

Class, Motherhood and Mature  
Studentship:  
(Re)constructing and  
(Re)negotiating Subjectivity

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## Summary

*‘Class, motherhood and mature studentship – (re-)constructing and (re)-negotiating subjectivity’* is a thesis which explores the complex psychosocial dimensions of aspiration, motivation and participation in higher education as a working class mature student and mother. Psychosocial interviews were used to explore the lives and experiences of thirteen working class mothers who became mature students at four Universities in South Wales.

Taking an explicitly psychosocial approach to analysis, and drawing on the researcher’s own subjectivity as a tool used in concert with an eclectic range of relational, psychoanalytic work, it considers the emotional/affective and unconscious elements of aspiration, motivation and the consequences for subjectivity as working class women, and as mothers and students within the landscape of contemporary neo-liberalism.

The thesis aims to offer nuanced understandings of aspiration, motivation and transformation as a complex psychosocial phenomena centred around a web of intergenerational and affective practices in relation to classed relational, cultural, historical, geographical, and temporal contexts.

As a thesis it argues that; aspiration, motivation and participation in higher education needs to be understood within the context of real women’s lives and the relational and affective landscape of family, class, gender and culture if issues of aspiration are to be addressed.

It considers that paying attention to unconscious processes is central to academic understandings of this psychosocial phenomena, supporting the warrant for psychoanalytically inflected research methodologies. It contends that aspiration, motivation, participation in higher education and social mobility are complex processes containing painful aspects, conflicts and contradictions. It argues also that the way in which higher education is used by the women as a space in which to (re)- negotiate subjectivity is more complex than government agendas of social mobility take account of.

Finally, in highlighting and exploring the links between trauma and higher education, it suggests and supports the idea that the potential of the ‘space’ of higher education goes beyond transparent universal understandings. In addition to being a material space, it was also an imagined and emotional ‘place’. For the women in this study it was a ‘place’ of safety and containment but not without risk.

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# 1.

## Chapter One

### Introduction: Class Motherhood and Mature Studentship

*'Class, Motherhood and Mature Studentship: (Re-)constructing and (Re-)negotiating Subjectivity'* is a thesis which explores the complex psychosocial dimensions of aspiration, motivation and participation in higher education as a working class mature student and mother.

#### 1.1. Context and Issues

Encouraging aspiration has been a persistent theme across successive UK Governments. Linked to social mobility, both are proposed as a panacea to inequality and poverty (Allan 2013), with the requirement to gain qualifications as a fundamental trope of current modes of Governance of Higher Education (Walkerdine 2011). Within neo-liberal Governmentality, aspiration is shaped by discourses and practices supposedly for the good of society as a whole. However various feminist works have disrupted this ideological discourse (Rose 1999; Ringrose and Walkerdine 2008; Francis and Hey 2009; Reay, 2013).

It is perhaps more accurate to say that this position describes a rhetoric around a concern of a 'poverty of aspiration' in the working classes (Walkerdine Melody and

Lucey 2001; Lucey Melody and Walkerdine 2003; Francis and Hey 2009). In recent years, the ‘problem’ of low aspirations in working class families and communities has formed a central plank of educational policy in successive UK Governments. We (the working classes) apparently do not know the right things or want the right things (Skeggs 1997) and this assertion extends to the failure of the working classes to engage with Higher Education as an aspirational project for the self (Reay 2013).

Mothers, and particularly working class, and lone mothers are seen as “both the problem and the solution to national ills” (Skeggs 1997, p. 48.) They are simultaneously charged with the task of “raising the meritocracy” (Gillies 2005; Gewirtz 2001) whilst being understood as lacking the skills and moral responsibility to be able to transmit aspirational values to their children (Allen and Taylor 2012; Gillies 2005). There is then, an impossibility to this project for working class mothers, who are nevertheless expected to be able to negotiate a path for themselves and children towards something ‘better’.

## **1.2. Aspiration within Reflexive Modernism**

Aspiration is central to the formation of the modern neoliberal subject: characterised as an autonomous (Beck 1992), self reflexive agent (Giddens 1991). The legacy of New Labour is a moral and contractual discourse, which embraces the concept of reflexive modernism and suggests an increased freedom for individuals outside of structural constraints (Giddens 1991). As such, within modern Western society, understanding the life course as a linear trajectory of appropriate ages and stages of

participation has become contestable. This shift has coincided with a change in the landscape of post compulsory education in Britain, which has been transformed by the shift to a mass system of higher education and an overall increase in access to and participation in higher education. As a result of this expansion, higher education is no longer just the domain of middle class school leavers, and the student population has become more diverse in terms of age, class, gender, race, life experience, occupational profiles and caring responsibilities with numbers of mature students increasing steadily (Mercer 2007; Marandet and Wainwright 2006).

As Giddens (1991) asserts, plurality of choice means that adult individuals are now invited and expected, to be many things during their lifetime; “*we are not what we are, but what we make of ourselves*” (Giddens 1991, p.75). As Kennedy (2001) also argues:

individuals are compelled to take greater control over the kinds of social identities they wish to assume...because once powerful solidarities such as class, occupation, church, gender, and family are slowly declining in their ability to define our life experiences”

(Kennedy 2001, p.6).

### **1.3. Problematising Aspiration within Reflexive Modernism**

Such neo-liberal assumptions have been seen to actively diminish the relative disadvantages of class, race and gender, and Britain has increasingly embraced a

‘can do’ philosophy (Thomson et al 2003). However, these discourses of agency often mask the structural constraints of class status, geography and the distribution of wealth for those who struggle on but ultimately ‘can’t do’ (Mannay and Morgan, 2013). Such assumptions which understand the concept of aspiration as an individual possession or character trait, belie and underestimate the rich complexity of living in a neoliberal reflexive society. That we can all better ourselves, regardless of social class, gender, ethnicity, etc is short sighted of the way that these social identities intersect to mediate life chances and subjectivities.

Understanding aspiration through discourses of meritocracy and individualism, directs responsibility for failure away from structural and institutional barriers perpetuated within neo-liberalism, and instead, places responsibility for failing to better one’s self at the level of the individual (Tyler 2013). The need within neo-liberalism to constantly reinvent one’s self in an entrepreneurial way to meet the needs of a shifting meritocratic global economy, according to Bauman (2005), links meritocracy to the work ethic. As a result, those who ‘can’t do’ are constructed as ‘feckless’, ‘shirkers’ responsible for their own poverty (Francis and Hey 2009; Allen 2013). This is particularly the case in relation to constructions of motherhood within welfare policy and contemporary popular culture, where working class mothers occupy precarious positions in relation to the ‘successful female subject’. Young, single mothers in particular, are viewed as problematic, their motherhood read as ‘non-ambition’ as well as being deviant, lacking morality, knowledge, having low expectations and in need of correction and transformation because of their ‘failed femininity’ (Allen and Osgood 2009; McRobbie 2007, 2008).

What neoliberal assumptions around aspiration and social mobility also miss are the inherent tensions and affective responses attached to identity transformation. Implicit in neoliberal discourses and reflective in government policy discourses of aspiration and social mobility is the idea of a desired and unproblematic trajectory from working class to middle class status and values. Working class identities are to be moved away from, escaped and discarded on the way to a middleclass ‘ideal type’ (Zandy 1995; Allen 2013; Jones 2011; Friedman 2013). This idea can be understood as an act of symbolic violence (Sennet and Cobb, 1972). It pathologises working class lives and identities and in so doing perpetuates and upholds class boundaries and inequalities which pervade them.

#### **1.4. Aspiration and Class Transition**

Also not considered within these assumptions are the effects of transitions and class movement. Working class mature student mothers are embedded within families, communities and cultures. The few that manage to negotiate the path and respond to calls to become something ‘better’ are required to leave behind old lives and old ways of being. This is a ‘wrenching’ (Reay 2013) process which distances them from the relational, social, material and affective context in which both their subjectivity and their aspiration were formed (Allen 2013). There is then, the very real potential of the costs and pains of aspiration outweighing the gains. As a reaction to the inherent classism and the *denial and indifference of the psyche’s of working class people*, (Plummer 2000, p. 45) within the past four decades, inspired

by their own experience, several feminist academics who hail from working class backgrounds have addressed a chasm in educational research (Steedman 1986; Tokarczyk and Fay 1993; Hey 1997; Skeggs 1997; Mahony & Zmroczek 1997; Reay 1998, Plummer 2000; Walkerdine et al 2001; Lucey et al 2003) These authors and studies have theorised the effects of academic success on feminine working class subjectivity from a psychosocial perspective, reflecting on the pain of moving away from their working class origins. More recently within sociology, Friedman, (2013 p.352), has called for ‘a new agenda in mobility studies’ which is able to take account of ‘symbols and artefacts of class inflected cultural identity’ which may result in a better understanding of the costs and benefits of social mobility.

### **1.5. History, Culture and Affective and Psychological Issues of Aspiration**

Contrary to the political rhetoric and discourses which surround and construct working class families within a sphere of lack and need to raise aspiration, various sociological and psychosocial research has shown no shortage of aspiration in working classes (; Allen 2013; Archer 2013; Reay 2013; Walkerdine 2011; Lucey et al, 2003). What these studies highlight is not a lack of aspiration in any simple sense, but rather a lack of ‘knowing how to do it’, due to inequalities in wealth (Reay 2013) and the right kind of capitals (social, cultural and economic) and access to resources in order to facilitate change. Alongside structural barriers to success are cultural, affective and psychological barriers. Within socio-political rhetoric, aspiration as a concept is emptied of any affective, relational, historical and cultural understanding. Historically, it is not that the working classes lacked

aspiration or didn't know the value of education - far from it - rather it was systematically denied to the working classes who were educated to the point of being a productive workforce. Since education has only recently been 'reinvented as an aspirational project for the self' (Reay 2013 p. 665) it is hardly surprising that the working classes are slower to join this enterprising project. Historically, self development and education has been for others – who would work in the mines, the factories and the mills if the working classes realised their potential and forgot their place in society? (Reay 2013)

In their work in 'Steeltown', Walkerdine and Jimenez (2012) have shown how minds, attitudes and behaviour alter less radically than markets and economies. In order to cope with relentless adversity and the chronic insecurity of being in thrall to capitalism and global markets, the working class people of 'Steeltown' developed coping - survival strategies which keep minds, bodies and communities going. Despite their redundancy and irrelevance in today's economic landscape, according to the authors, such 'affective practices' can remain unconsciously sedimented in everyday lives, preventing change occurring because of the way in which this threatens ontological security. In times of poverty and chronic insecurity, it is these that have been a source of survival, upholding "the flimsy line between survival and death, annihilation" (Walkerdine and Jimenez 2012, p. 171). Aspiration and transition, conceptualised through such an historic and cultural lens can be understood as working against community ideas of mutuality and solidarity, making change difficult. It is perhaps little wonder that working class women sometimes have difficulty in imagining how to reach and embody the aspirational femininity

required within current neo-liberalism. Such a historical and cultural view of intergenerational continuity and change helps to cast light on what is at stake for working class mature student mothers in Higher Education, helping to de-pathologise class attitudes and aspirations. It seems then that the “*once powerful solidarities such as class, occupation, church, gender, and family*” which Kennedy asserts are losing their grip, might still be able to influence life experiences (Kennedy 2001). The role of the past in the present is then vital to our understanding of aspiration.

Concerns of ‘not fitting in’ or ‘standing out’ in higher education is a common theme in the narratives of mature student learners, this is particularly the case for working class students (Reay 2009). Similarly, the demands of the two greedy institutions of family and University (Edwards 1993) have implications for subjectivity. Both family and university demand all that you have and more and yet the practices of each are at odds with the other. Such experiences are emotionally charged and subject to the ‘ordinary affects’ of everyday life (Stewart 2007). Lynne Layton’s work, *Who’s that Girl, Who’s that Boy* (2004), has illustrated how subjectivity is produced in complex, context specific ways, across different locations, in relation to others, making it a complex and affective psychosocial phenomenon subject to threat when status is called into question. Skeggs’ (1997) work shows the way in which cultural hierarchies of class and gender operate and are internalised. Her work, which looked at working class women following caring courses at a local college of Further Education showed how their identities were constructed in relation to the middle class ‘other’ and involved psychic moves of dis-identification with

other working class women in order to claim respectability for themselves. With this in mind then, it is not difficult to imagine that aspiration is also produced in context specific ways making it, too a complex, cultural, relational and psychosocial phenomena, which might be enabled or constrained. If we are to understand how it works and address issues of aspiration it is imperative that it is understood and studied as such.

## **1.6. Aspiration and Affect**

Various, sociological, psychosocial and more psychoanalytically inflected studies have emphasised the ‘psychic landscape of class’ experience (Reay 2005), revealing it to be relational, deeply embodied, affectively lived and ‘beyond consciousness’ (Skeggs, 1997; Walkerdine et al 2003, Reay 2005, Hey and Leathwood 2009) and the ‘affective turn’ in social science has been productive to these understandings.

Leathwood and Hey (2009) point towards a long line of work which engages with the place of emotion and affect in education. This kind of engagement is particularly relevant to working class mature student mothers and discourses of aspiration. We need to try to understand the way in which class consciousness operates in order to understand how change and transformation becomes possible (Walkerdine et al 2001; Leathwood and Hey 2009; Walkerdine 2011). We need also to know how the transition into, in and through education is experienced and feels.

### **1.7. Issues at Stake for the Present Thesis**

Aspiration, motivation and participation in higher education for working class mature student mothers is about all of the issues above – rather than a simple lack of aspiration. These concepts need to be understood in the context of real women's lives – how they are lived and experienced affectively and relationally to family, culture, history, time and space.

As a working class mature student mother myself, I didn't know what my aspirations and motivations to participate in higher education were based upon – but I was in a Pre 1992 University and there were a plenitude of emotions around it. Alongside my desire to learn was a desire to go back to my old life centred around motherhood and family. Pride, fear of discovery as a fraud, guilt in relation to my children and inferiority to other students are some of the emotions that characterised my experience as a mature student mother. As individuals we may not always know why we make particular decisions and take certain actions. Some of these reasons may be based in culture and some may be based at an unconscious rather than conscious level rendering them difficult to articulate. Mindful of this, in addition to requiring a psychosocial lens of inquiry, the study also requires a psychoanalytic approach to take account of unconscious processes and get beyond 'rational explanations' in order that we might understand the conflicts and contradictions of experience. Using elements of Psychoanalysis offers a means of linking worlds; the objective with the subjective, the personal with the cultural and the psychological with the social (West 1996).

Within the small research sample of thirteen women, within the data there were unanticipated and surprising frequencies and levels of personal trauma/traumatic experiences. Studies looking at the motivation of mature students to return to education have shown that these include: the search for an identity beyond wife or partner, an opportunity to rewrite their histories, a desire to change self concept and to increase self esteem and confidence (Edwards1993; Shanahan 2000; Walters 2000; Pritchard and Roberts 2006). Despite other studies of mature students in higher education making reference to traumatic experiences, these threads have not been taken up for exploration in relation to higher education. With the notable exception of West (1995); Parr; (2000) Quinn; (2003, 2010); Walters, 2010, the links between trauma, higher education and identity are relatively unexplored within the academic literature. There is then the need to further explore this connection through an affective lens. The existing work above suggests that the way in which higher education is used as a means of ‘transformation’ is more complex than either institutions or government agendas of aspiration/social mobility/economic competitiveness currently take account of.

## **1.8. Thesis Aims**

What is overlooked in relation to working class aspiration and indeed often working class experience as a whole then, are the ways in which people are mutually constituted by the psychic and the social. A psychosocial approach tries to surmount the individualising nature of psychology (traits) and the concern with society and culture (structure and agency) of sociology by understanding them as

mutually constituting and taking into account conscious and unconscious processes.

In this thesis the focus is on each of these realms, constituted in a whole and the affect produced within context : the desires, conflicts, ambivalences, tensions and contradictions which make up the subjectivity, possibilities and experiences of the thirteen working class mature student women in the study. The aims of the thesis are to:

- Explore the psychic/affective landscape of class in which aspiration, motivation and participation are formed, regulated, enabled, and constrained; relationally, culturally, historically, geographically and temporally by conscious and unconscious processes – and the implications for subjectivity.
- Present further dimensions to aspiration, motivation and participation which are currently not taken account of in policy.
- Move beyond attitudes and opinions to the heart of the real dilemmas, fears, anxieties and ambivalences occasioned by the shifts required of working class mature student mothers.
- Refute ideas of poverty of aspiration by applying a psychoanalytically informed historical and cultural psychosocial lens to de-pathologise affects and attitudes around aspiration and motivation within working class families. Acknowledging and making allowances for the ways in which working class subjectivity in the present has been moulded by historical, cultural, and economic forces from the past, enables us to move beyond deficit understandings and discourses of lack.

## **1.9. Thesis Research Questions**

Using psychoanalytically inflected psychosocial research methods, the data were produced and analyzed around a concern to understand the ways in which the thirteen working class mature student mothers participating in the research construct, negotiate and manage identity, using the following research questions:

- What motivates working class mature women students who are mothers to enter Higher Education, and perhaps more importantly, what keeps them there?
- What does it feel like to be a working class, mature student mother in higher education; what are the emotional processes involved and what are their consequences for subjectivity?
- How does motherhood mediate studentship and what are the tensions created by being a working class mature student mother in Higher Education and how are they managed?

When I embarked upon this research, I expected to hear accounts surrounding the difficulty of being a working class mature student, mother in university. My own experience and the relevant academic literature I shall discuss in Chapter Two informed me that I would hear about psychic conflict and re-negotiation of lives and identities which might be painful for those affected and difficult to hear. What was unexpected, however, were the accounts and levels of appalling psychological trauma experienced by my very small sample, told to me during our interviews.

Thus, although trauma was not an initial research focus, as Rock (2007, p 30) argues, there is a ‘need to remain open to the features that cannot be listed in advance of the study’. I was concerned and fascinated by the difficult stories of the women’s lives and could identify with many, but in truth I was at a loss as to what to make of them in relation to my research. There was then an evolving need to explore the empirical evidence of connections between trauma and higher education. Grounded in the data was an unexpected fourth research question:

- What are the links between trauma, aspiration, motivation and higher education, in terms of subjectivity/Identity?

The academic literature, theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches adopted to address these research questions are laid out in the subsequent three chapters, which are followed by three empirical chapters. In the next section the reader is guided through the thesis with a summary of the scope of each chapter.

### **1.10 Guide to the Thesis**

The academic literatures surrounding issues of aspiration and motivation, class, social mobility, mature studentship, higher education, gender and motherhood are vast. Therefore, **Chapter 2 - *Reviewing the Affective Landscape: Class, Motherhood and Mature Studentship***, presents a selection of pertinent literatures as they intersect and confines itself to discussing the affective elements of these concepts in order to contextualise the research and provide an academic base on which the arguments of the thesis rest and later analytic chapters build.

### **Chapter 3 - *Researching Working Class Mature Student Mothers through a***

***Psychosocial Method*** is the first of two reflexive methodological chapters which describe the research process for the study. Its focus is to present how my research concerns and questions developed and translated into the present study which utilised a psychosocial (psychoanalytically inflected) theoretical framework and a series of three psychosocial interviews as a method of collecting empirical data. This includes making explicit context and origins, early explorations and methodological influences and decisions. Also discussed in this chapter are the theoretical assumptions underpinning the design of this psychosocial project, providing an overview of the psychosocial paradigm – its theoretical influences and assumptions and how subjectivity is understood within this paradigm from a psychoanalytic perspective. Research design is discussed in terms of strategy and decisions regarding methods for collecting empirical materials. The Chapter ends with a presentation of the research sample and the final psychosocial design of methods used to generate and collect the data; a series of three psychosocial interviews (Stopford, 2004), selected due to their fit in relation to the aims of the research and their potential to access affective and unconscious aspects of experience integral to my inquiry.

**Chapter Four: *Interviews, Feelings and Findings***, is a second reflexive, methodological chapter, and is concerned with the particular way I conducted and analysed psychosocial interviews with the thirteen working class mature student women who were the participants in this psychosocial exploration of subjectivity,

aspiration and motivation in higher education. The chapter draws on extracts from my research diary to illustrate issues and tensions encountered in the research process and to show the efficacy of the multi interview design. Issues of ethics, the handling and storing of data, are discussed in relation to the study. The multi-level analysis process is explained and the themes emerging from the analysis presented. The chapter ends with a discussion of issues of writing and representation as they relate to the analytic chapters.

**Chapter Five - *Mapping Fantasy, Imagination, Action and Movement*** is the first of the substantive analysis chapters and is a case study, focusing on one participant, Tanya. Illustrating the psychosocial complexity of aspiration the concept of Schizoanalytic Cartography is used to suggest a way in which change and transition might become possible. The Chapter provides psychosocial insights into what is at stake, not only for Tanya and other women like her, but also their families; the affective risks and the costs of higher education as a mature student mother and what this means in terms of subjectivity. It illustrates also, how this movement may be both simultaneously formulated by, facilitated and constrained by others relationally, through a network of culturally formed psychosocial affects, some which conflict and contradict, others which augment and enable. The chapter aims to offer a more nuanced understanding of the psychosocial complexity of aspiration and provides insight into how working class mature student mothers might construct, negotiate and manage identity, speaking directly to the first three research questions of the thesis.

***‘Chav Mum’ versus ‘Yummy Mummy’: Aspiration and Motivation as a Moral Imperative of Neo-liberalism and Constructions of Motherhood***, is **Chapter Six** of the thesis. Again aiming to show psychosocial complexity, in this chapter aspiration and motivation are examined through the lens of constructions of motherhood in contemporary neo-liberalism. Using data from three women, Jordan, Jayne and Jade, who became teen single parents, the Chapter argues that the women’s decision to embark upon higher education can be traced to neoliberal constructions of motherhood, characterised by the polemic identities of ‘Chav Mum’ and ‘Yummy Mummy’. It argues that for these marginalised women, ‘bettering’ themselves through higher education became a ‘moral’ imperative, related to the stigma and shame surrounding lone motherhood and a desire to claim a ‘respectable’ identity for themselves and their children. The data used in this Chapter shows the way in which Jordan, Jayne and Jade tried to manage and re-negotiate what they understood as ‘spoiled identities’ (May 2008). This chapter then, explores the ways in which, affective aspects of class and motherhood may meld in order to influence motivation and aspiration in Higher Education, and again addresses the first three research questions of the thesis.

**Chapter Seven: *Making Links between Trauma, Higher Education and Identity***, is **the last analytic chapter in the thesis**. Here, painful stories of trauma are presented through the use of a composite case study, in order to surmount the issues of working with and presenting such data. In making links between trauma, higher education and identity, and focusing on the meanings of education within the women’s past and present lives, the theme of higher education, imagined as ‘a place

of safety', is interrogated. It considers the space of higher education beyond its transparent academic function, as a place of imagined safety or containment.

The chapter also establishes a link between the women's chosen educational trajectories and careers, which align with their intimate past traumatic experiences. Building on the previous two chapters, the chapter provides empirical evidence for the imperative of psychosocial understandings, the role of affect and emotion in aspiration, and the place of the past in the present and future for the working class mature student mothers studied. The chapter is able to speak to each of the thesis' research questions, but specifically address the fourth as the title suggests.

**Chapter Eight:** concludes the thesis. Here, reflections on the methodological approach of the research, and the themes and conclusions of each analytic chapter are brought together in order to crystalize the research findings and to summarise the empirical, methodological and theoretical contributions of the study, and the implications for policy and practice.

## **2.**

### **Chapter Two**

#### **Reviewing the Affective Landscape: Class, Motherhood and Mature Studentship**

##### **2.1. Introduction**

The academic literatures surrounding issues of aspiration and motivation, class, social mobility, mature studentship, higher education, gender and motherhood are vast. The topic of working class, mature student mothers in higher education is polymorphic in nature, and there is not the scope within this Chapter to extensively review each element. Therefore, the chapter presents a selection of pertinent literatures as they intersect and confines itself to discussing the affective elements of these concepts in relation to the four research questions set out in Chapter One, and in preparation for the later analytic chapters.

The chapter commences by considering the ways in which class is conceptualised and comes into being on an affective register, particularly in relation to working class mothers. The next section situates working class mothers within discourses of aspiration, the ‘self as project’ (Giddens 1991) and social mobility within neo-liberalism. Problematising deficit understandings of working class ‘lack’, the chapter then moves on to question social mobility as an unequivocal good (Friedman

2014) by considering the affective landscape of this process. The chapter then considers extant literature around the experiences of mature students within higher education, with a particular focus on class and motherhood and consequences for identity. The final section of the chapter presents literature which tries to form links between higher education, trauma and identity.

## **2.2. Conceptualising Class: Social Class and Identity on an Affective Register**

As Wood and Skeggs (2011) assert, class as a term:

is one of the most spoken, denied, euphemised and confusing terms bandied about in public culture and remains integral to the vernacular, from popular culture to government rhetoric and academic writing

(Wood and Skeggs 2011, p. 8).

Within the history of educational and sociological research, focus on social class has oscillated between precedence and irrelevance (Archer, 2003). Traditionally, within social research, social class has tended to be conceptualized through income, material and economic resources with little consideration of its significance in psychological terms in relation to identity and how it may mould, restrict and intervene in the production of knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, motives, traits and symptoms (Aries & Seider 2007). For some post-modern commentators such as Kennedy (2001) and Giddens (1991), social class is now merely a redundant spectre

like concept, no longer relevant to a neoliberal society made up of autonomous individuals. However, to be working class isn't just about understanding that others may have more resources than you. It is a classificatory device of distinction and an absent presence, circulating and marking bodies whilst not being specifically named (Lawler 2008). Class is an identity issue which is lived and felt, within a psychic landscape (Reay 2005). Other commentators, in particular feminist post structural perspectives, acknowledge the inherent problems of approaching social class as a mere classificatory concept dependent upon occupational status and economic factors (Walkerdine et al 2001; Archer et al 2003; Reay 2013). Instead, they highlight how, apart from the highly gendered basis upon which these understandings are built, they also infer homogeneity within groups and obscure how class may interact with other aspects of oppression such as gender and race in every day lived experience to produce particular kinds of identity/subjectivities.

There is now much fluidity in the concept of class making it difficult to define and this can make self- categorization difficult. Woods and Skeggs (2011), use MORI data from 2002, to draw our attention to this issue and the curious finding that more than half of those classified as middle class through their occupational status claimed to have “working class feelings” (p. 8). Importantly for the present research, and adding weight to the conception of class as ‘felt’ or affective in nature is the fact that the participants each self-identified themselves as working class women.

### **2.3. Bringing Working Class Women and Mothers into Being**

Since class relations and inequalities are not just based on economics, as Lawler (1999) suggests, it is not the most meaningful way to understand how class is lived and experienced as subjectivity. Class is not a ‘thing’ or an objective position, rather it is a doing, it gets done. Acknowledging the enmeshing of economic with cultural factors, Lawler (1999), using the theories of Bourdieu, has argued that one way in which class comes to life is through cultural mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, and of normalisation and pathologisation. Many feminist scholars interested in social class have argued that rather than being configured as equal but different, working class and middle class knowledges and cultural competences are organised hierarchically, with the former constituted as unequal, pathologised as ‘other’ in relation to the inherently right and legitimised latter (Lawler 1999; Skeggs 1997; Walkerdine and Lucey 1989). It is the upholding of such fictions in culture and society through socio-political discourses and practices that inscribes classed subjectivity in terms of superiority/inferiority, normality/abnormality, judgement/shame. It is then the social ‘Other’ that relationally shapes subjectivity, identity and self-understandings, emphasising the highly relational and affective nature of class (Taylor 2007; Archer et al 2003). Through a middle class lens, working class people generally “do not know the right things, they do not value the right things, they do not want the right things” (Lawler 1999 p. 11). Set up against the middle class Other, and particularly the idealised femininity of neo-liberalism, working class women are often seen as overly sexualised and dirty (Skeggs 1987), in possession of the ‘wrong’ qualities and quantities of femininity (Walkerdine 1990)

and as ‘bad mothers’, insensitive to the needs of their children (Walkerdine and Lucy 1989).

Val Gilles’ work around marginalised mothering is particularly helpful to the argument of the thesis. She notes that in recent years policy documents have suggested that:

the family is being centralised as a device for tackling wider social ills such as crime and poverty. Described as the ‘building blocks for safe and sustainable communities’, good parents are able to nurture and transmit vital values to their children which both protect and reproduce the common good.

(Gillies 2008 p. 95).

She argues, however, that despite pledged support to all families, policy initiatives are directed towards disadvantaged or socially excluded families, “Poor parents are charged as reproducing cycles of deprivation and anti-social behaviour and as such are intended for ‘behaviour modification’ ” (Gillies 2008 p. 95.)

## **2.4. Being the Wrong Kind of Mother**

Work by Allen and Osgood (2009) has illustrated how the shift from a welfare to a workfare state required for economic recovery in the UK (McRobbie 2000), has shown neo-liberalism at work in the construction of young women as subjects of

Welfare. Young mothers are problematised as having little aspiration and expectation, being morally and socially deviant, too lazy to work and requiring “correction or transformation into economically active and reliant subjects via their (re)immersion into education or the labour market” (p. 4). The discursive landscape on which motherhood, in particular, is constructed within neo-liberalism is particularly important for the aims of this thesis. Allen and Osgood (2009) have shown the ways in which the maternal has been transformed by neo-liberalism and constructions of motherhood within Welfare Policy discourses and contemporary popular culture in the UK, and the ways these are mobilised to produce two dominant representations.

Working class parenthood, and in particular lone parenthood has become synonymous with feckless, welfare scroungers and the “grotesque and comic figure” of the ‘Chav Mum’ (Tyler 2008 p.17). This ‘failing femininity’ an ‘abject’ status which requires state intervention (Walkerdine 2003; Ringrose and Walkerdine 2008) is set against the ‘Yummy Mummy’, a white, middle class professional woman who embodies freedom, choice, respectability, and aesthetic perfection (Allen and Osgood 2009). This successful female subject of neo-liberalism is able to consume herself into being, displaying all the right markers for belonging and acceptance (Ringrose and Walkerdine 2008). She is oriented towards economic participation and self regulation (Allen and Osgood 2009). As ‘top girls’ (McRobbie 2007) they can ‘have it all’. Such representations not only falsely present motherhood within a pathologising hierarchy, like the deficit discourses of aspiration I shall discuss shortly, they obscure the structural inequalities on which they are based and indeed

rely. This is the site where mothering, as a classed activity becomes exposed, (Duncan 2005) as only some minds and bodies are capable of aspiration, success and respectability.

Within neo-liberalism then, there is a moral imperative for the ‘bad’ working class mother to embark upon a self reflexive project of improvement, to aspire to be the ‘good’ middle class mother of value and worth to her children and society. As “both the problem and the solution to national ills” (Skeggs 1997 p. 48.), within neoliberal governance they are simultaneously charged with the task of ‘raising the meritocracy’ (Gillies 2005; Gewirtz 2001) whilst being understood as lacking the skills and moral responsibility to be able to transmit aspirational values to their children (Allen and Taylor 2012; Gillies 2005). There is then an impossibility to this project for working class mothers, who are nevertheless expected to be able to negotiate a path for themselves and children towards something ‘better’ (Hey and Bradford 2006) . This impossibility is acknowledged by Reay (2015) and Hartas, (2012) who states: “Parents, no matter how good or effective they are cannot overcome structural problems to maximise their children’s educational opportunities and life chances” (Hartas 2012 p. 3 cited in Reay 2013). The biggest factor influencing a child’s success in education is, according to Hartas (2012) parental income (Reay 2013).

The affective consequences of the two polemic identities on offer within neo-liberalism, and being the ‘wrong kind of mother’ is explored in relation to the data in Chapter Six of the thesis. The Chapter considers one way in which motherhood

within neo-liberalism influences the participants aspiration, motivation and participation in higher education, speaking to the second research question of the thesis.

## **2.5. Shame, Respectability and Moving Up**

According to Sennett and Cobb (1972), in modern individualistic (meritocratic) societies, where individual value is based upon occupational achievement or accumulation of wealth, without resources it is difficult to garner self-worth. Such inequality and power relations inflict acts of symbolic violence on the self; psychic ‘hidden injuries’ of class such as shame and inferiority (Sennett and Cobb 1972). As explored by Owen Jones (2011) understandings of the working classes in UK society have gone from the ‘salt of the earth to the scum of the earth’, the ‘respectable’ working class having apparently died out and ‘given way to a feral underclass’ (Jones 2011 p.7). According to the right-wing journalist, Simon Heffer, aspiration is key here. Drawing on discourses of meritocracy, in his view those that can, do – working class aspiration has meant that the respectable working class have moved up into the middle classes, via education and white collar jobs leaving behind those that cannot and do not/will not:

You don’t have families anymore that live in sort of respectable, humble circumstances for generation after generation. They either become clients of the welfare state and become the underclass, or they become middle class.

(Heffer cited in Jones 2011 p.7)

Here, then there is a new vocabulary of social class, one which is suggestive of white working class scum, again vilified through the figure of the ‘chav’ (Taylor 2008). Not only has ‘working class’ become a ‘spoilt identity’ (Reay and Ball 1997) it is also intended for disposal (Zandy 1995, p.1). Implicit in this construction is a moral imperative for us all to have a middle class disposition. Within America the term ‘middle class blue collar’ is used to describe this sensibility (Lubrano 2004). Posited in this way – ways of neoliberal Governance, working classness is something we should all wish to escape from, to the respectable realms of middle classness, implying a natural, unproblematic trajectory. As Imogen Tyler (2008), asserts, such constructions and labels mean that lives are open to ‘perverse misrecognition’ which actively dams mobility. While for some, there is the possibility of ‘moving up’ occupationally, economically and materially to middle class status, in terms of subjectivity this trajectory or transformation is complicated by having grown up developing a working class consciousness and indeed unconsciousness and is not unproblematic.

## **2.6. Working Class Aspiration and Social Mobility via Higher Education**

For more than two decades, social mobility has been a point of confluence for opposing political parties in the UK (Payne 2012). New Labour Government’s (DfES 2003) aims of fostering a civil society, promoting citizenship and bolstering both the family and community through higher education supported the expansion of higher education via Education Policy initiatives such as Lifelong Learning and Widening Participation (Edwards 2002). As a Government initiative, Widening

Participation was central to New Labour's higher education policy, the rationale for which has been framed around both economic competitiveness and social justice. In terms of the former, recent shifts from industry and manufacturing, toward a knowledge-based economy acted as an incentive for many Governments in the developed world to invest in their citizens and academic institutions in order to produce world class research, compete in global markets, gain economic prosperity and individual wealth. In terms of the latter, the British Government now also views universities and colleges as providing a more social role, expressing in the 2003 White paper their "vital role in expanding opportunity and promoting social justice" and providing more social equality through the inclusion of disadvantaged groups (DfES 2003).

More recently, the last coalition Government, under the leadership of David Cameron expressed its "mission to build an aspiration nation" - "opening doors and breaking down barriers" (Cabinet Office 2011) by stating:

It's what's always made our hearts beat faster – aspiration; people rising from the bottom to the top...line one, rule one of being conservative is that it's not where you've come from that counts, it's where you are going...We just get behind people who want to get on in life. The doers. The risk-takers...We are the party of the want to be better off, those who strive to make a better life for themselves and their families – and we should never be ashamed of saying so (David Cameron 2012)

Speaking as a man from the position of enormous privilege, I have no doubt that Cameron and his peers need not worry about where he has ‘come from’. Infused with privilege, his background and social status has propelled him forward, his gaze always ahead, looking toward where the next round of ‘more’ and opportunity will come from. Rising to the top is far less problematic when starting from the upper middle and not the bottom. If you are working class, and a woman with children, “where you’ve come from” counts completely, and this is an issue which this thesis aims to make clear .

## **2.7. Deficit understandings of Aspiration**

Chiming with the individualisation thesis of Beck (1992) and the ‘self as a project’ (Giddens 1991), and implying meritocracy, encouraging aspiration then has been a persistent theme across successive UK Governments, with the requirement to gain qualifications as a fundamental trope of current modes of Governance of Higher Education (Walkerline 2011; Edwards 2002) . However it is perhaps more accurate to say that this is a rhetoric around a concern of a ‘poverty of aspiration’ in the working classes and this extends to the failure of the working classes to engage with Higher Education (Francis and Hey 2009). As Archer and Leathwood (2003) explain:

...low rates of achievement and/or educational progression among working-class groups are represented as resulting from their lack of appropriate attitudes, aspirations, motivations or abilities.

(Archer and Leathwood 2003 p. 228)

In terms of current Social Policy, social mobility is stated a ‘principal goal’. The basis of this is the understanding that increased mobility is central to mitigating inequality and poverty and as such raising aspiration within the working classes was aimed at the level of the family, understood as key in tackling ‘intergenerational cycles of poverty’ and a ‘cultures of worklessness’. (Cabinet Office 2011; DWP and DfE, 2011; Allan 2013). In this view intergenerational cycles would be restricted and any persisting inequalities are justified through discourses of meritocracy. In this vision of a dynamic, fair and just society, no individual is apparently prevented from success (Friedman 2013). Such pretence, over a highly loaded and ideological terrain is an act of symbolic violence to those who are left behind and simply cannot, or indeed chose not to, ‘better’ themselves away from their working class lives and identities (Reay 2013). This is the site where class divides are upheld. While disparate individuals, may become more socially and economically mobile, nothing changes in terms of class inequality and life chances within and between groups (Reay 2013). Similarly, where structural and psychological barriers to aspiration and social mobility are upheld and/or ignored, and change and movement perceived as impossible, such issues are de-politicised. The inability to achieve is accounted for through a discourse of ‘lack’ and deficit. It is assumed that there is a lack of the possession of the ‘right’ qualities in working class individuals, families and communities to possess and foster aspiration, and an inability to ‘know what’s good for them’ and evolve. In this psychologised model, poverty and inequality becomes the responsibility of individuals and families rather than the Government. This also fits in with established assumptions about the causes of

poverty and inequalities, and ‘the other debilitating effect of poverty, low aspirations’ (Francis and Hey 2009 p. 227) as being transmitted down generations by inadequate parenting. Such a model further bolsters the status quo.

## **2.8. Problematising Deficit Understandings of Aspiration using an Affective Lens**

Various sociological, psychosocial and psychoanalytically informed works have problematised deficit understandings of aspiration and social mobility within neo-liberalism ( Layton 2008; Francis and Hey 2009; Walkerdine 2011; Allen 2013; Reay, 2015) and empirical research has shown no lack of aspiration within the working classes, drawing attention instead to: structural inequalities and cultural, affective and psychological issues (Walkerdine et al 2001; Lucey et al, 2003; Walkerdine, 2011; Allen 2013; Archer 2013; Reay 2013, 2015). For example, Francis and Hey (2009) have argued that state education, is based on middle class values and assumptions and as such working class children are automatically disadvantaged from the time they embark upon schooling. Reay has described how embarking upon higher education can mean moving away from families and communities on a physical, emotional and psychic level, a ‘wrenching’ process which is experienced on an affective psychic landscape (2005, 2015) making change difficult.

## **2.9. Social Mobility – An Unequivocal Good?**

Sam Friedman's (2013) recent sociological work, "The Price of the Ticket", has highlighted the parallels between Goldthorpe's work and the celebratory framing of social mobility as an unequivocally progressive force within Policy discourse.

Using the important social mobility studies of Goldthorpe and his Oxford colleagues as a launch to his argument, Friedman contends that Goldthorpe's quantitative work, although pioneering in charting rates of social mobility, offers little insight into how social mobility is lived and experienced. Goldthorpe's later work (1980) used life history notes to address 'the experience of social mobility'. However, in his analysis he essentially "ruled out any negative psychological implications to social mobility", considering it to be a positive force for both individuals and society (Friedman 2013 p. 355).

In Goldthorpe's analysis the psychosocial effects of social mobility on the men in his study were read as unproblematic. These psychologically fluid accounts, are accounted for by the fact that the men felt they did not stand out in their new occupations in terms of their class status. Rather, they understood themselves as being part of a new heterogeneous group, but having shared comparable trajectories, tastes and lifestyles which provided reciprocal ontological security (Friedman 2013). According to Friedman, Goldthorpe's conclusions of the social mobility experience, can be understood as accidentally bolstering policy assumptions as an unequivocal good.

Critiquing this perspective using the testimonies of respondents for re-interpretation, Friedman finds “a much more ambivalent experience of mobility than Goldthorpe’s analysis suggests” (Friedman 2013 p 357). In his own analysis of Goldthorpe’s data, considering the cases of a male chemical engineer and electrical engineer, Friedman notes that while these two respondents viewed their trajectories as essentially beneficial, the benefits are viewed in terms of the family as a whole, rather than from their individual self perspectives. These perspectives, he argues are portrayed as “loss and upheaval”(p. 357) drawing attention to the idea that social mobility is not necessarily unproblematic, highlighting the complex psychosocial and affective nature of social mobility and that class is emotionally mediated. Friedman (2013), has called for “a new agenda in mobility studies” which is able to take account of “symbols and artefacts of class inflected cultural identity” in order to investigate the ways in which class movement can disrupt a coherent sense of self (p. 364). Such enquiry, according to the author may result in a better understanding of the costs and benefits of social mobility and the way in which the “emotional pull of class loyalties can entangle subjects in the affinities of the past (p. 364)”. This offers some explanation of why, despite socio-political rhetoric, social mobility is not aspired to simply and straightforwardly.

## **2.10. Class, Education and Social Mobility**

Such rethinking of the experience of social mobility and the ‘hidden costs’ however, have long been the concern of those theorising social mobility through the vehicle of education in the fields of the sociology of education (Skeggs 1997; Reay 2005; Reay et al 2010) critical social psychology and the psychosocial (Walkerdine et al

2001; Lucey et al 2003; Hey 2006 ). Such feminist approaches have sought to relocate the boundaries between intimate personal experience and academic process (West 1996). Testament to the idea that class is undoubtedly a very personal issue existing on an affective register, and inspired by their own experience, several feminist academics who hail from working class backgrounds have sought to address the chasm in research around the psychosocial aspects of social mobility (Reay, 1997, 1998, 2002, 2003; Skeggs 1997; Tokarczyk and Fay 1993; Mahony and Zmroczek 1997; Hey 1997; Lawler 2000; Walkerdine et al 2001; Lucey et al 2003). These works have theorised the effects of class and gender in terms of affect and identity, and the consequences of academic success on feminine working class subjectivity. Using psychosocial perspectives, drawing on their own subjectivities and incorporating autobiographical elements into their work they have illustrated the many ways in which the past: biographies, culture, history - collides with the present producing affects such as confusion and ambivalence, shame, guilt and loss which may result in feelings of inauthenticity around the self.

Theorising the feminine, classed subject through feminist principles and fusing developing ideas from Lacanian psychoanalysis with Foucauldian post-structuralism, Walkerdine et al (2003) explored how and why some working class girls were able to make the drastic and painful leap beyond their destiny into alien classed territories while others remained within the secure margins of their classed worlds. Considering those that had made the leap, the authors explored the emotional dynamics of existing as a “hybrid” between two competing classed worlds, and the unavoidable losses and gains academic success bestows upon working class females

in terms of the emotional dichotomy between who they once were and who they are becoming. A consistent theme within this research was that creating new hybrid subjectivities involved a continual defensive reconstruction and monitoring of the marginal boundaries between conflicting and competing sources, be they ideas, or behaviour, in order to maintain a psychic separation. Such a transition also necessarily entails a separation from pre-existing ties and relationships. In a cruel paradox they found that the inner resources necessary for transition are also potentially self-destructive – there are no easy hybrids (Walkerdine et al 2003). Such intimate and individualised narrative accounts which provide insight into the experience of being working class and in higher education, are important to understanding what facilitates and hinders these transitions and the real ‘price of the ticket’.

Working class relationships to education have, according to Reay (2001) never been easy. Higher education is constructed as “a dangerous place” (p.333) where one survives rather than prospers. Hidden within the “promises and possibilities” of higher education are many hidden threats to selfhood (p.337). Looking specifically at working class students, grounding their work in the theories of Bourdieu, Reay (1998; Reay et al 2002) have also used a psychosocial approach to great effect, illustrating how class and gender mediates education in terms of choices and trajectories and how simultaneously embarking upon educational and class transition makes the experience of higher education “qualitatively different” for working class females. Reay (1998/2002) posits higher education as “hazardous and uncertain for working class women: an experience in which there are potential losses and gains”

(Reay 1998, p. 12), understanding that survival in such an environment entails working class women making a chameleon type transformation to middle class values and attitudes, since as Lawler (1999) asserts, working class people “do not know the right things, they do not value the right things and do not want the right things” (Lawler 1999, p.11 ).

Lawler’s (2000) work around class and mothering illustrates the pivotal position of class in constructions of good mothering. Focusing attention on mothers who had become upwardly mobile through education, her work illustrates exactly what was at stake for these women; moving up meant rejecting the practices and understandings of their own childhood and indeed the working class mother who brought them up (Lawler 2000).

## **2.11. Educational Transitions, Shifts in Identity and Ontological Safety/Security**

Recent psychoanalytic work undertaken by Walkerdine (2011; 2013; 2014) has taken these understandings further forward. The work makes a fundamental critique of neo-liberal ideas around the self as a project (Rose 1999) and the inherent rationalism of a perceived lack of the correct qualities intrinsic to the working class to undertake and achieve such a project of betterment. Looking at how the Department of Children, Schools and Families (now the Department of Education) stressed the centrality of lack of aspiration in relation to working class failure and higher education, she argues that rather than a straight forward lack of aspiration the

situation “is a complex, economic and psychosocial problem’ (Walkerdine 2011 p. 257). For example, she highlights how, on an affective register being aspirational within working class, post- industrial communities may be read as disloyalty by going against ideas of masculinity and femininity, sameness and solidarity and the ‘affective practices’ and ways of being which historically have been relied upon, have held communities together and in this way make sense. Minds, attitudes and behaviour alter less radically than markets and economies and ways of being can remain sedimented through ‘affective practices’ and ways of coping with difficult, traumatic circumstances and economic uncertainty. As such, change and transitions which require shifts in identity can become problematic to ontological safety and a sense of belonging, not only for the individual but also the family and wider community.

## **2.12. Aspiration, Fantasy, Imagination and Change**

Utilising the work of Felix Guattari, a radical psychoanalyst, Walkerdine (2011; 2013; 2014) highlights the fundamental relevance of the material, embodied and subjective experience of place in relation to education and class transition. She uses Guattari’s conceptual apparatus as an analytic methodology to think about the way in which place and affect are entangled, and the role of fantasy and the creative power of the imagination, in relation to how change, movement and transition might be possible for the working class subject. She submits these as of central importance over aspiration, and argues that rather than lacking aspiration in any simple sense, paucity of support and resources result in working class students often

lacking the means by which to mobilise fantasy and imagination in a way which can result in action. As a result fantasies are often pursued in conflicting or contradictory ways which could be understood as jeopardising or damming success. Accordingly, it is the creative power of imagination, in relation to overcoming anxiety which creates the potential for forward movement into new, and crucially, safe, geographical and imaginative spaces for subjectivity to occupy.

In adopting Guattari's method of 'Schizoanalytic Cartography' in her work, she was able to map the trajectory of one working class girl, Nicky, who despite not initially doing well in school, managed to mobilise her fantasy to be a student in order to leave her home town for university and a successful research career. What emerges from this schizo- analysis, which maps the trajectory or 'psychogeographical journey' of Nicky's fantasy to imagination to action, is a picture of the way in which affects, attached to space, place, the material, the virtual, fantasy and imagination meld and coalesce to offer potentiality in terms of forward movement and change into the unknown (Walkerdine 2013). Also, highlighted is the relational nature of Nikki's educational success; affecting the possibility of change are the complex relations within the family.

### **2.13. Affect rather than Simple Aspiration**

According to Walkerdine (2011, 2013, 2014), given the deeply embodied and affectively lived and performed nature of class, and the complex ways in which subjectivity is produced across social locations, any movement can be experienced

and felt as hugely threatening in an ontological sense. Thus, transition to and participation in higher education, which necessitates shifts in identity, is about affect rather than aspiration in any simple sense of the concept; aspiration is ensconced within complex relations and practices which mean that driven by affect, fantasies are pursued in complex and contradictory ways. It is this understanding of aspiration/motivation as a complex and contradictory, relational and affective psychosocial phenomenon which forms the basis and main argument of the thesis. Chapter Five, the first analytic chapter, adopts this analytic methodology to make explicit the psychosocial nature of aspiration, understood in the context of real life.

Having discussed these important issues of class in relation to aspiration, education and social mobility, in the next section, I turn to the academic literature in relation to mature students in Higher education; in particular working class women and mothers, in order to further explore issues of aspiration and identity which form and support the foundation of the argument of the thesis.

#### **2.14. Mature Studentship**

As discussed, within contemporary neo-liberalism, understanding the life course as a linear trajectory has become problematic. Historically, adulthood was punctuated by a series of transitions for example; to work, to marriage or significant relationships, parenthood, retirement. Against the backdrop of neo-liberal ideas of self actualisation, adult trajectories are now complex, with ‘non normative’ shifts such as late parenthood and late studentship becoming more frequent as is the

opportunity (and necessity) to have more than one career in one's working life.

Indeed, expansion and diversification of the student population within universities is also linked to neoliberal ideas of the self actualising, self governing subject (Mercer 2007).

### **2.15. Mature Students: A Diverse Category**

Although considered a distinct group, there is much heterogeneity in the category of mature students both in terms of intersectional identities and individual biographies (James 1995). As Waller (2005) confirms;

mature students are a diverse and heterogeneous group, with the 'reality' of their experience(s) being too complex, too individually situated, for meaningful representation otherwise (Waller 2005 p.115).

As such , Waller further argues that historically academic literature has made 'overly simple generalisations' about this group by focussing on social categories rather than subjective experience. The biographical turn in social research however has been able to start address this and is evident for example, in the work of Baxter and Britton (1994, 1999; Wilson 1997; Reay, Ball and David 2002). The subjective experience of different constituencies within the category of mature students in higher education is vital both in academic theorisation and in terms of policy. Whilst as a category the term 'mature student' is useful as political arithmetic, it does nothing to speak of the diversity in the category. If social justice through the vehicle of higher education is to be taken seriously, how to attract and maintain different

types of older students needs to be considered. Also, in need of investigation is the way in which aspiration and motivation is enabled or constrained for mature students, through the intersectional categories of class, gender, race and individual biographies, within cultural contexts at particular points in time.

### **2.15.1. The experience of Women as Students in Higher Education - Who Cares?**

As is the case with the present thesis, much of the academic literature which looks at women's experiences in higher education is research which has been undertaken or formed from a 'frontline' perspective, often either by women who were mature students themselves or by tutors who through their contact with this student population have identified particular issues of interest (for example, Karach 1992; West 1996; Walters 2000; Shanahan 2000; Parr 2000; Maher 2001; Montgomery and Collette 2001; Quinn, 2003, 2010; Mercer 2007). This suggests an affective understanding and empathy around the female mature student experience and recognition of its 'qualitative difference' (Reay, 1998; Reay, Ball and David, 2002).

The experiences of mature women students has been of particular import in the field of Women's Studies. As Maher (2001) suggests:

Teachers want to empower and credential female students by illuminating their experiences of the world through feminist lenses (an academic and non-academic task; they want to use women's studies to integrate women into the

academic disciplines, and not least, they want to transform higher education itself by making it about and for everyone, not just the few

(Maher 2001, p.8 ).

Within this realm then, the aim of higher education is not simply about credentialism and gaining qualifications but moves beyond these neo-liberal ideas. Here the aim and focus is about empowerment, diversity and inviting women en masse, valuing the experiences women bring with them to university and , understanding education as life changing, potentially transforming female students' world views, how they think about their lives, and themselves; making and remaking meanings (Maher 2001). These are benefits to the 'self' or individuals which simultaneously benefit society through attempts at equality.

## **2.16. Motivation and Participation in Higher Education**

Within the context of social mobility, when explaining their return to education, we might expect the working class subject, to offer economic or vocational reasons as motivating factors. Indeed as Archer and Leathwood, (2003) argue, the widening participation project within neo-liberalism is based around the idea that working class people ought to want to better themselves and desire a middle class lifestyle, it is not surprising then that vocational aspirations “partly reflect the powerful normative gaze of such ideas within society” (West 1996, p. 206) . These are of course perfectly valid individual explanations and have been cited by my own participants, and may well be an initial motivating factor. But, Lawler has highlighted the contradiction and impossibility for working class women in particular, in this desire.

However, very practical and rational explanations can often hide a raft of other more complicated emotions, affects and motivations that may not feel like valid explanations, perhaps because they are too personal, too painful, and stand outside of cultural norms and expectations around class or gender (West 1996). A central tenet of this research, which will be explored fully in the next chapter in relation to the methodological approach adopted, is the understanding that as individuals we are not always consciously aware of the reasons why we act as we do, and make the decisions and choices we do. This is not to say that the women I interviewed blindly blundered into education, but rather some of the motivating factors may in fact be more unconscious, perhaps felt but unarticulated on many levels. Reasons for this felt but unspoken desire might be to protect both self and family members and even the wider community from the threat of change and transformation (West 1996). To want something outside of what the immediate context offers is in effect a rejection of lives and selves and on a psychic level may even be understood as painful and an attack to ontological security (Walkerdine and Jimenez 2012).

Despite the variations in the mature student population, mature learners are likely to have different motivations for study in comparison to traditional age learners (Scott, Burns and Cooney 1998). These include, but are not confined to; the search for an identity beyond mother or wife (Pascal and Cox 1993), and an opportunity to re-write their histories (Shanahan 2000), a desire to change self concept (Walters 2000) and increase self-esteem and confidence, (Pritchard & Roberts 2006) and for academic development and personal growth (Mercer 2007). According to King (1989) personal development and studying areas of interest accounts for mature

student's greater academic performance. However, this explanation only takes us so far. Scott, Burns and Cooney (1998) rightly assert that foregoing studies have used methods which have directly asked about reasons for returning to education, rarely focusing on more defined measures of motivation (Boshier 1971; Boshier and Collins 1985 cited in Scott, Burns and Cooney 1998). In their own quantitative study comparing the motivation of mature age women with children who have successfully graduated and those who did not complete their studies, they found that motivation between the two groups did not differ. However, when personal circumstances were controlled for, this made a difference; personal history and current life circumstances made a difference to both return and leave. In particular marriage problems, unsupportive families and general life circumstances each influenced participation, providing evidence for education as a means of compensating for or escaping difficult realities. Similarly, Scott et al (1998) and Shanahan (2000) also found that higher education offered the means to discover new roles, following trying and burdensome life circumstances.

Other studies have found children to be a motivating factor in choosing to enter into higher education (Edwards 1993; Reay et al 2002; Leathwood and O'Connell 2003; Mercer 2007). In Mercer's (2007) study women were twice as likely to state this as their motivation back into education expressing and illustrating a desire to be a role model to their children. However, as Walkup (2006) has highlighted and I myself experienced, women students with dependent children are not recognised as a discrete group with differential needs within the student cohort. Regardless of one's route to university, traditional and non traditional students are lumped together as a

student body. Currently, universities do not hold data on how many women in Higher Education have dependent children, taking primary responsibility or sole responsibility for their care and domestic management (Green Lister 2003) so at present numbers of women juggling between and across “greedy institutions” (Edwards 1993, p. 62) are unknown. The routines and responsibilities of their everyday lives are different from traditional age students and those without caring responsibilities and as such studentship could be considered an additional significant role and identity to motherhood and the domestic sphere. Outside of the institution, there are different demands placed on mothers – domestic, financial, relational and emotional. Whilst not necessarily on the back foot, Walkup (2006) has argued for the acknowledgement of the position of student women and mothers, a group she terms as (SWAMS) as “essentially different” from both school leavers and non-traditional students without parental responsibility. In addition to shouldering the responsibility for child care and the domestic sphere (often solely), extant research (Edwards 1993; Archer et al 2003; Osborne et al 2004) suggests that they often lack support and encouragement for learning from partners and family which often produces conflict and dissolution of relationships.

Additionally, for this group of women, whilst struggling with the practical demands of the public realm of university and the private realm of home and family, psychologically they are also subject to the ideologies which surround motherhood, of the selfless, nurturing female and the way in which neo-liberalism has transformed meanings and identities around motherhood based around political and cultural constructions of the ‘good’ and ‘bad’ mother (Allen and Osgood 2009). The

relational nature of aspiration, motivation and participation for working class mature student mothers is thus centralised. Mercer (2007) has highlighted the relational nature of the participation of the mature students in her study, as opposed to the ‘individualised process’ it was for those without family responsibilities. Classed motherhood, within contemporary neo-liberalism and the way in which this shapes, subjectivity and aspiration and motivation in connection to higher education is explored in Chapter Five, addressing one of the research questions integral to the thesis.

## **2.17. Juggling between Places, Roles and Identities as a Mature Student**

### **Mother**

Salient in the literature around women and higher education is the theme of juggling between competing demands on time, resulting in guilt and anxiety (Edwards 1993; Shanahan 2000; Reay, Ball and David 2002 ). Who does what within homes and families is of great import to women in that position and this kind of research, however, there is a need to move beyond simply looking at the division of labour in the domestic realm and where the lion’s share of parental responsibility lies. It informs us that some women have no help, others have more and that gendered ideologies endure, with affective consequences for the women. It says little as to why this might be, how it is experienced and the very real consequences for both their psychological health, their relationships with others and their ability to maintain their studentship. Very relevant to the thesis is the work of Dawn Mannay (2014). She has illustrated the way in which in Wales, social and moral identities are entwined with parenting and care of the home and ideas of the ‘good’ mother. She

argues that such commitment to working class respectable femininity has been formed as a resistance to an implied working class lack and the discourses of dirty, promiscuous and shameful behaviour attributed to working class women, from which they struggle to escape (Aaron 1994). Within families and communities, working class motherhood may be a source of pride, respect and status, however, scape-goating discourses which vilify poor, working class, and single mothers because of their threat to moral and social order (Skeggs 1997; Gillies 2007; Tyler 2008;) serve to bridle their agency (Mannay 2014). Considering the emotional price of maintaining acceptable forms of motherhood and working class respectability for the women, Mannay's study demonstrated how their agency:

can be constrained and silenced by gendered norms, local culture and poverty: and how even when choices are enabled they are accompanied by costs that are disempowering, shaming and difficult to bear" impacting upon educational possibilities and trajectories.

(Mannay 2014 p. 6).

These are significant issues in relation to the aspiration, motivation and participation of working class mothers in higher education.

## **2.18. The experience of Mature Students: Identity Transformation and the Relational Nature of Aspiration, Motivation and Participation**

Studies looking at the experiences of mature students reveal consistent themes of identity transformation. Whilst many of these changes are positive such as academic

growth, feeling happier (Mercer 2007), confident, feeling empowered and enlightened, and having increased status in family (Karach 1992; Wakeford 1994; Shanahan 2000), the literature also reveals themes of struggle in relation to identity construction, negotiation and management. Several writers interested in women as mature students within higher education have been influenced by their own experiences in this context (Karach 1992; Parr 1998). As researcher/participant Karach (1992) studied the experiences of a group of working class women undergraduates participating in a women's studies course. Her study revealed that the women felt alienated by the system, and dislocated from their past roles, status and experiences and expressed a sense of "partial loss in their sense of self"; the transition from being a mature woman to a student entailing both a social and psychological split (Karach 1992, p.316). What this study acknowledges is that women bring with them to university a vast array of knowledge, experiences and roles, which over the years constitute who they are; their identity and their subjectivities. In finding these past roles, knowledge and experience redundant and/or in conflict with other possibilities is, in essence, a rejection and devaluing of the self as has been previously understood and experienced It can mean denying whole dimensions of self which, for one woman, caused her to feel much less solid . The importance of past experience and experiential knowledge in relation to; aspiration, motivation and participation, future possibilities and changes in identity is explored in various ways throughout the analytic chapters, and is vital to the thesis as a whole.

For the women in Karach's study, meeting, sharing, working and bonding with like-minded others in the same position as themselves was a very important, positive experience and a useful coping strategy or survival technique. Karach (1992) suggests that absence of this support is likely to lead women mature students to locate this sense of dislocation and alienation within themselves, often resulting in mental health problems and failure to complete their degree. Other research has also found the support of other students to be important to both participation and educational trajectories (Karach 1992; West 1996; MacDonald and Stratta 1998; Shanahan 2000; Reay, Ball and David 2002; Wilcox et al 2005). In addressing the research questions, the highly relational nature of the intersectional identities the women hold and the way in which these collectively influence aspiration, motivation and participation are explored across the three analytic chapters. Chapter Five in particular, explores the consequences of the push and pull between family and university and the consequences for relationships and subjectivity. The salience of other mature student mothers as a source of support and survival, in relation to the transition into higher education and sustaining participation is also included there, and considers the way in which these are accomplished and function. Such an analysis is important to the retention of working class mature student mothers.

Britton and Baxter (2001) have argued that "the culture and practices of higher education make this space a key site for the construction of new identities, which may conflict with other/prior identities" (Britton & Baxter 2001 p.99). For the participants of this study, managing conflict and changes to identity was more arduous to working class mature students than their middle class counterparts, and

negotiating alteration in family relationships was particularly difficult for female students in comparison to males.

As Beck (1992) understands:

While men remain essentially untouched by family events in their biographies, women lead a contradictory double life shaped equally by family and by organisations. For them the family rhythm still applies...

(Beck 1992 p.132)

Stevens (2003) also explored the experiences of women mature students from a phenomenological perspective using conversational style interviews with twelve women aged between 30-40 undertaking courses in humanities and the social sciences. Mapping their experiences of being a mature student over an extended period of time, Stevens' study was able to reveal the change in sense of identity that the women experienced and the tensions created in doing so from competing identities, revealing the "Existential Pioneerism" required for self creation. Also noted by Stevens, was the manner in which "participants strive on in authentic pursuit of new goals, unnerved by the increasing multiplicity and the attendant insecurity" it brings (Stevens 2003. p.235). Additionally, for these women, academic aspiration was a fragile concept, liable to change at a moment's notice, dependent upon the successful 'juggling' of roles and identity (Edwards 1993). While this demonstrates pioneering bravery in 'keeping on, keeping on' (West 1996) and suggests resilience, its source, the emotional consequences - what this bravery

might actually entail, are left out of such accounts. These understandings of participation on an emotional and affective landscape are vital.

Re-negotiation or transformation of self necessarily requires also a renegotiation or transformation of existing relationships with family and friends. Another common theme within the literature on mature student women in higher education are around juggling roles and identities and the effect which this may have upon relationships with family and friends (Wakeford 1994; Clouder 1997; Stevens 2003). In her classic study Edwards (1993) notes how conflict within the domestic sphere and evolving new identities posed threat to existing relationships. From experience I know that my own participation didn't rely upon my academic ability. Whilst this was obviously a central feature, equally important was the embedded nature of my subjectivity; in the family, in culture, in history, but distributed across locations, and the affective responses that were evoked by people, places and practices. In essence, how I felt and experienced higher education, and motivation was embedded in my relational world and the way in which I had internalised these relationships.

Relational psychoanalysis is part of the eclectic psychoanalytically informed methodological tool kit I adopt in this research. In the following chapter, Chapter Three 'Researching through a Psychosocial Method' I further justify and lay out my use of this theoretical analytical approach.

Changes to existing relationships as a consequence of higher education are reflected throughout the literature on mature students as are the importance and support both

within the domestic sphere from family and friends and the university from tutors and peers. But the more subjective accounts, called for by Waller (2005), of how such changes - the gains and losses, the negotiations and re-negotiations and the implications these have for subjectivity are often missing. While the literature informs us that these tensions exist, there is a paucity of accounts which provide depth understanding. What accounts tend to miss is the way in which culturally and historically class and motherhood are inscribed into subjectivity and affect aspiration, motivation and participation in higher education.

## **2.19. Education, Trauma, Place and Space**

As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, one unexpected aspect of the research was the frequency and levels of trauma experienced by my small sample. The connection between trauma and education although perhaps surprising and unexplored is not entirely new. Janet Parr (2000) also made this connection when like myself she began her research looking at mature students, as a mature student mother herself. She too was shocked by the amount and severity of the trauma in the lives of her participants. In her book “Identity and Education: The Links for Mature Women Students”, Parr (2000) describes her impression of the women she interviewed as:

fighting for personal survival, not in a physical, but in a psychological sense and education is the vehicle they are using. For all the women, education could be seen as therapeutic in its broadest sense.

(Parr, 2000, p.118).

## **2.20. Emotional and Affective Terms of Engagement**

Although unlikely to be a conscious aim, Walters (2000) also suggests that for some, education can have a reparative aspect resulting in therapeutic outcomes.

According to Walters psychosocial study, it has the power to repair the past in some sense. The student counsellors she interviewed considered that it was a means of setting the record straight, proving to both themselves and others that they can achieve, moving beyond that which was before, plugging an emotional gap. To confirm and support her own findings, this researcher draws on West's (1996) pivotal study of adult returners to education and their motivations. He challenges the idea that adults returning to education do so simply to follow vocational ambitions and aspirations. Rather, through his psychoanalytically informed approach, he contends, that motivation and learning should be perceived as part of a struggle with fragments of the self: feelings of marginalisation, meaninglessness and inauthenticity, and that the space of higher education potentially is a space of management and moving beyond such feelings.

Both these studies were able to offer nuance and depth to understandings of what higher education can offer individuals emotionally, beyond its transparent academic function. It is these kinds of understanding which this study aims to achieve in order to address the final research question which aims to explore the links between, trauma, higher education and identity.

### **2.21. Higher Education as Space**

As the literature reviewed above suggests, motivation for study has been framed as compensation for, or escapism from, difficult life circumstances. Such life circumstances and problems, for example domestic abuse, the stresses of single motherhood and a desire to escape these have been noted by other academics on the front line of teaching or as personal tutors (Quinn 2003, 2010; Walters 2010). In particular, Montgomery and Collette (2001) noted how in returning to education, one of their participants, Barbara, “echoed the wish women have expressed and which Virginia Woolf articulated as the need for a room of one’s own” (p . 305). Similarly, Jocey Quinn’s (2003) work uses feminist spatial theory applied to the context of higher education to explore the ways in which university may be a protective space, a refuge from various forms of threat and a zone of separation (Quinn 2003). Quinn argues that for the women in her study, the imagined space of the university acted to shelter the women from perceived threats and dangers outside of the academy, which include threats to their sexuality, physical threats of violence and abuse, threats of isolation and protection from their own fears. In this way, as Quinn explains, although still residing ‘in the threatening outside world, the university had generated a mental space of comfort’ which could be drawn upon when required (Quinn 2003 p.455).

### **2.22. Emotion and the role of Higher Education**

Val Walsh (1996) has considered the 'Terms of Engagement' of mature studentship and has explored 'Pedagogy as a Healing Politic'. She acknowledges the way in which subjectivity is formed first in the mess and pressure outside of the university, bearing the signs of those strains both in terms of being and meaning in the world. In her feminist work, she actively calls for education as a healing space. She argues that:

As marginals, women students and tutors need to construct a healing space in higher education, not because we conceive education as consciousness-raising or as therapy, but because if it is not a healing space, it will be yet another piece of oppression and damage.

(Walsh 1996 p. 206).

Leathwood and Hey, (2009), have also identified and supported the role of emotions and affect in higher education, acknowledging its role in Student Support, as an important element of Widening Participation. In their own work, they have used these concepts to critically interrogate neo-liberal discourses around feelings in higher education and the way in which they mould and influence educational trajectories. Despite a body of work on the significance of emotion and affect in relation to higher education, its place in the space of higher education and the role of higher education however is controversial. Ecclestone and Hayes (2009) are concerned about "the dangerous rise of therapeutic education" and adopt a 'stiff upper lip' and 'get over it' approach to the difficult biographies individuals bring with them to higher education. They suggest that therapeutic support amounts to

“molly coddling”, “infantalisation” and constructions of the student as vulnerable (p. 87). They contend also that:

the rise of the therapeutic university has even more serious implications than a therapeutic school or college because belief in knowledge and reason, and optimism about their progressive and social consequences are at stake: once at risk, the ideal of the university begins to disappear.

(Ecclestone and Hayes 2009, p. 86).

Such a view can be understood as reactionary against the Psy discourses (Rose 1999) which function as part of neo-liberal governance. However, this view is based on the notion of an ideal type universal student that is, white, western, middle class and male (Leathwood and Hey 2009). As such it negates the very real and often difficult life circumstances which are part of subjectivity, brought to university, often reflective of inequalities and oppression in society. These circumstances form part of identities, influencing experiences as students in university and influencing future possibilities and trajectories. In this view, which polarises the affective from the rational, and the past from the present and future, the therapeutic potential of the space of higher education is perceived as both against and beyond its ideological remit.

Concurring with West (1996), who also uncovered stories of trauma in his research with mature students, I consider that although distressing, it is vital that these traumatic stories be told and heard in higher education, through a historical and

cultural perspective, if “the roots of oppression are to be better understood and people empowered to change them” (West 1996 p. 213). Paradoxically then, the space of higher education can be understood as both a space of risk and a place of safety, a space of dislocation and belonging . This element of safety will be explored in Chapter Seven, in order to address my forth research question and make connections between trauma and higher education.

### **2.23. Conclusion**

This Chapter has provided the reader with an overview of the literature informing the study and, on which it rests. I have looked at the pathologising ways in which class, and working class mothers have come to be constructed, understood and represented within the present time of neo-liberal governance. I have argued that, carried within socio-political discourses, there is a moral imperative for improvement in order to be the ‘right’ kind of feminine subject and mother modelled on the image of the middle class woman. Viewed as both the ‘solution and the problem to national ills’ (Skeggs 1997 p. 48), I have highlighted the impossibility of the charge of ‘betterment’ facing working class mothers.

Using the literature, I have argued against the deficit discourses of aspiration which surround the working classes, pointing instead to the need to look beyond aspiration as a trait possessed by certain individuals, arguing that; such views ignore wider class and cultural based inequalities and places blame at the level of the individual, and that within the rhetoric of aspiration, aspiration as a concept is emptied of any affective, relational, historical and cultural understanding.

Subjectivity is produced in complex context specific ways making it complex and psychosocial. It follows then that aspiration is also produced in context specific ways making it also, an inherently complex, psychosocial phenomena which needs to be studied as such if we are to understand how it works and address issues of aspiration.

Social mobility is framed in society as an unequivocal good. However, as shown in the literature, and from my own experience, there are losses as well as gains to being educationally successful as a working class woman. These losses can be in terms of both family relationships and issues of identity, through a felt loss of belonging, existing instead as a hybrid between different classed worlds, these contradictions resulting in pain and conflict (Lucey et al 2001). While these issues have already been explored by feminist researchers, according to my data, a generation on these issues are still present. The need to explore these complex issues of identity become stronger as more women subjects are called upon by neo-liberalism to 'become somebody' - else, in the changing labour markets of late capitalism and the middle class cloning project of neo-liberal governance (Gerwirtz 2001).

Studies have confirmed higher education as an agent of change in relation to identity/subjectivity, particularly for women and mothers and class has been further implicated in this. Changes to identity can be positive, for example, self esteem and confidence and negative because of feelings of loss and displacement, and juggling

the roles and identities of mother and student within the family and university is arduous and complicated by poverty of time often producing guilt and affective consequences . Higher education is understood as a site of identity struggle formed by both a desire to change or re-negotiate identity, and a fear of changing identity and its consequences for self and others. These conflicts and contradictions in identity and experience can result in ambivalence towards study. Chiming with the studies focusing on class and social mobility via higher education there are losses and gains of transformation. There is then a highly affective and emotional register to negotiation, re-negotiation and management of new hybrid identities within liminal spaces which complicate projects of ‘transformation’.

Despite often being considered in an homogenous way, both the categories of class and mature students are made up of different constituencies. Working class mature student mothers have arrived at education via diverse routes. Aspiration, motivation and participation need to be understood in the context of real women’s lives – how they are lived and experienced affectively and relationally to family, culture, history, time and space if we are to understand how these concepts are formed, enabled and constrained and policy guidelines informed.

Mature students present a constellation of reasons for embarking upon higher education of which vocational aims are part, however reasons often go beyond vocational aims . Regardless of explanations cited, along with their motivations, inevitably embodied affect and emotion will also be brought. More personal

reasons and benefits are sometimes hidden beneath more rational explanations obscuring individual struggles for identity. Based on data collected in the research there is a need to explore the links between trauma, aspiration, motivation and higher education, in terms of subjectivity. Despite some groundbreaking work, the links between trauma and higher education are relatively unexplored within the academic literature. Studies however indicate a therapeutic and protective element to higher education. It suggest then that the way in which higher education is used as a means of 'transformation' is more complex than either institutions or government agendas of aspiration/social mobility/economic and global market competition currently take account of. To draw a line between vocational and personal motives, the public and the private, is artificial and reductionist in terms of understanding the way in which working class mature students engage with higher education (West 1996). Again concurring with West (1996) I consider that there is an urgent need for exploring the way in which the personal; psychic, cultural and historical, the most intimate parts of the self are connected to the most remote and impersonal of social forces (Mills 1970; West 1996). We can then shed further light upon aspiration, motivation, behaviour and it's outcomes and consequences.

This chapter has highlighted the issues facing working class mature mothers as they become students and participate in higher education. It has brought into focus the affective register of experience and has shown the complex psychosocial dimensions of aspiration, which will be explored later in the empirical chapters of the thesis, arguing that it be researched as such in relation to working class mature student mothers.

In the following chapter (Three), the importance of the ‘affective turn’ (Clough and Halley 2007) and imperative for a psychosocial approach to the research will be laid out. I contend that in addition to a psychosocial lens, the research also requires a psychoanalytic approach to take account of unconscious processes and get beyond the ‘rational explanations’ which make up surface understandings of everyday lives. This next Chapter, the first of two which are methodologically focused, commences reflexively with an explanation of the origins of the research and the way in which this developed into a psychoanalytically informed methodology and theoretical framework for the research.

### **3.**

## **Chapter Three**

# **Researching Working Class Mature Students through a Psychosocial Method**

### **3.1. Introduction**

This chapter is the first of two methodological chapters which describe the research process of the study. It is necessarily reflexive and as a result is lengthy. An overarching aim of the research is to explore the psychic/affective landscape of class in which aspiration, motivation and participation are formed, regulated, enabled, and constrained; relationally, culturally, historically, geographically and temporally by conscious and unconscious processes – and the implications for subjectivity.

Informed by the academic literatures discussed in Chapter Two, the focus of the chapter is to present how my research concerns and questions developed and translated into the present study which utilised a psychosocial (psychoanalytically inflected) theoretical framework. This includes making explicit its context and origins, early explorations and methodological influences and decisions. It then discusses the methodological and theoretical assumptions underpinning the design of this psychosocial project, providing an overview of the psychosocial paradigm – its theoretical influences and assumptions and how subjectivity is understood within this paradigm from a psychoanalytic perspective. It then goes on to discuss the research design in terms of strategy and decisions regarding methods for collecting

empirical materials. The chapter ends with a presentation of the research sample and the final psychosocial design of methods used to generate and collect the data; a series of three psychosocial interviews (Stopford 2004), selected because of their fit in relation to the requirements of the research and their potential to access affective and unconscious aspects of experience integral to my inquiry. Further methodological processes and issues – the collecting/generating of data, storing and handling of data, data analysis, and ethical issues and reflections on methods/methodology will be dealt with in the subsequent Chapter, *Chapter Four – Interviews, Feelings and Findings*.

### **3.2. Why A Psychosocial Approach?**

#### **3.2.1. Situating Myself in the Research**

Decisions regarding research topic, design and conduct are never value free or neutral. As researchers we embark upon the process, not just as academics, but also as people with individual personal histories (Parr 1998). Social research is a moral-political activity (Henn, Weinstein and Foard 2005). At this point, in line with the feminist and psychoanalytic psychosocial methodology which informs this thesis (Ribbens and Edwards 1998), I feel it vital to offer some biography to make clear my own stake in this research and how this affected my role as a researcher and the research itself. Arguing the importance of this point, Liz Stanley and Sue Wise (1993) assert “recognition of who a researcher is, in terms of their sex, race, class and sexuality, affects what they ‘find’ in research is as true for feminist as any other researchers” (Stanley and Wise 1993 p. 228). In offering aspects of my own story I hope methodological transparency will be achieved for the reader. I make clear my

acknowledgement of how I was interpellated into this research topic “for particular internal and external reasons that will inevitably have some bearing on the interview process” and indeed the analysis process, the interpretation of data and how I have chosen to present my findings (Cartwright 2004 p.222). I make no claims to a neutral or dispassionate miner of ‘truth’, rather I bring to the research setting my own subjectivities, identities, insights, values, judgements, layers of affect and unconscious processes, which exist in relation to a social, cultural, geographical, political and temporal context (Hammersley 1995). In this thesis I draw upon these in order to present a version of understanding in terms of how it might feel to be a working class, mature student mother in Higher Education in a time of neo-liberalism. I am then utilising my own subjectivity and dynamic processes (conscious and unconscious) as a research tool. Because of this, at the nexus of this qualitative project is my role as a reflexive psychosocial researcher (with a psychoanalytic accent) (Hollway and Jefferson 2013) and the process of on-going critical reflection on methods, practices and emotional involvement (Clarke and Hoggett 2009). It is hoped that acknowledging this positioning in my research and the effects of this in terms of knowledge, offers a means of transcending a “rather mechanistic operationalisation of reflexivity in qualitative social science” (Hollway 2004). The role of the researcher in the production of qualitative data is of great importance from both a psychoanalytic and post-structural perspective. As Parker, (2005) asserts:

Subjectivity is viewed by psychoanalysis, as with much qualitative research, not as a problem but as a resource (and topic). To draw upon ones own subjectivity in the research process does not mean that one is not being

‘objective’, but that one actually comes closer to a truer account. In psychoanalytic terms, the ‘investment’ the researcher has in the material they are studying plays a major role in the interest that will eventually accrue from the research

(Parker 2005 p. 117)

In revealing aspects of my own biography and subjectivity as a working class mature student and mother, here and throughout the thesis, I hope to make clear the historical, temporal and cultural formation of my own subjectivity, conscious and unconscious processes and how I worked with these dynamic processes in the collection and analysis of the data, being influenced by concepts from psychoanalysis such as transference and counter-transference to make sense of the data and inform the analysis by both connecting and separating my own emotional/affective responses. Here, reflexivity is conferring with psychoanalysis to aid transparency and validity. In sharing my own story, then, what initially might be judged within other more conventional paradigms, to be an act of self indulgence or sentimentality, against the context of the analysis chapters should aid the reader’s assessment of transparency and validity and my affective connection to the topic and the research. Issues of validity within psychosocial research are taken up in a later section in this chapter and in Chapter Four, the following Chapter.

### **3.2.2. Origins: Staking my Claim**

Hailing from a working class background as a mature student and mother, my research topic and methodology has been influenced by my own experiences of university and my personal background; the time, history and culture into which I was born. I want now to explain how this project evolved, translating from one working class mature student mother's set of personal feelings or affects: fears, anxieties, guilt and inadequacies, into concerns, a set of research questions and PhD thesis.

I grew up in a small valley in the South Wales coalfields during the 70's and 80's. A time of the working class hero, miners' strikes, food parcels and picket lines. Sat in my living room with my mother at the ironing board one hot June day in 1984 I watched a news report that showed striking miners picketing on mass at Orgreave, a British Steel Coking plant. I watched in horror as men stripped to the waist were charged and trampled by police on horse-back, chased and beaten with truncheons by police in riot gear in what was to be dubbed "the battle of Orgreave" - knowing that somewhere within the mass of frightened fleeing men was my Dad, a 'flying picket' from a South Wales Colliery. Depicted by the media as 'yobs' and 'hooligans' and described by the then Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher as "the enemy within" I didn't recognise these working class men shown to me by the BBC. My Dad wasn't a 'yob' and he wasn't violent, but he was fighting, with others – for their livelihood, their families, for me. The next day having heard his telling of the experience, I opened the newspaper and for the first time came to the realisation that the media didn't tell the truth, that truth and knowledge were not the same thing and that these things could be constructed! I was gobsmacked, outraged at the

injustice of it all and through these emotions my class consciousness was born and the social scientist within me stirred.

At school, the careers teacher offered us little information or advice: boys could join the army or try in vain to obtain one of the scarce apprenticeships on offer (thanks to Thatcher's Government the decline of heavy industry and manufacturing had begun) and girls could be nurses or work in the local sewing factory. I didn't want to do either. Dyslexic (although I didn't discover this until university) I left school with a handful of O'levels and went to technical college where I trained as a medical secretary. At the time I considered this 'nice little job' to be a glamorous and prestigious position. I could wear nice clothes to work and come home clean! I could 'work for' a doctor, someone clever, wealthy and important. Secretly, I fantasised that the doctor (a male naturally) might even want to marry me. I would be a 'nice' girl 'saved' from my working class life. Obviously, despite being the late 80's, ideas from the revolutionary late 60's still hadn't reached the Welsh Valleys! Untouched by feminism at this time, never in my wildest dreams did it ever occur to me that I might be a doctor...that I might, in fact, save myself.

After several satisfying years working as a medical secretary in forensic mental health (incidentally, 'working with' women) I became a mother, working part-time for a while, then giving up work completely when my second daughter was born to be a full-time "Mammy", devoting all my time and attention to my children, home and family – something else that 'nice or 'good' girls did in my culture. As a mother, it was okay to have a job (especially if it was a drudge, something that had to be done to 'get by') but a career...satisfaction from work outside of the

home...that was for a different type of woman all together and I didn't want to be her.

Later on, pooling my knowledge from my working life and the interest in child psychology developed since becoming a mother, I embarked upon a Lifelong Learning course. Within a year I had enough credits to apply to University and secured a place at a Red Brick institution. Thankfully, because of my 'nice little job' I realised the value of attending a prestigious university. I had witnessed how students sent on work placements from particular institutions were viewed by professionals in the world of work. I wanted a good degree from a good institution.

When I started at an elite University, I anticipated that student life would bring about some change and practical conflicts which would be difficult to negotiate. I was optimistic however, that I could have 'the best of both worlds' and be a 'good mother', a 'good student' and bask in the support of my working class family and friends. However, not only was I ill prepared for the extent of the practical "juggling act" (Edwards, 1993) I had embarked upon but also the unexpected inner turmoil and discomfort experienced through conflicting identities and feelings, and the complex manner in which they co-existed. As a result I found myself in a 'no-mans land', alienated from my working class past, friends and environment, and equally out of place within my new environment and the people within it. I had no sense of belonging, only 'otherness'; my sense of identity fractured. Within the elite institution my presence felt problematic in every respect; age, class, accent, status, knowledge and my perceived ability. Similarly, at home, my sense of maternal identity fostered through many years of being at home with the children, and the

practices and discourses in which this was performed and confirmed, became problematised by the new (and superior?) knowledge I was acquiring through academic study. The ‘all powerful, all seeing, mother earth type’ that, framed by others, I knew myself to be was ‘missing in action’ leaving behind a ghost, always lacking time, constantly tired and wracked with guilt for (although almost killing myself trying) being unable to devote the time I used to, to playing, reading, birthday cake making . I became ashamed that in my attempt at ‘good mothering’, I had taken such pride in my daughters’ appearance, dressing them in ultra-feminine clothes I couldn’t really afford – and what was worse I’d put them in matching outfits! I’d bought into the consumerism around mothering, and the result of my working class excess (Skeggs 2005), I learned, is the possibility that I am “producer of [the] children who are or who will be a threat to the social order” (Skeggs, 2000, p.2). I’d invested so much and mothered them the only way I knew how but I’d done it all wrong and now on the academic treadmill when would I ever have the chance to put it right! Both greedy institutions; family and University demand all that one has and more and yet the practices of each are at odds with the other. To be a good mother means not preparing for a seminar - “don’t work again tonight Mam”, but to be a good student is preparing for the seminar – “have you done the reading?” The tension this creates is like two ends of an elastic being pulled apart, more thinly stretched, all the time grimacing while you wait for one to snap stingingly back.

Puzzled by my own feelings and experience, I started to look at the academic literature in relation to women mature students, finding several academic writers who had explored the relationship between working class women and education

from a psycho-social perspective. I found this to be a cathartic process, finding that the work of Valerie Walkerdine, Diane Reay and Valerie Hey supported and legitimised my discomfort serving to de-pathologise my own experience somewhat – it wasn't just me, and perhaps I wasn't paranoid after all! But, it also fostered my interest in the experiences of others like me and influenced by psychosocial and psychoanalytic research approaches became the topic of my undergraduate dissertation, subsequently developing into work at Masters level and this present doctoral research.

In the final year of this research project, my thesis was affected by several major life events unfolding around me. Firstly my father was diagnosed with a form of motor neurone disease, the prognosis unknown. Secondly, my grandmother developed senile dementia and although we were unable to manage, along with my mother, I cared for her at home for nine months before her death. Thirdly, my husband became depressed and needed to take time off work. Amongst all this very emotional family turmoil, my PhD went on the back burner. My grandmother had become unmanageable for one person, meaning my mother was unable to manage without me and my husband needed my constant support and encouragement. After all, I didn't have 'a proper job' and what I was doing didn't have to be done 9-5. Although not explicitly voiced among the people I was caring for, implicitly I felt that it was something that we all thought didn't have to be done at all. I was a bursaried student – paid to produce. In what other job could I just not produce for a while because of the expectation to care? In what other job would there be any expectation from my family to do so? My brother worked in a hospital, there was no

expectation for him to care for my grandmother, “he was a man and working” so couldn’t. He had a ‘proper job’. Although this situation was stressful and emotionally excruciating, I should point out that my circumstances are not unusual. Indeed these are exactly the circumstances in which women like myself often experience education, and is in fact part of the *raison d’être* of the project. At 42 I was pulled by the needs and cultural expectations of my loved ones and the generations above and below. Lost in the quagmire of the situation for a while I could see no way forward. I was helpless. Time was running out and my thesis was in jeopardy: my supervisor was concerned and asked to meet with me. She pointed out that there was in fact no obvious *telos* to the situation, it could go on for months, years maybe. Time that I didn’t have. She asked me frankly, “What good will you not completing your PhD do anyone?” She was right of course. Despite all my efforts with my grandmother, I was still unable to give her any respite from the constant turmoil and persecution she felt. I couldn’t keep her safe anymore. Similarly, my husband either would or would not get better, but that was down to him and not me. In the larger scheme of things not completing my thesis could only make things worse. My desire to achieve had carried me this far, what would happen to these strong feelings if I felt all my hard work had been denied any pay off because of the needs of others? Resentment I feared would eventually fracture all the relationships that I was spending all my time nurturing. Watching my career and future earning potential disappear down the drain forced me to realise that ironically, this was in fact the time in which I finally ‘save’ myself and the people I cared about. In choosing to re-prioritise my PhD I was in fact safeguarding the possibility of an academic career, family relationships and financial security. Even though I thought I’d had moved away from the naive, gendered expectations of my

youth, for a while, guilt, (a manifestation of the ingrained gendered and cultural expectations and patterns of affect consciously and unconsciously part of my subjectivity) prevented it occurring to me that the strength of my femininity lay not in merely ‘caring for’, blindly playing the martyr and ‘managing and getting on with it’, but rather choosing how I cared in order to manage in a practical and emotional way that could benefit us all. Written here, the decision to focus on my PhD looks easy. It wasn’t. It was painful and I experienced all the conflicts and contractions that I write about in this thesis. My daughters experienced first hand my dilemmas. I knew I had made the right decision when one night cuddling my teenage daughter and discussing her concerns about her up coming AS levels, she turned to me and said “when I’m older, I hope I have balls as big as yours”. Gendered connotations aside, I knew what she meant, and it meant the world. There is nothing exceptional about my biography. Indeed these are the circumstances in which women like me participate in higher education. It does however illustrate some of the psychosocial complexity of aspiration as a working class mature student mother.

### **3.3. Can’t See the Wood for the Trees?**

Having situated myself in the research, making clear the classed, gendered, historical and cultural position from which I speak, the following section deals with the way in which the research process unfolded, commencing with methodological and empirical insights gained from research work undertaken for my dissertations as an Undergraduate and Masters level student. As already established, the positionality of the researcher is key within contemporary social research. While I have made my position clear in the research, this is not without its own problems and controversies.

From my particular vantage point of 'epistemic privilege' (Mannay 2010) I share many of the cultural understandings and meanings as the women and as a researcher I might presume that my position of cultural competence is advantageous (Atkinson et al 2003). Through my preconceived knowledge, there is however, the danger of the charge of my being 'too close' or familiar to the group and contexts in question and thus as a researcher be unable to move beyond my own view of the context. This would raise issues of representation: I might, perhaps, be blind to the multi-faceted aspects of the women's subjectivity and paint a particularly favourable one dimension 'inside' view of the women and their lives lacking the objective view that an 'outside' researcher would possess. Similarly, the method adopted within the research uses proximity as it is relational and dialogic in form. There was then the need to try to look for some balance and endeavour to "Make the Familiar Strange" to some extent (Mannay, 2010) . This has been addressed by other researchers by employing techniques of de-familiarisation. Dawn Mannay's research of marginalised mothers with whom she resided in the local area addressed this issue through the use of visual methods data production (along side narrative interviews) which allowed participants to present their meanings in creative form without the influence of the researcher. There were several elements built into the design which helped to provide a sense of strangeness. Firstly, the alternative research sites of the three other Post 1992 universities, where in addition to the difference of buildings and geographic location, there is a larger presence of both working class students and mature and students, were 'strange' in comparison to my university experience. Secondly, conducting interviews in the womens' own homes in their familial context, enabled an 'outside' perspective. Finally, the unexpected emergent theme of 'trauma' in the women's narratives, which as explained in Chapter One, resulted

in extending the focus of the study to establish, through a fourth research question, the links between trauma, higher education and identity also provided a sense of ‘strangeness’ and unfamiliarity to the topic. Each helped to overcome my knowledge of the field and ‘make strange’ the familiar (Geer 1964).

### **3.4. Early Explorations and Discoveries in Designing the Methodology**

Utilising auto-ethnography and focus groups and adopting a psychoanalytic psychosocial approach, my early explorations at Undergraduate and Masters levels highlighted the diversity in the categories of mother, mature student and working class women. While mature students’ experiences may be “*qualitatively different*” from traditional students, they are by no means uniform (Reay, 2002). For the women I studied previously, motherhood mediated the experience of University to negative and sometimes positive effect. Children were seen as a motivating factor in returning to and continuing education but were simultaneously a source of constraint and competing demands (Reay et al, 2002). Whilst physical separation from children was possible, psychic separation was more complex. The women’s motherhood subjectivity was omnipresent, influencing their student experience practically and emotionally. Applying a psychosocial lens which theorises ‘the subject’ psychoanalytically, bearing in mind both conscious and unconscious aspects to subjectivity, I came to understand that conflict and contradiction between family and University meant that the women used both conscious and unconscious defensive strategies and practices in order to survive. These included splitting (separating off parts of one’s identity) and compartmentalising identities.

The inability to separate nor mesh, student and mother identities had psychological costs and often was experienced in terms of failure, inadequacy and guilt in relation to their children. However, drawing on experiences of motherhood also seemed to make the women self-sufficient and determined in relation to their studies. I wanted to understand these tensions and contradictions and their affective dimensions further.

Similarly, defensive strategies and practices (significantly avoidance) were used also to manage the psychological costs of working class identity within an elite University. Comparison of data from the focus group, pilot study and my auto ethnography, suggested that academic knowledge gained studying within the social sciences at an elite University may influence experiences in three ways. Firstly, within this area working class subjectivities and experiences are often problematised, thus raising awareness and secondly, students are encouraged to adopt reflexive attitudes. When these two factors are connected with the minority status that working class, mature student/mothers have within the University, it is perhaps unsurprising that this may result in a more self-conscious awareness of issues connected to both identity and class, the self-construction of an identity as “other” and account for differences in awareness of “hybridity” (Mercer, 2007).

Secondly, the opportunity to share educational transition with others who came to higher education via similar routes (and are thus likely to be the same class background), and have similar family circumstances was valued. The women who

were able to enjoy such support seemed to struggle less with issues of identity and belonging within the University. In contrast, the women who were denied this aspect were the same women who expressed pains of hybridity and dislocation (Lucey et al 2003). Whilst I had no-one of a similar demographic background with which to share my academic journey directly, luckily, through attending a foundation course at life-long learning, I met a working class woman who had made the transition the previous year to the same university I attended. This woman subsequently became my role model and a life-line. I had no idea of what was expected of me...but she was doing very well. I thought that if I did it her way I would be ok and my image/fantasy of her and her achievements provided something for me to hold onto - an anchor point to my culture and identity, perhaps even one that allowed me to move forward - safely. The relational nature of academic journeys and participation in Higher Education is a theme running through each of the analytic chapters of the present thesis, but in particular the support of other women with whom one can identify with in terms of class, culture and maternal status is explored in Chapter Five, through a case study which considers the educational transition of one participant – Tanya.

I became convinced that without the depth approach applied to this undergraduate research, our stories may seem to be merely tales of woe, struggle and frustration, indeed, this is how the academic journeys of women like us have been portrayed in much of the academic literature (Karach 1992; Edwards 1993; Clouder 1997). What is left unaccounted for in much of this literature however, are the psychosocial, relational, affective and unconscious mechanisms which shape these experiences.

We experienced higher education, mediated, through both motherhood and social class position which entailed risks, psychological conflict and pain. However, application of an in depth perspective of analysis , looking beneath the surface of experience enabled a sense of just how complicated 'depth reality' may be (Wengraf, 2001). Application of a psychosocial lens enabled a different understanding of our experiences, providing potential academic (and as researcher-participant, cathartic) insights and understandings. It revealed that our stories are actually of psychosocially engineered strength, courage and triumphant acts of will. We used various conscious and unconscious psychological strategies to construct, manage, and defend identities and courageously refuse the position of powerlessness which was continually on offer. In pursuit of forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1986), for ourselves and family in the long term, we were willing to endure all physical and psychological claims demanded by both "greedy institutions": family and university, understanding our academic journey required short-term pain for long-term gain (Edwards 1993, p.62).

Lacking in this undergraduate research however was a more nuanced understanding of the women in their historical and cultural context and the complex relational dynamics in which emotional and affective aspects of their subjectivity, aspiration and motivation are embedded - the conscious and unconscious pushing and pulling between people which influences everyday life and subjectivity. The present research seeks to address these dimensions of participation in higher education for this group of working class, mature student mothers, and aims to more fully understand the non-unitary nature of the self, showing how certain internalised

aspects of subjectivity act in concert to each other to simultaneously constrain and motivate these working class mothers into and through Higher Education.

One marker on my Masters Research commented that an Ethnography as a participant researcher could have been conducted. Whilst I was ideally placed to conduct such a study, and it would have informed me about the everyday lives and experiences of women in university, it would not tap into the inner and affective side of individual experience and meaning. I may be able to access what happens, but understandings of why and how it is experienced and felt would be left wanting. However, as a researcher I would argue in the research field one is always implicitly conducting ethnographic work. In some sense I was simultaneously doing ethnography (Mannay and Morgan, 2014 ).

### **3.5. Developing the Design**

Thus, in terms of the present research, the task was to design a research methodology which potentially could make sense of women's affective experiences in terms of how psychic (conscious and unconscious), social, cultural and historical processes, dynamics and practices meld together to influence subjectivity and make sense of individual experiences, dilemmas, struggles, investments and refusals of subject positions and the driving forces propelling these women forward in often difficult and painful circumstances. I am then, researching and exploring subjectivity and affect, though the inter-sectionality of class, gender/motherhood, and mature studentship within the spaces of the family and higher education. In the following

section I explain the way in which my research was profoundly influenced by the ‘affective turn’ in Social Science and Critical Theory (Clough 2007) and why I turned to the psychosocial (psychoanalytic) paradigm to aid my exploration and address the research questions set out in Chapter One and included below as a reminder to the reader:

- What motivates working class mature women students who are mothers to enter Higher Education, and perhaps more importantly, what keeps them there?
- What does it feel like to be a working class, mature student mother in higher education; what are the emotional processes involved and what are their consequences for subjectivity?
- How does motherhood mediate studentship and what are the tensions created by being a working class mature student mother in Higher Education and how are they managed?
- What are the links between trauma, motivation and higher education, in terms of subjectivity?

### **3.6. Researching Subjectivity and Affect - Epistemological and Ontological Premises and Design Decisions**

#### **3.6.1. Affect and Emotion– Affecting and Being Affected**

The conceptual origins of the thesis lies within the body of work around the psychic, emotional and affective dimensions of class, education and gender and the argument that aspiration and motivation are explicitly psychosocial, discussed in Chapter Two (Reay, Walkerdine, Skeggs, Hey). This work has emerged from within the ‘affective turn’ (Clough 2007) - a burgeoning interest across the social sciences (and indeed

other disciplines) in the study of affect (Leys 2003; Wetherell 2012). This turn to affect - and emotion, has enabled researchers of the social to impel their analysis with 'psychosocial texture' and broaden the horizons of social investigation. (Wetherell 2012, p. 2). In her book "Affect and Emotion", Wetherell points to the multiple meanings of affect, highlighting the meaning of the term, not only as a psychological one; "the emotion associated with an idea or set of ideas, but also it's locomotive nature as a mode of "influence, movement and change" (Wetherell, 2012, p.1-2). The term's Latin origins 'affectare – to strive after, pretend to have' are particularly pertinent, if ironically so, to both the literature discussed in the last chapter, and the strivings and sometimes necessary pretence involved in being a working class mature student mother in University (Wetherell 2012, p1-2).

Also of influence in the present study has been the work of Sara Ahmed which theorises the "*Cultural Politics of Emotion*" (2004) and its implications. Affect and emotions are defining features of human existence. Infused into everyday life, they are involved in the bonds and social alliances we form with others and the way in which we view ourselves and are viewed by others. However, rather than a psychological state, Ahmed argues that emotions are cultural practices. Focussing on the relationship between emotions, bodies and language, she (2004) highlights how emotions have a productive power, they 'do' things – by generating and creating meanings. Affects and emotions, particularly through discourse and rhetoric, are able to endow bodies with different qualities and values, subscribing those bodies, and our own to powerful and productive ideologies, constructing possibilities and limitations for people in current times. In studying affect and

emotion, according to Ahmed (2004) we are able to trace the often concealed material, historic and political contexts, and sources of discourses, emotions and ways of being that are lived and embodied. Emotions in this sense are material rhetoric – they have affective power and can dictate modes of life (Riedner p. 702). It enables an understanding of the chaotic processes which occupy the present moment of the social and the way in which these affect the minds and bodies of individuals and communities (Clough 2007). This is particularly relevant to this thesis in understanding the way in which the women's minds and bodies were affected by the current time of neo-liberalism and the way in which the affect produced influenced their aspiration and motivation into Higher Education. This issue is taken up and explored explicitly in Chapter Five, where I argue that aspiration and motivation can be understood as a moral imperative of the 'correct' form of motherhood implied within political discourses/rhetoric and media representations of motherhood within neo-liberalism. It is relevant also in relation to the geographical, historical and cultural context of many of the women's participation in Higher Education, with many of them being brought up in communities decimated by the loss of heavy industry and processes of de-industrialisation. Considering this research topic through the lens of the 'affective turn' has been a vital part of the thesis' methodology.

Most psychological research about mature students is based on the Cartesian conception of a rational unitary subject, which assumes that individuals follow reasonable and rational motives, are aware of their actions and motivations and are in charge of their own lives. Similarly, within the mass of educational research

conducted, the lion's share is concerned with conscious processes and makes no attempt to engage with the unconscious (Hollway, Lucey and Phoenix 2001). However, that individuals are able and choose to give transparent narrative accounts of their experiences may be contested (Hollway and Jefferson 2000/2013). Indeed, as a working class, mature student and mother myself, I had no real idea of my motives in pursuing education, particularly since it caused me such stress and anxiety and before embarking on the research I certainly had no clue how the complex emotional and affective aspects of experiences, may influence the construction, negotiation and management of identity within university – I just 'felt' that things weren't right. As a researcher, I felt that, if I couldn't give a straightforward explanation of my feelings, desires and motivations as a mature student mother, then perhaps other women couldn't – I felt that just asking them would not be enough. Some things literally can't be said (Frosh 2001; Walkerdine et al 2003 ), some things can be "felt" without a conscious thought to attach to that feeling.

Although occupying a controversial space in Anglophone culture (Lawler 2008), social research and indeed psychosocial research itself (these debates will be explored in a later section of this chapter), psychoanalysis, fundamentally premised on the dynamic unconscious is able to look at the ordinary everyday actions/interactions of daily life and potentially tap into ways of exploring and understanding things that are missed by other more conventional theories and paradigms. Importantly, for the aims of the present research, difficult questions around autonomy, agency, desire, fantasy, motivation, aspiration and risk can be asked and mined with depth and irrational contradictions and conflicts highlighted

and explored, for example; Why go into education at a certain point in one's life, why go back into it at all, how does being a mother affect aspiration, why keep going when family relationships are against you? Indeed, why are family relationships against you?

Similarly, from the point of view of researcher subjectivity, Hollway and Jefferson (2013) highlight, how in our everyday lives, we often question the accounts of others, disputing, interpreting or counter arguing a position. To not utilise these skills in research thus suggests a loss of the subtlety and complexity that we use in day to day knowing (Hollway and Jefferson 2013 ). Whilst I acknowledge that we are neither transparent to ourselves or others, I wanted to utilise in the research process what I felt I knew in a subtle and an embodied way of knowing. It is important to emphasise here however, that I do not claim my knowledge, ways of knowing or my interpretation of the data to be superior to the women I interviewed, merely that using a psychosocial methodology and borrowing ideas and concepts from psychoanalysis, offers a potential means of understanding the complexity of the women's lives by acknowledging the conscious and unconscious dynamic processes at play and utilising my own feelings, experiences and emotions as a research tool. The 'voices' of the women however were paramount and as the following methodological chapter (Four) explains more fully, the women's narratives and feelings and my own feelings and interpretation were treated with the same critical lens of inquiry . The following section further explains the theoretical foundation of the thesis by conceptualising for the reader, the psychosocial paradigm and the position of psychoanalysis within the paradigm.

### **3.6.2. Conceptualising the Psychosocial Paradigm**

Within the past few years, the developing paradigm of psychosocial studies has become an important site of enquiry within social research in the UK, Europe and North America. Internationally, there are now psychosocial centres, journals, study groups/networks and conferences dedicated to this growing tradition. While, a precise definition of the term ‘psychosocial’ is, at present, difficult to pin down, consensus within the academic field considers that psychosocial studies may be characterised by explicit inter or trans-disciplinarity and a focus on the tensions created through the mutual constitution of the social and the psychic (Psychosocial Studies Network, 2009). As this suggests then, ideas within this intellectually diverse and pluralistic paradigm (Walkerdine 2008) coalesce around a wide theoretical commitment to the notion that the ‘psychological’ cannot be separated from social, cultural and historical contexts and that the psychic cannot be reduced to the social, nor the social to the psychic, rather they are co-constructing and mutually constitutive, neither being privileged over the other. This perspective gathers inspiration from an array of theoretical sources including critical theory, post-structuralism, process philosophy, feminism and psychoanalysis, and is incorporated under the umbrella of Critical Psychology (Psychosocial Studies Network 2009). It is important to note then, the way in which the term psychosocial is used and applied here in comparison to its more customary use in other fields, such as medicine and health where the term is used to bring together what are treated as disparate elements: the individual and the social to be unproblematically amalgamated. While such an approach may be able to provide some practical

solutions in these fields in terms of care or health promotion, it lacks any theoretical account of the individual-society dualism; for example how, what's inside a person's head gets inside and why things might play out as they do in everyday life, resulting in "thin" or "surface" understandings of the uniqueness of social experience and inner life, lacking depth, nuance to complexity and created tensions. As applied in this thesis, a psychosocial lens is concerned with the interdependence of individual biographies and social processes, the way in which things become internalised to form our subjectivities.

### **3.6.3. The Turn to language**

The 'turn to language' of the past two decades has been of prominent influence across many disciplines and has offered critical psychology new means of making sense of individual lives. Post-structural/constructionist approaches to subjectivity and identity construction through narrative contend that lives are lived as texts, and identity constructed and reconstructed inter-subjectively through relationships and positions within discursive practices, mediated by context, pre-existing available cultural resources and social and political discourses (McAdams 2002; Frosh and Baraitser 2008). Identities are considered shifting and fragmented, demonstrated by the multiple and often contradictory subject positions adopted within speech. Accordingly, discursive perspectives within this paradigm such as those adopted by Billig (1997), McQueen and Henwood (2002) and Wetherell (2003), argue that psychosocial psychology should be based on the investigation of the outward activity of everyday discursive practice - "terms used in a specific stylistic and grammatical fashion", the use of tropes, metaphors, and figures of speech that nothing stands

outside of this in terms of identity construction and meaning making (Wetherell & Potter 1988, p.172). Theoretically, this constructionist perspective however, has been criticised for what is understood as “an over socialised view of the Subject” hollowing the subject of any interiority (Hollway and Jefferson, 2013, p. vx).

#### **3.6.4. Beyond Language to the Unconscious**

Problematically for my purposes however; if the women in this research are produced as subjects merely in and through discursive positionings and practices, how can we account for their choice to move into higher education, their desire for change, their resistance to change, their aspiration and motivation to keep going, the conflicts and contradictions of their every day lives? We need instead to look at the emotional and affective investments (conscious and unconscious) the motivational dynamics, attached to particular discursive positionings. These processes also produce our desires, the things we strive for (Henriques et al 1984).

Psychoanalytic standpoints concur with the constructive role of language and that all meaning is subjective, however, they also argue that meaning cannot be reduced to language – there is much more to subjectivity than can be ‘said’ – there are things that are literally un-sayable (Frosh, 2001). From a psychoanalytic perspective, the subject can’t be held together by the sum total of discursive positionings, as suggested by some post-structuralist theories, there must be more (Henriques et al 1984). This ‘more’, is understanding the individual investments in particular discourses and the reasons for adopting some discursive positionings and rejecting

others (Hollway 1984). Here then the subject is understood as an emotionally driven one, defined within, but existing beyond language (Frost 2008). Central to this perspective is the role of dynamic unconscious processes in constructing social realities. Psychoanalysis used within the psychosocial paradigm profoundly challenges any attempt to separate the individual and the social (Henriques et al 1998. p. 206).

Subverting the traditional perspective of the rational subject outlined above, a fundamental understanding of a psychoanalytic post-structuralist approach to subjectivity is that individuals are conflicted, fragmented, socially and historically contingent and contextual, non-unitary beings. Walkerdine et al. (2001) “posit a subject whose actions, behaviours and biographies are not solely determined by conscious will, agency or intent (or indeed lack of these things)” (Walkerdine et al 2001, p.84) and it is this conception, which challenges enlightenment liberalist perspectives and pays attention to the emotional aspects of subjectivity that I draw on as a theoretical foundation for the thesis.

What psychoanalysis is able to offer in terms of the exploration of identity then, is an ‘interpretive schema’ based in what Ricoeur terms a ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’. Mistrustful of and transcending the visible and the manifest, it focuses on personal history and social context, looking beneath to enable the consideration of desire, fantasy and repression in the women’s lives, taking into account the parts of identity which are neither conscious, nor rational, shattering the notion of an un-fragmented

self (Lawler 2008). The very long quote by Minsky below is particularly helpful to understanding. Minsky contends thus;

If we can accept that there is evidence for the dimension of identity which is outside our conscious knowledge, we have to ask how it came into being.

Psychoanalytic theory is the discourse which attempts to provide the answer to this question because, alone among discourses, it deals with the human subject's unconscious coming into being and the kind of events which constitute an individual's hidden, unrecorded history. It charts not what we normally call history – the history of consciousness, of social power and domination, the social construction of reality – but another kind of story. This is the important history of the individual's consciousness construction, which takes place inside the wider social or cultural context, but maps how an individual has reacted to the powerful currents of emotion in his or her own family and the presences and absences, both physical and emotional, within this family

(Minsky, 1996, p. 8).

### **3.6.5. Representation: Theorising Affect and Subjectivity from a Psychoanalytic Psychosocial Perspective.**

Interpretations of the terms 'identity' and 'subjectivity' are multifarious. For some 'identity' may be understood as a social position whereas 'subjectivity' refers to how this position is experienced and performed by the subject (Hollway and Jefferson 2005; Wetherell 2008). In their bid to challenge dominant theorizations of

subjectivity and “Change the Subject”, Henriques et al (1994) draw on the French term “asujettir” which means to both produce subjectivity and make subject. For the authors ‘subjectivity’ refers to the condition of being a subject; individuality and self awareness. In this application the subject is theorised as dynamic and multiple, positioned and produced by particular discourses and practices (Henriques et al 1998 p. 3).

Drawing on psychoanalysis to theorise subjectivity has gained popularity due to what is understood as the potential to move ‘behind’ or ‘beyond’ the words/text and make intelligible the reasons behind investments or emotional commitments (Henriques et al, 1984) in particular discursive positionings and practices.

Recognising the role of the unconscious mind, this is achieved by paying attention to what is left unsaid and orientating toward the psychological organisations which determine the way in which meaning emanates from experience (Hollway and Jefferson 2000.) Thus, from this perspective in order to understand subjectivity, behaviour and its influences, it is necessary to transcend conscious, ‘rational’ explanations and consider the entanglement of social and psychic processes, since even though unconscious process may remain occluded, their contribution, is immense (Lucey et al 2003). This approach holds certain epistemic and ontological assumptions: the existence and authenticity of dynamic and often conflicting unconscious processes; that individual experiences are mediated by the management and regulation of anxiety; both researcher and participant are co creators of the narrative account through inter-subjectivity, and the participant must be viewed within a psychic, social and biographical context. In this way it becomes possible to

transcend the problematic ‘individual-society’ dualisms around theories of identity.

The subject then, as Frosh (2003) understands is:

A meeting point of inner and outer forces, something constructed and yet constructing, a power-using subject which is also subject to power, is a difficult subject to theorise, and no one has yet worked it out.

(Frosh 2003, p. 1564)

As might be expected within any (re) emerging field, there are some valuable, on-going, lively debates within psychosocial studies, for example; how psychosocial studies should be theorised in terms of the individual/society dualism, and how and where the psychological and social come together, a debate which is signified through the use of a hyphen. While some theorists e.g. (Hollway 2004; Clarke and Hoggett 2008; Rustin 2008) insist on a hyphenated form of ‘psycho-social’ to represent two distinct entities: “wherever you encounter the social, you encounter it multiply mediated by the psychodynamic and vice versa” (Hollway 2004, p.7) others (Walkerdine 2008; Frosh and Baraitster 2008) conceptualise ‘the psychic’ and ‘the social’ not in terms of linkage but rather a merging or blurring of the two entities. There is also debate regarding the appropriateness and merit of utilising psychoanalytic techniques within the field of psychosocial research, in regard to both the utility of psychoanalytic interview methods and interpretive practices which I shall outline shortly (Wetherell 2005; Frosh and Emerson 2005). Indeed, this debate extends deeper, into questions regarding which theories of psychoanalysis should be used in this approach: Kleinian versus Lacanian, though there is not scope here to

develop these important debates (see Special Issue of “Psychoanalysis, Culture and Society”, 13 for a full contextualised debate). However, despite more than a century since the beginnings of psychoanalysis in the work of Freud, its concepts, insights and controversies still pervade many disciplines which seek to understand the social world and the beings that reside there. Its continued appeal, according to Frosh (2003) is the manner in which psychoanalysis has adapted and moved its foci, theoretical ideas, conceptual languages and therapeutic practices in accordance with the shifting cultural tensions of every day life. As a mode of understanding it connects with our interests, offering explanations, stories and ways of enquiry which can make sense of the complexity of what is happening and why this might be so. As a form of knowledge, its depth approach could be understood as hailing us via a form of flattery – we have hidden depths – we are not all that we seem – there is more to us than meets the eye – good and bad. Indeed, within the Western world as a ‘pop psychology’ many key terms from psychoanalysis, for example, the unconscious, repression, denial, Freudian slips, have become a reified form of knowledge by which many try to make sense of their ‘selves’, their lives, their relationships and the behaviour of others around them. In this way then “being literate in psychoanalytic concepts is nowadays a crucial component of cultural literacy” (Frosh, 2003). Despite controversy the potential of psychoanalysis within psychosocial research is persuasive and there now exists a proliferation of research and academic writing with a psychoanalytic psychosocial agenda for example Stopford 2004; West 1996; Walkerdine et al 2003; Lucey et al 2001; Hollway 2006; Layton 2006, 2009; Lucey 2010; Hollway and Jefferson 2013; Walkerdine and Jimenez, 2012; Walkerdine, Osvold and Rudberg, 2013. These works have highlighted the relational and inter-subjective nature of subjectivity and experience.

Embedded within a relational matrix in terms of class, culture, and family the women told me about their lives as mothers, daughters, sisters, grand-daughters as well as friends and students. Attached to each story or event was a set of complicated and often conflicting emotions which we could understand as forming the basis of other relationships, events and affects, these fragments forming a collage of subjectivity and experience. Embarking upon higher education, the women carried with them each of these roles, relationships and affects coalescing in their changing subjectivities as their journey progressed. An understanding of how the women and their families live inter-subjectively is crucial to understanding how class and gender operate in relation to higher education, aspiration and government aims of civil society and social justice. We need then to understand the situated and relational nature of how the women live and make transformations. Relational understandings of motivation and aspiration allow us to move away from models of individual deficit and pathology.

### **3.6.6. Relational Approaches to Psychoanalysis**

Our relatedness to others is central to our mental life. As Mitchell (1988) explains, while it might be presupposed that a sense of self magically happens or develops through maturation, within psychoanalysis it is understood as an extremely complex process, “an intricate and multifaceted construction, that is a central motivational concern throughout life and for which we are deeply dependent on other people” (Mitchell 1988, p. 30). Thus from the perspective of relational psychoanalysis, we

come to know who we are in relation to others and the repetitive patterns of relating and positioning. In our worlds of interaction, there is a ubiquitous concern toward the creation, maintenance and preservation of familiar interrelationships, and continuity, both in the proceedings of our everyday lives and as ‘objects’ or internal presences. Our sense of self is fashioned through the ceaseless tides of affect and perception being in relation to others creates. According to Mitchell (1988) in this way we are both ‘self-regulating’ and ‘field regulating’, with associated processes sometimes working harmoniously or against each other, creating conflicts. Within the pertinent literatur, there is a paucity of accounts which enable depth understandings. What accounts tend to miss is the way in which class and motherhood are inscribed into subjectivity and the limits and constraints placed upon gendered aspiration. What is lacking then are understandings of what it might be like; why they might exist, how they are played out and what these tensions feel like. The first empirical chapter (Five) contributes to processes of understanding by examining the ways in which classed, gendered and relational positionings may conflict with educational trajectories.

Despite what I felt to be a methodological imperative and commitment to a psychosocial theoretical framework utilising elements from psychoanalysis, which had evolved from my experience in the research community, at the outset of the research I had no commitment to one particular approach. In this research I draw on an eclectic mix of object relations and relational psychoanalytic theories as means of theoretical/conceptual frameworks, of interpretation and analysis . Whilst the research wholly adopts a psychosocial perspective the approaches used in each of the

analytic chapters were driven by the empirical data and a commitment to take account of and move beyond traditional, taken-for-granted accounts of class, gender and education and the experiences of working class mature student mothers which exist within social research, generated from within other paradigms.

Having discussed the conceptual and theoretical influences and decisions involved in the methodology of the research, the following section focuses on choices and decisions related to the strategy of inquiry and the instrument of data collection selected; a series of three psychosocial interviews.

### **3.6.7. Strategy of Inquiry**

Based on the psychosocial nature of the study, I considered a narrative/biographic strategy of inquiry most appropriate to explore the phenomenon and address the research questions. This would allow a description or telling of the women's lives in such a way that included the historical, cultural, gendered and temporal nature, but also of the events, experiences, people, places and emotions and feelings as they journeyed through life and into higher education as a working class mature student mother. Facilitating the emergence of a variety of aspects of subjectivity and their contexts in this way would help access individual meanings; vital to the psychosocial exploration and analysis of data.

### **3.6.8. Finding a Research Tool to access Emotion and Unconscious Dynamics/Processes**

In terms of design I needed a method of data collection with the potential to access the hidden aspects of experience: emotion and affect that, based on my own experience, I assumed an integral part of the women's experience also. Informed by my previous research I noted that within their responses, participants often give conflicting and contradictory accounts. I needed a method therefore that could address these 'irrational' contradictions. As an undergraduate I had some success using focus groups with this research population, however, despite being a space where emotion was expressed producing valuable data, there wasn't scope within the setting to address the complexities of each woman's unique, personal and sometimes painful experiences. I felt that this could only be addressed by a more private in-depth interview approach which went beyond a discursive account. Qualitative depth interviews have been considered as concordant with feminist priorities on experience and subjectivity, and of close, harmonious and personal interaction between researcher and the researched (Kvale 2005). The scope of the research and its emphasis on the social, cultural, historical and temporal construction of subjectivity required a 'depth' approach "to get a sense of how the apparently straightforward is actually more complicated, of how the 'surface appearances' may be quite misleading about 'depth realities'" (p. 6). Qualitative interviewing according to Wengraf (2000), should aim to disrupt from the facts of the interview to the many subjective, social and cultural extra-interview realities.

### **3.6.9. Researching Subjectivity using Psychoanalytically informed Psychosocial Interviewing Methods**

Over several decades, Kvale (1986, 1996, 2000, 2003) has advocated psychoanalytic perspectives as being “relevant for enriching and deepening” the use of qualitative interviews in the social sciences , detailing several characteristics of the psychoanalytic clinical interview which, he contends, makes it relevant to the needs of contemporary qualitative researchers (Kvale 2000 p. 9, 11). He considers the setting such that it unfolds in an open and undirected manner, using the analysand’s free associations and the analyst’s free floating attention. As a result knowledge is gathered over a period of time, and this acquaintance, facilitates deeper understandings and perspectives. Commenting on this aspect, Midgley (2008) explains how:

the psychoanalytic interview involves a human, emotional interaction between two people which promotes the generation of new knowledge: it is in this respect a true “InterView”, in which the knowledge constructed between the two people is an ‘inter-subjective knowledge’ (p.218).

The dynamics of the interview also are taken as data.

More recently, with the aim of exploring subjectivity, interview types which are explicitly psychosocial in nature have been developed by several prominent researchers (Hollway and Jefferson 2000); Stopford 2004; Cartwright 2004; Walkerdine et al 2003; Walkerdine and Jimenez, 2012; and it was to these studies

that I turned. This approach extends the sociological focus of the dynamic nature of the researcher/researched relationship and explores the “psycho-logic” of the research encounter (Clarke and Hogget 2009). What this means in practice is that the research situation is recognised as one laden with affect, conscious and unconscious, which may be either brought to the encounter or co-produced within the encounter. Traditionally psychoanalysis has been used to examine the ‘defence mechanisms’ of the encounter such as ‘repression’ and ‘denial’, deployed to avoid experiencing difficult types of affect. More recently, the work of Bion (1962) and the concept of ‘containment’ has been used as a means of investigating how affect is managed between the researcher and researched and the way in which it is received or rejected dependent upon not only emotional receptibility but also the strength of the affect and the courage to accept it (Clarke and Hoggett, 2009). When applied in a clinical context, the concept of transference is understood as unconscious images from the patient’s past being imposed on the analyst. Counter-transference is the analyst’s unconscious response to the patient, their significant others or the patient’s transference itself (Walkerdine et al 2001). Within social research, some psychosocial researchers use these concepts to deepen understandings of the research relationship and be more alive to their own affective and somatic responses to the respondent through affective ways of knowing (Lucey, Melody and Walkerdine, 2003.)

For example, in their ground breaking psychosocial exploration of gender and class, Walkerdine et al (2001), developed a psychosocial research method of engagement which synthesised post-structuralism and Foucauldian discourse analysis with the psychoanalytic concepts of desire, anxiety and defences to consider the effects of

unconscious processes and social constraints in the longitudinal study of a group of working class girls and their trajectories. Also, “working with emotions” (p.84), they cautiously used their own subjectivity as a tool and explored their own defences as researchers in relation to the interview encounter and data produced in order to aid analysis. In this way the boundaries of objective researcher/researched are breeched in a positive way to consider issues of transference and counter-transference, projection and projective identification, thus weaving psychoanalysis into the research process to compliment autobiography and academic discourse. As a result, the complex negotiations, self-reinventions, losses, emotional struggles and feats of emotional strength of the young women studied were revealed to illustrate the tensions produced by social class (Walkerdine et al, 2001). It was this work in fact which first connected my own feelings and experience as a working class mature student mother to the world of academia. Connecting with this study and the authors’ sensitive approach to researching class and gender was a cathartic experience which provided a way forward, both personally and in terms of research. It highlighted, that perhaps I too could, and wanted to cautiously...work with my own emotions and subjectivity and has been integral to informing all aspects of my research.

### **3.6.10. Critique and Concerns of Psychoanalysis in Social Research**

Transporting psychoanalysis from the clinical therapeutic setting to the research setting has generated considerable controversy from both the wider research field and those immersed within the psychoanalytic field. Concern focuses around the implications of utilising tools; grounding procedures, interpretive strategies, and

concepts from the clinical setting and deploying them in the very different and complicated context of the social research setting in order to produce knowledge of an individual in the social world. While the concepts themselves might be useful in gleaning better understanding, it is widely recognised that they cannot be literally transposed from the therapeutic clinic to the research field. There is also the issue that the process of analysis in the clinical setting is done in situ with the analysand present, however, in the research setting this is done post interview through what Frosh and Baraitser (2008), term as “interpretation of dead text” which questions its inter-subjective nature. Not being trained in clinical psychoanalysis, this separation is justified by the authors on the grounds of the different purposes and aims of the research and therapeutic context: “research interpretation is therefore an activity associated with data analysis as opposed to data production” (Hollway & Jefferson 2001 p.77-78). This has been queried by other researchers who contend that it is inconceivable that interpretation may be suspended until post interview (Miller, Hoggett and Mayo 2008). Similarly, the Kleinian manner in which counter-transference is deployed in some models has been critiqued by Frosh & Baraitser (2008) as being dangerously close to “an ungrounded expert system of knowledge” (ibid, p. 363).

These concerns about truth, reality and power have been taken on board by perspectives with relational psychoanalysis which incorporates a postmodern sensibility to psychoanalytic theory (Stopford, 2004).

### **3.6.11. Piloting the Interview**

In the study, in order to glean the depth responses that my exploration of subjectivity warranted, a psychoanalytically inflected psychosocial interview approach as well as methodology was necessary. To further aid the research design, I consulted other relevant literature, and identified two further potentially suitable, but different interview approaches which I subsequently critically reviewed and piloted as part of my Masters Research. Selected because of their opposing stance, the pilot sought to evaluate the effects and consequences of adopting two accepted, but very different approaches to psychosocial interviewing. Stopford's (2004) Relational approach is dialogic and conversational in style whereas Hollway & Jefferson's (2000) Free Association Narrative Interview (FANI), the researcher reveals little of their self, uses open ended questions, avoids 'why' questions and follows up responses using the respondents order and phrasing. While both approaches to interviewing have been exemplified and successfully adopted by others within the field, there are some important theoretical, methodological and ethical differences between the two which may have particular implications and consequences in terms of data production. In relation to my substantive topic it was important that I discover what these might be and how they may affect conditions for the emergence of subjectivity within the research interview. The literature and my own previous research had indicated that working class mature student/mothers may have particular issues which are both intimate and difficult, they may also feel more comfortable in some interview situations than others. Time is also an issue for this population and thus, eliciting the richest data in a context which facilitates both the conscious and unconscious emotional and effective aspects of subjectivity and

experiences to be disclosed, exchanged and considered, in the least amount of interviews was also important. Left with two opposing views in approaching the research of subjectivity, the broad focus and rationale of this comparison in relation to my research was in ascertaining which approach would produce the best conditions for the emergence of subjectivity. This was achieved by considering:

- Which approach will elicit the most useful dialogue?
- Which approach best facilitates connection with both conscious and unconscious affective and emotional processes/dynamics?
- Which style and approach is likely to make the women most comfortable?
- What are the implications of each approach for the novice researcher?

Being based in a Kleinian approach, the FANI method theorises the subject as ‘defended’, protecting themselves against anxiety in the research encounter. As a result, only hidden and irrational material is viewed as meaningful. In contrast, the relational approach, based in Relational psychoanalysis and Self Psychology, considers the self multi-layered and as such “all layers and dimensions of the self, manifest and unmanifest, have important functions and meanings” (Stopford 2004, p.23). I wanted then to test for myself both these theoretical assertions, not least because of their implications for analysis and whether the ‘truth’, meaning and emotional aspects of the women’s experiences can only be accessed when defensive structures are breached.

The approaches also differ in the way the researcher uses their own subjectivity and discloses aspects of their self. The FANI method and its use of free association to

access participants' own meaning frames, precludes active disclosure of the researcher's subjectivity, whereas the Relational approach and its conversational style considers revealing the researcher's subjectivity as essential to the co-construction of knowledge. It was essential that I discover which method is likely to be a more comfortable experience for the women I research and again in terms of knowledge production which style facilitates both the best narratives and most engagement with the unconscious processes posited by both.

In these two psychoanalytically inflected techniques to interviewing there is a difference also in how subjectivity is deployed for interpretation and analysis. In the FANI, interpretation and analysis are conducted post interview aided by the researcher's subjectivity, whereas in the Relational approach the researcher's subjectivity is used by interpreting and questioning the participants stories during the interview as and when appropriate, as well as post interview. I wanted then, to better understand through experience the different ways in which a researcher may use their subjectivity and how in doing so this may influence the dynamics of the research encounter and understandings of my research population.

Both methods couch their differing approaches to analysis in terms of ethics, i.e. the FANI advocates not sharing interpretations with the participants, while the Relational approach considers it vital that participants are involved in interpretation which may deepen and thicken understanding. In line with the feminist methodology which informs this project (Ribbens and Edwards 1998), I wanted to

better understand the justification of each perspective in relation to working class, mature student/mothers.

A further ethical consideration was the differing stance each takes on approaching their participants and causing distress, which again is informed by their differing theoretical stance. Hollway and Jefferson, the authors of the FANI method argue that “distress is the midwife to truth when researching anxiety provoking subjects” and that distress “is not necessarily harmful if discomforting” but impossible to avoid however, if we are to arrive at meaningful understandings (Hollway & Jefferson 2000, pp.98-99). In contrast, Stopford takes a more empathic stance, contending that distress doesn’t necessarily equate to meaningful data. Quite obviously, I did not wish to cause overt distress to my participants, however, I felt it was important to test each opposing view and gain valuable insight into what data may be produced causing the least distress to a population understood as already experiencing some emotional discomfort. In the pilot the two participants were interviewed on three occasions. Although not an ideal sample size, the small number of participants was counter-balanced by the depth of data generated by the two repeat interviews.

### **3.6.12. Comparison of the two Interview Approaches**

It is, of course impossible to know what influences and consequences are due to the interview method and what are due to a myriad of other factors and as such the limitations of this comparison are acknowledged. I would argue that both the FANI

and the Relational approach to interviewing produced data which facilitated insight into meaning, subjectivity and identity and allowed some important themes to emerge in relation to working class, mature student mothers. However, using the FANI method, I found having to pose follow up questions using the respondents order and phrasing cumbersome in practice. Having to pay attention to the order and phrasing in the interview, I felt, detracted from listening and meaning making and the felt inter-subjective dynamics of the encounter. Given that psychoanalytically informed approaches hinge on the ability to make affective emotional connections through transference/counter-transference, I would further argue this was achieved more successfully for me as a researcher by the Relational approach, the dynamics of which facilitated the emergence of subjectivity through emotional engagement. As a result valuable insights into the emotional processes and affective aspects of experience and subjectivity emerged providing a richer understanding of the complexities of this group of identities, how they interact, the diversity of the academic journey and the lack of homogeneity within this population.

My decision to adopt Stopford's approach over Hollway and Jefferson's at that time was also based on ethical considerations. Both interview methods couch their differing approaches to interpretation and analysis in terms of ethics and the welfare of participants. Adopting the FANI method caused me some ethical concerns. I was uncomfortable with the idea that the women's lives and predicaments could only be knowable through myself as an 'expert researcher, yet these insights could not be taken back to the women for validation or contestation, since according to Hollway and Jefferson (2000) 'defended subjects' are motivated by unconscious processes to

not recognise anxiety provoking aspects of themselves. This raised questions for me about the women's 'voices' (Atkinson, Coffee and Delamont 2003) and where this may leave the women themselves? What will they get out of the research in terms of co-construction of knowledge and what of the prospect of having some self understanding of their own motivations? These asymmetries of knowledge and power are at odds with the fundamental principles central to a feminist approach which, I feel, are essential to incorporate into researching all social groups.

It is important to note however, the issues I had at the time of designing the interviews have since been taken up by Hollway and Jefferson in a second edition of their book "Doing Qualitative Research Differently" (2013). This new edition provides the researcher with a far better understanding as time, experience, and other researchers taking up the mantle of Hollway and Jefferson's method have given the authors a pool of richness on which to further develop and conceptualise their approach and method, and address the concerns I presented above. While I now feel that the two approaches are now more closely aligned, I still feel the relational and conversational approach of Stopford to be more suited to my own research style.

Through the pilot I established that the conversational, dialogic style of Stopford's (2004) Relational Psychosocial interview better suited my own personality, and my status as a novice researcher, and facilitated a relaxed exchange which opened avenues where authenticity and mutuality could be exposed. This relational, intersubjective process fostered a sense of safety and trust enabling narratives to transcend mere description to include 'felt' or emotional aspects of fantasies and

experiences, and disclosure of very personal and sensitive knowledge to unfold across the series of three interviews. For these reasons I selected this method of interviewing for the present study. The next section provides a full discussion of the method.

### **3.6.13 Stopford's Relational (post-classical) Approach to Interviewing**

Developed through dissatisfaction with the ethical and epistemological issues posed by the use of methods informed by traditional psychoanalysis, as an alternative to classical psychoanalytic theory, Annie Stopford, a trained clinical psychotherapist, has incorporated relational (postclassical) psychoanalytic theory and practice into her research methodology. Based on a pluralistic model of subjectivity, this theory realizes a major epistemological move from a one person to a two person centred psychology (Harris 1998 cited in Stopford 2004). This participative approach, Stopford argues, allows for a more inter-subjective approach to social research through the co-production of data which is more in line with post-modern perspectives and concerns around the production of knowledge and power relations. Contrary to the more one sided flow of dialogue in the FANI method, the relational approach to interviewing is conversational in style. Here, the researcher acknowledges and exposes their own subjectivity, albeit to varying extents, using it to guide the discussion and gauge how, when and what issues may be explored further, and which should not for fear of distress. In contrast to the FANI above, within this methodology, the 'self' is considered multi-layered, hence both conscious and unconscious expression are treated as meaningful data which are collaboratively produced. Dialogic in style, knowledge and meaning are co-constructed and

interpreted, both within the research encounter and through the sharing of researcher's thoughts and emergent findings post interview, this being considered ethically sound in terms of sharing knowledge with the participant, which equally belongs to them as much as the researcher. Through the participant's contributions and insights in repeat interviews, analysis is a negotiated process and the power-imbalance implied in the research relationship redressed somewhat. The 'truth' producing, objective and authoritative researcher is confuted within this approach. Interpretations of meanings, symptoms and behaviour are thus tentative, based on emotions and somatic experiences and considered as one of many understandings (Stopford 2004). This dialogic, participatory, relational approach:

offers a way to hold the intra-psychic and the inter-subjective in creative tension, whilst taking seriously post-modern questions about the nature of power, truth and reality in the analytic research relationship

Stopford (2004, p.13)

This is achieved by the exploration of fantasies and thoughts where possible, during the conversational style interview. Similarly, perspectives and/or doubts in relation to participants' stories are also explored during the interview encounter. This enables the mutual construction of meaning and diminishes the chances of offending participants with later analysis. The researcher also needs to be in tune with their participant's 'self state' and be aware of verbal and kinaesthetic cues. These are vital in assessing when to explore and make interpretations and when it may be too

distressing. This attunement is also integral in assessing the utility of the researcher's questions via the manner in which the conversation continues, for example are emotions and conflicts revealed or does the participant shut off? (Stopford 2004, p.21-22). Critical of Hollway and Jefferson's assertion that 'distress is the midwife to truth' (Hollway & Jefferson 2000, p. 99), Stopford argues that distress does not necessarily equate with more useful and meaningful data and thus approaches her participants sensitively and with empathy, guided by ethical responsibilities as both psychotherapist and researcher.

In the research context, where we have extremely brief contact with research participants compared to the frequency and longevity of the psychoanalytical clinical process, it is arguably even more imperative that psychoanalytically inclined researchers try to devise methods which facilitate our participants' involvement in construction of interpretation.

(Stopford, 2004, p. 18)

Park (2001) considers that "relational knowledge comes from connecting and leads to further connecting. It is reciprocal, not only in that the parties involved know each other, but also that it grows from interaction" (p.86). The conversational, dialogic style of this interview meant that my participants and I conversed in a manner which was 'natural' 'conversational' and familiar to us. This undoubtedly aided relational processes (conscious and unconscious) and throughout the interviews I felt very strongly connected to the women and within this space we were both able to reveal and share other aspects of our subjectivities.

Convinced that the technique could elicit the quality of data required I decided to adopt this technique as a template. I then turned my attention to the quantity of empirical material. From my experience of the pilot interviews I reasoned that one interview may not be enough. I wanted to get a sense of a biographical unfolding but I wanted also to look for contradictions, conflicts and inconsistencies in the account which may point to unconscious process/dynamics. Having selected Stopford's (2004) psychosocial interview technique, I decided to use a series of three interviews which would allow the sense of a story unfolding. I considered three to be an appropriate number reasoning that in the first interview data would be created as two strangers coming together for the first time. A second interview would allow us to build on this established research relationship. It would allow also insights and interpretations and themes from the first interview to be explored with the participant in the second as well building on the account and generating new stories and themes. The process would be repeated in a third and final interview at which point I would further reflect on and share my interpretations of the series of interviews and invite their response. A series of three interviews then would allow both the account and the research dynamics to develop and change producing rich data, which included the participants' involvement in the construction of interpretation, on which to conduct the psychosocial analysis.

The interview process will be discussed and fully elaborated in the following methodological, Chapter Four – Interviews, Feelings and Findings. The final section of this Chapter discusses sampling and introduces the 13 working class mature student mothers who participated in the research.

#### **3.6.14. Let's Talk? - Sampling and Recruitment**

Because the depth perspective adopted required a multiple interview technique and time consuming multi-level analysis, a small sample was necessary and afforded higher levels of contact and engagement). As I have made clear, my own experience of being in a pre 1992 university as a working class mature student and mother raised some issues for me. However, just because I had experienced it this way, for example feelings of 'hybridity' (Lucey et al, 2003), it didn't mean that other working class women would too. I therefore wanted to gather other working class women's experiences of life in a Pre 1992 University. I wanted also to get the perspectives of women in other types of universities and alternative locations for diversity and comparison. My initial plans were to recruit a purposive sample of twenty one women, seven each from three universities in Wales; a Pre 1992 University, and two Post 1992 Universities. Unfortunately recruitment proved to be more problematic than initially anticipated for several reasons and this was not the patterning of the final sample. These problems are discussed below.

#### **3.6.15 Time Poverty, Lack of Sample and Gatekeepers**

Studies have shown that mature students experience poverty of time (Mercer 2007; Edwards 1993; Clouder 1997). Attending university lectures and independent study means that often women have, and are governed by, complicated travel arrangements to university and/or complex childcare arrangements which result in a poverty of time. Practically then, this group often don't have time to give to anything that is not

directly related to the here and now of studying or caring for family and domestic responsibilities. Neither, perhaps do they have the inclination to consider things not directly concerned with their immediate situation. From my own experience, having assignments looming alongside the highs and lows of family life and responsibilities is not necessarily conducive to responding to recruitment flyers and volunteering to be part of a research study. Recruitment however turned out to be more problematic than I had anticipated.

There was a lack of specified sample in the pre 1992 University (Broadfield University), plenty in the post 1992 Universities, but a lack of response from gatekeepers. In order to recruit my sample I approached community education groups (where women might just be moving on to HE), mature student associations, student union, lifelong learning tutors, and other academics with similar research interests in other universities. After a few months of little response I resorted to flyers and personal canvassing, tentatively approaching women in university cafes to talk about my research, and if appropriate inviting them to contact me should they wish to participate. I also expanded the university sites. In doing so, I was able to access help from a lifelong learning contact who physically took me around each department and introduced me to tutors and possible participants, which was a godsend. In this post 1992 University (Greenfield University<sup>1</sup>) this very hands on approach, where tutors knew the names and personal circumstances of their students was striking in comparison to the remote approach in the Pre 1992 University

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<sup>1</sup> Pseudonym for Post 1992 University

(Broadfield University<sup>2</sup>). Serendipitous timing, or in this case it's lack also affect recruitment. Had I been recruiting participants two or three years later when I was at the writing up stage of the project my experience of recruitment would have been very different. By this time in the pre 1992 University strong links had been established between the university's LEARN Pathway Programme students and an Academic School based Coffee Club recently set up for Mature Students to support them in their transition and academic journey. My involvement in this group would have facilitated access to a purposive sample. However, this would have raised further ethical issues and based on my familiarity and friendship with the group and the very sensitive issues which emerged from the present data, would have further complicated the 'telling' of the women's lives (Weiler and Middleton 1999).

Thus, even though recruitment was challenging I am confident that the women I interviewed were pleased to participate. The women that I recruited and interviewed appeared to appreciate the opportunity to talk to someone they could identify with and told me their stories readily. Curiously, despite being a small sample, the level of trauma/ traumatic events the women experienced and conveyed was shocking and higher than might be expected. A desire or need to "tell their stories", perhaps on some level looking for identification, validation or catharsis may be related to why these particular women chose to participate.

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<sup>2</sup> Pseudonym for Pre 1992 University

This issue of recruitment has been surmounted in several other studies where the researcher is also a tutor on an academic programme (Stevens 2003; West 1996; Mercer 2007; Waller 2004, 2005; Walkup 2006; Montgomery and Collette 2001). Potentially, in this situation the researcher has direct access to a ready made population on which to draw. Although perhaps implicit, one would imagine that for the women, this context links participation in research more directly to their academic study and experience. One could also surmise that having developed a rapport with a tutor might predispose them to wanting to 'help' with their research. While playfully acknowledging my own 'sour grapes' frustration at not having such a convenient sample myself, ethically the power dynamics between the researcher and researched makes this situation sensitive in terms of any coercion or academic advantage implied or (mis)understood by the participants. Additionally, based on the inter-subjective nature of dynamics in the interview encounter, one might also assume that being interviewed by a tutor or a fellow mature student mother, may produce very different data. When researching subjectivity, methodologically, this issue is an important one and feminist approaches have stressed the importance of breaking down barriers between the researcher and researched and symmetry in terms of social identities in the interview dyad. I was a researcher but also a mature student mother (Stanley 1984). I was the same sex, class, ethnicity and sexuality as the women, grew up in a similar industrial working class community as the majority and the same age generation as most. Educationally we were similarly matched, and we each had the status of mother. As was discussed earlier, it might be assumed that being 'an insider' and sharing in the positionality of the women enable each to better identify with the other, consciously and unconsciously and thus better facilitate access to the deep, emotional elements of the women's experience which were

sought. Surprisingly, what were disclosed in the interviews then were unanticipated and very personal and often traumatic accounts of childhood and adult experiences. Whilst I hadn't consciously disclosed this aspect of my own subjectivity to the women, I feel that unconsciously I may have been conveying something which facilitated the safe sharing of their own experiences. However, there were aspects of some of the women's situation that I could not consciously directly relate too. For example, some of the women were single parents bringing up children alone after escaping extremely dysfunctional relationships. At the time of interview I had never claimed state benefits, was married and shared parenting with my husband. Though I had the lion's share of hands on parenting, as a family we were financially supported by and reliant upon him, a fact not lost on me during this time. Supported by and reliant upon state benefits three of the women had made geographical moves in order to study and escape their partners influence. Thus while I could not directly sympathise with their situation at the time, I was aware of an empathy and respect which at times made me feel guilty for sometimes moaning about my own situation. My fantasies about this aspect of their lives meant I felt somewhat cosseted in comparison to some.

### **3.7. Introducing the Sample**

The actual sample with which the research was conducted consisted of thirteen women drawn from four University Campuses in South Wales who self identified as 'working class'. In terms of ethnicity, all the women were white and all were residing in South Wales. The table set out on the following page details

demographic information. Issues of deductive disclosure have prevented providing the courses of study the women followed (Kaiser, 2009)

Name	Age	Motherhood status/Living Arrangements	Number of Children and Ages	Housing	Previous Employment History before University	University Attended
Tanya	34	*SM, *WP	Two(15, 1)	RCA	None	Post 1992
Jade	28	*SM	Three ( 13, 9, 5)	RCA	None	Post 1992
Lynfa	34	*MM	One (2)	OO	Semi Professional Health Care Worker	Pre 1992
Martine	36	*SM	One (2)	RCA	Miscellaneous roles	Post 1992
Jayne	32	*SM, now *MM	Two (13,5)	RCA	Intermittent Receptionist	Post 1992
Jordan	22	*SM, *LWP	One (2)	LWP,OO	Shop Assistant	Post 1992
Ellen	32	*SM, now *CWP	One (15)	RCA	Intermittent Miscellaneous roles	Pre 1992
Debbie	43	*SM, now*CWP	Six (25, 17, 15, 9, 7,6)	RCA	Factory worker	Post 1992
Justine	41	*SM, *SP	Two (7, 10)	RCA	Various qualified roles	Pre 1992
Ruth	33	*MM	One (2)	OO	Laboratory Technician	Pre 1992
Tina	36	*SM	One (6)	RCA	Procurer of luxury items	Pre 1992
Trudy	42	*SM, now CWP	Three (21, 16, 9)	OO	Business Owner –	Post 1992

Elizabeth	29	*MM	Two (5,3)	OO	Dental Assistant	Pre 1992
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Table 1

Key: \*SM = Single Mother, \*MM = Married Mother, \*WP = With Partner, \*CWP = Cohabiting with Partner, \*SP= Shared Parenting, \*RCA = Rented Council Accommodation,\*OO = Owner Occupier, \*LWP = Living with Parent

Table 1 shows the demographic details of the women interviewed.

### 3.7.1. Getting to Know You

People are often ambivalent and hesitant, when asked by researchers to place themselves in a social class (SurrIDGE 2007). Since the women self identified themselves as working class, we can assume that this subjectivity, is part of a self conscious (and unconscious) identity.

Although the women shared a self identity as working class, mature student mothers, there is much diversity within these intersectional categories. This is reflected in the diversity of their experience; the women's relation to education vary, as do their levels of structural/material marginalisation through their class position, and their levels of support. All of these are obviously important in terms of identities/subjectivities. Firstly, categorised in terms of education and employment: Knighton (2002) has highlighted that when considered in relation to higher education, first generation attendee status is testimony of educational disadvantage than either parental income or occupation. Of import is that each of the women in the present research were the first in their family to enter university, thus among the other more obvious aspects of identity they share, for example, their status as

working class mothers, they also share this marginalised, disadvantaged status which illustrates a lack of cultural capital in relation to education.

Firstly, while the women were all clearly “clever” and most would acknowledge this in themselves since childhood, often this wasn’t fully reflected in their educational attainment at the time of leaving school. Due to the relational context of their childhood; sometimes due to trauma, incident or dysfunction, and sometimes due to a lack of parental expectation, to different extents aspects of support and care which enable motivation, aspiration and success were missing. The women could very broadly be placed in three groups:

In the first group, were undergraduates in higher education for the first time, undertaking degrees following an access course. Their work history varied from none to having always previously worked in manufacturing/care/service industries to having owned her own successful business. About half the women in this group tended to almost drift into higher education following access courses, greatly supported and mentored by College Tutors, and Careers Advisors who often rallied “getting them onto” courses at their local University. For the other half, their learning choices and aspirations were more specific and their applications more autonomous, however still centred around local Universities. Motherhood involves ties that bind in many ways, and the inability to travel great distance because of family and lack of money has to be considered as a constraining factor. Additionally, reliance on informal childcare due to lack of financial resources also meant making

choices based on convenience. For the majority moving home to attend a university of choice was not even a consideration.

In the second group, having already recently completed an Undergraduate Degree, some were undertaking further Masters or PGCE qualifications. Once again their work history varied from caring, through to a high profile purchasing role. While for the majority of women in this group moving was not considered, travelling further to attend University became both a consideration and a possibility, particularly to attend a pre 1992 University. Although one woman did move closer to the university once her course had started, this was based on convenience and a desire to distance herself from past difficult relationships with her mother and ex-partner. She was also familiar with relocation, having emigrated alone some years earlier.

The third group of women, having attended university at traditional age, three were returning to university in their thirties to undertake PhD's or Post Graduate qualifications in order to progress their career or change career direction, having already experienced varied and rewarding (qualified) work. These women had very formulated plans in terms of their studies and future aspirations and had invested much time and effort in their applications for funding in terms of bursaries and scholarships. Having previously attended other universities around the country, they knew the capital that attending an elite pre 1992 University carried and chose to study there and were prepared to move and travel.

Secondly, there was a significant variation in the extent to which the women were “marginalised” by their working class status. This seemed to be influenced by their relationship status and biographical history, the number of children they had and their previous employment history. Some women considered they had adequate material resources and income, some managed on state benefit, whereas others struggled on benefits. Most would be considered as living in conditions of poverty, below the national average income in the UK (Child Poverty Action Group). What surprised me was that several mothers reported that their financial position was good, they were better off than they had been, and were adequately supported by the various bursaries, grants and loans available to them as learner mothers. In particular, the child tax credits available to mothers working sixteen hours apparently made a considerable difference to their financial circumstances. This of course is relative and perceptions of having adequate resources is subjective.

In terms of their motherhood status, in general, the women took main responsibility for the care of their children and the domestic sphere. Exceptions to this were Justine, who now divorced shared care with her husband, the children living between houses; and Jayne, whose mother and husband took on the main responsibilities in this area; and Ruth and her husband who shared caring responsibility, her husband working part-time when she was not in University.

### **3.8. Conclusion**

This Chapter has been concerned with detailing the research processes involved in the study up to the point of and including Sampling. This commenced with my own biography, situating the researcher as a classed, gendered and cultural subject in the research field contaminated by ‘personal and political sympathies’ (Becker 1967, p. 123) and explicating the way in which the theoretical framework evolved from ‘living within’ the research community. It then moved on to the argument for and a description of the study’s theoretical paradigms and perspectives. Also included in this chapter was a discussion of the research strategy, and a discussion of the comparison pilot study of two psychoanalytically inflected psychosocial interview methods which was a precursor to and decisive in the final selection of interview the technique. Presented also, were the reasons for the selection of Stopford’s (2004) Relational approach to psychosocial interviewing as a method of collecting empirical material, followed by a discussion of the main principles and techniques of the method. The Chapter concluded with a discussion of the sampling process and an introduction to the sample.

This psychoanalytically inflected psychosocial study used a biographic research strategy and a series of three relational and dialogic psychosocial interviews developed by Annie Stopford (2004) as a method of data collection. The sample were purposive, comprising thirteen working class mature student mothers studying across four university sites in South Wales. The subsequent chapter (Four) continues the explanation of the research process, starting with a discussion of ethics and how the interviews were conducted.

## **4.**

### **Chapter Four**

#### **Interviews, Feelings and Findings**

##### **4.1. Introduction**

This second methodological chapter is concerned with the particular way I conducted and analysed psychosocial interviews with the thirteen working class mature student women who were the participants in this psychosocial exploration of subjectivity, aspiration and motivation in higher education. The chapter commences with the ethical considerations of the research. It then turns to the production of data. The way in which the psychosocial interviews were conducted; what took place, when, where and how, and the inter-subjective dynamics of the research encounter in which the data emerged is explained, along with the material I took to be data. Included also, are methodological insights in relation to the production of data. This is followed by a discussion of some implications of the methodology, as a lone and novice researcher. The way in which the data were stored and handled is then discussed before moving on to focus on the particular way in which data were

analysed by reflecting and drawing on my subjectivity as both researcher and as a working class mature student and mother, and incorporating prior knowledge of the participants socio-historical/cultural history where appropriate. In this section the multi-level analysis process is explained and the themes emerging from the analysis presented. The chapter ends with a discussion of the process of writing and representation.

#### **4.2. Protecting the Women's Interests - The Ethical Procedures Involved**

Ethics in social research refers to the conduct, choices, accountability and moral deliberation of the researcher, throughout the entire research process (Edwards and Mauthner 2012). In the last methodological Chapter (Three), I explained the ethical concerns I had in relation to methods of data collection, which were addressed through pilot interviews, and resulted in choosing to adopt Stopford's (2004) relational and dialogic approach to psychosocial interviewing. Acknowledging the importance of ethics, throughout the research process, the chapter takes this as its starting point. However, ethical dimensions to the research will be raised and addressed throughout the present chapter in relation to design, consent, collection of data, reflections on methodology, analysis and the reporting of findings.

The research was conducted based on feminist principles of care and responsibility. This stance was influenced by the work of Ros Edwards and Melanie Mauthner (2012) and Elisabeth Porter (1999). Porter's feminist ethics is informed by three

interrelated features: personal experience, context and nurturant relationships.

Class, gender and context have shaped my own dilemmas in everyday life, and the way in which these have been experienced, has influenced my ethical perspectives.

This is carried forward into the research process to influence the range of, and appropriateness of response to the ethical dilemmas faced. Since, like the women, I am myself a working class mature student mother, and the methodology required use of my own subjectivity as a tool, my ethical response throughout the research process was empathic, nurturant and emotional (Edwards and Mauthner 2012).

The next section describes the ethical procedures built in to the design of the research and is followed by an account of the way in which I conducted the psychosocial interviews with the thirteen working class mature student mothers.

#### **4.3. Doing the Paperwork**

Subsequent to ethical approval, the interviews were conducted following Cardiff University's Ethical Code of Conduct and the ESRC's Framework for Research Ethics(2015).

#### **4.4. Providing Information and Confidentiality**

Before the initial interviews commenced, the women were given information sheets explaining the research and providing relevant contact details (see Appendix B) which were further explained and discussed. Consent forms were then signed (see Appendix C), before a short proforma was completed detailing demographic information (Appendix D). The women were protected by explicit confidentiality. I

assured them of anonymity and informed them that names of people, places and some other identifying features would be changed in order to protect their identity. At this time I also explained how I intended to use the data collected; that it would be part of a PhD thesis and may be part of future academic publications and presentations.

Issues of confidentiality were particularly relevant in the writing up of Chapter Seven which explores aspiration and motivation through the links between trauma higher education and identity. The way in which I dealt with this ethical issue of working with sensitive data, and further protected the women from identification will be referred to in the final section of the chapter concerned with the way in which the thesis represents the women. A full explanation of the ethical dilemmas and decisions concerning representation in relation to trauma is provided in Chapter Seven.

In the third and final interview, I conducted a debriefing session to provide the women with any necessary information to complete their understanding of the nature of the research, and to elicit their experience of the research in order to detect any unforeseen negative effects or misunderstandings (BPS, 2009). Whilst it was not envisaged that any harm would come to the women as a result of this research, it was acknowledged that talking about personal experiences and the affect surrounding them, may elicit some emotional discomfort. Therefore, I provided participants with

information regarding their University's Counselling Service who would be able to give expert advice and support if required.

#### **4.5. Sharing Experiences over Tea and Biscuits – Conducting the Psychosocial Interviews**

For the women's comfort and convenience, which I presumed would also facilitate the best engagement and data production, on recruitment<sup>3</sup>, the women were asked where they would like to be interviewed. Some chose to be interviewed in a private room at their University's library, others chose to be interviewed in their home. The psychosocial interviews were conducted between September 2012 and April 2013. Where possible the women were interviewed on three occasions. Nine of the women were interviewed three times, three twice and one on one occasion (lasting approximately three hours). The digital audio recordings lasted between twenty minutes and an hour and a half, and in total twenty seven hours of audio recorded interview data were generated.

#### **4.6. Sorry I'm Out – Sample Attrition**

During the research process, the sample were affected by some attrition, mainly after the second interview. This took the form of either cancelling our last interview at short notice and then being unable to commit to another date, or not being at home on the day and time of the visit. When this occurred I endeavoured to set up another interview with them, (usually by e-mail) thanking them for their time, asking if all

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<sup>3</sup> Please see Poster used for recruitment purposes Appendix A

was well and if they would like to be interviewed again. In response to the ethical principles and feminist stance adopted, and described earlier, because of the affect laden stories and personal disclosures elicited during the interviews, it was important to check that the interviews had not caused upset or had felt intrusive. Where a response was not forthcoming, I took this to signal that the woman, for whatever reason no longer wished to participate and was exercising her right as a participant to withdraw from the research at any time without explanation, as explained prior to interview, understanding consent as an ongoing process (ESRC 2015). Despite this being disappointing in relation to the design and method, I didn't pursue this issue with the women. I did not wish to press them further for their time not wanting them to feel coerced (ESRC 2015), cause 'possible harm' (Research Ethics Guidebook), and cloud the positive research relationships and sense of trust and understanding I felt had been established, and evidenced in the often difficult and painful stories they had told me.

The issue of consent to participation became more complex however, with one participant, Martine. After her cancelling and suggesting future dates for our final interview on three occasions, Martine's consent was one of ambivalence. Through our many e-mail exchanges (which were taken as data) and the sensitive interview material collected in our interviews, I understood this to be a defensive strategy in relation to management of her emotions and feelings. When I conducted the final interview, Martine opened the door to me saying "oh I've been dreading this, I'll never do it again" and then subsequently, enthusiastically expanded upon the very painful and sensitive areas of her life she had told me about in the other interviews,

which I hadn't explicitly asked about. Martine wanted to talk, and perhaps more importantly she wanted someone to 'hear', but at the same time she wanted to protect herself.

This points to the way in which consent to participate in social research perhaps cannot be reduced to a rational cognitive decision. Hollway and Jefferson (2013) highlight how whilst the principles of consent are set up around the assumption of a rational and autonomous subject, in practice this is often not reflected in participants responses and decisions around participation. Rather, the authors argue, consent and participation are based on feelings and fantasies about the researcher and the research. These feelings might be evident in Martine's ambivalence: whilst she found that the research brought up difficult emotions for her, I think the feelings she had about me also made her want to share them with me, this suggests she felt/imagined the quality of a 'safe' context and that if nothing else, she felt me capable of listening well (Hollway and Jefferson 2013).

The interviews themselves lasted longer than the recordings, particularly when taking place in the women's homes. This was due to me being welcomed as a guest, being made tea and introduced to other family members, usually children, and talking and interacting with them before the interview 'technique' was employed. This interaction was also taken to be data and is discussed more fully in the later sections concerned with analysis.

#### **4.7. Getting ready to Listen and Hear**

In presenting myself as a researcher, I aimed to do so in as authentic a way as possible. I did not try to alter my appearance feeling that it offered the participant important details about my personality and values with which to identify, dis-identify with or defend against. Either of these responses would create useful data. Because of the inter-subjective nature of the interview encounter, and the co-creation of empirical materials presumed by the approach, and to facilitate myself and each woman to be as relaxed as possible in order to create a sense of trust, I made a conscious effort to make myself open and emotionally available to listen and ‘hear’ the women’s stories. In order to do this I would prepare by arriving to the interview in plenty of time, taking some time to gather my thoughts and centre myself. Drawing on what I now understand to be “mindful” techniques, before and during the research encounter I instinctively imagined my solar plexus opening with the result that I was listening from that part of my body as well as with my ears.

Attention to affect was a methodological and empirical key concern of the project. Stopford (2004) has highlighted the way in which research encounters are laden with affect and often there is anxiety or fear on both parts and this needs to be acknowledged as data. Such affect is often brought to the research encounter by either party and/or created within that encounter. It was therefore important to pay attention to what would make me anxious and influence the production of data, for example, a desire to build a rapport and get good data; fear of being late; personal issues and events happening at the time. It was important also to pay attention to the data outside of the research encounter and listen, before the tape recorder gets

switched on, to the anxieties on the part of the participant, for example their fear of lateness, their enthusiasm (or otherwise) towards the research encounter and events, and what might be happening for them at the time of interview. Research spaces are never empty of data and this is an aspect I have explored further in publication (Mannay and Morgan, 2015). This co-authored paper emphasised the importance of the “Waiting Field”, as an opportunity to explore the times when real lives carry on before they make room for the intrusion of the ‘technique’ of data production. Importantly in the present research, “spaces of reflection”, “spaces prior to” and “spaces of interruption/disruption” of the interview process, were able to provide rich understandings of family relationships and dynamics and the everyday material realities of marginalised lives (Mannay and Morgan 2015 p. 10).

#### **4.8. Thank You and Data as Happy/Unhappy Accidents**

The women were not paid for their participation. Instead, for the first two out of three interviews I would bring cakes, biscuits or general “treats” that could be shared by all the family. In the final interview I would bring flowers as a ‘thank you’ gesture. All were appreciated and the women’s young children particularly enjoyed selecting biscuits, being brought into the encounter. I purposely interacted and engaged with the children, in a similar way to my own. Often I was left alone with the children for brief periods while the women made tea in the kitchen. The children would bring me toys to play with or things they had made in school, and ask me questions about my own life, which I was pleased to answer, for example, “where’s your little girl”? While some researchers may find the presence of children distracting or inappropriate, the women’s maternal subjectivity was part of my

concern; parts of themselves emerge in relation to their children. Additionally, since we were each mothers, children provided a point of connection and engagement for us. It is also important to realise that these are the conditions in which the women also often study: when at home, children are omnipresent. There is not the luxury of creating ‘perfect’ conditions for either study or interview, and I did not feel it a requirement that I did so. This was the women’s ‘natural’ environment. An interview would not have been possible any other way for some. However, other family members did sometimes make their presence felt to less obvious positive effect. But once again, this provided rich data in terms of understanding the women in their context and was in fact serendipitous. As explained above, disruptions, ‘waiting times’, or times ‘in-between’ interviews are never without use, and may be a space where we discover important information about ourselves and our participants. In centralising the salience of these spaces, the ‘ethnographic experience’ is accessible within these waiting times; the times where real lives carry on before they make room for the intrusion of data production techniques. What is viewed in this time is a ‘backroom view’; of an interrupted/disrupted space where the omnipresent, but often hidden, relational context and affective aspects of being a working class mature student mother, partially emerge and the way in which personal history, subjectivity and affective practices are formed in and are regenerated in the social relations of everyday life ( Mannay and Morgan 2013).

Here I want to offer some reflections from my research diary to illustrate:

#### **4.8.1. Jordan**

*Jordan is 22 and lives with her mum, sister and young son. She has a very supportive family and during our interview at home her elderly grandparents turned up to cut the grass. Her grandmother suffers from senile dementia. Jordan explained that she was in the middle of an interview but the grandparents insisted “they wouldn’t be any bother”. As a result the interview took place with the grandparents partially present, going back and forth between the living room and the garden – which really disrupted the interview. My mind went blank.*

The extract above illustrates the way in which the interview space was not a priority for the family in the way it was for me. While the grandparents didn’t necessarily mind my presence, what was being undertaken was of little importance – this was their life and they carried on. This interruption was able also to provide a view of the wider relational context in which Jordan is embedded. Here, the ways of caring which might hold, contain and enable the family are on display; ‘affective practices’ (Walkerdine 2010) which make and re-make the relational unit. Importantly, it became evident to me that these practices are not based upon rationality or practicality; indeed it would have been far easier and quicker for Jordan to cut the grass herself. Rather it was an affective exchange based on mutuality, love and support for each other, saying much about the family’s dynamics and the way ‘things are done around here’. This ‘back room’ view is discussed as part of the analysis in Chapter Five of the thesis, where I use my emotions to reflect on the constant interruptions to an interview with one participant, Tanya, from her sister, and what they might be able to add to the analysis.

Having explained the broader context and concerns of the psychosocial interviews, the next section is concerned with dialogue and the manner in which accounts were elicited from the participants.

#### **4.9. The First Interview**

I commenced each of the first interviews with a deliberately broad and open question or request: *Can you tell me how you got to this point in your life, you can start where ever you want?* It was framed thus because, while the literature reviewed in Chapter Two has identified the difficulties and barriers encountered by working class mature student mothers in higher education, and my own experience supports these findings, I didn't want to frame responses in these terms. Neither did I want to assume that firstly, the women had encountered barriers or difficulties and that these were the same as mine. Secondly, like Hollway and Jefferson and their 'transparent self' problem (Hollway and Jefferson 2000), I was suspicious that they may not be able to articulate or describe these barriers and difficulties and their source. Wishing to be helpful and provide me with appropriate answers, some women sought clarification at this point. However, I tried to resist guiding them to a point or event in their life, instead reassuring them that it was ok to start anywhere; it was their story and I would very much like to hear it. This meant that sometimes narratives went back to childhood, at other times the starting point was their commencement in higher education. Importantly, this meant that the terrain addressed was wide ranging and participants could answer through their own meaning frames, potentially pointing to conscious and unconscious associations around participation in higher education as working class mothers.

In this interview, and indeed throughout the series, I would ask questions of their accounts and feelings, and where possible and safe to do so tentatively explore fantasies and feelings around people and events. In this way the participants were made aware of the way in which I might interpret the material and represent them in the thesis, building a sense of trust and safety or containment. This exploration enabled a more mutual construction of meaning and lessened the possibility of causing offence or upset in my subsequent analysis. However, It was not always possible to explore accounts in this way and some women actively blocked such an exploration, perhaps feeling it to be intrusive or as an unconscious defence mechanism. Similarly, if I felt ‘out of my depth’ by their sometimes painful accounts, I would listen carefully with sympathy/empathy, making it clear that I had ‘heard’ them before steering the conversation to a less emotive subject. In this way, as a researcher I tried to provide a sense of safety and containment in the interview space (Bion, 1962) . Not wishing to compromise the interview or their emotional wellbeing, or indeed my own if I sensed discomfort within the women I would move away from that discussion. Of note, is that I often found myself strongly responding to what I felt the women needed emotionally and the way in which I felt positioned by the women: as therapist, counsellor and social worker. I understood these to be projective identifications - “the role into which the other is cast ; nudged, seduced or coerced” (Clarke and Hoggett 2009 p.13). These were interesting and telling positions in terms of the women’s own subjectivity. I often drew on aspects of my subjectivity formed in relation to the field of mental health, in which I had worked previously as an empathic response.

#### **4.10. Second and Subsequent Interviews**

Between interviews I would listen to the transcripts and take into consideration the incoherencies, gaps and contradictions in the story and highlight the 'emotional subtexts' which are often ignored in other forms of sociological analysis (Day Sclater, 2000). From there I could follow up any emerging themes mentioned and any questions or clarifications could be noted and addressed in the subsequent interviews. Initially, anxious to get a good interview and enough data and to avoid what might be awkward silence, I was tempted to fill any pauses with conversation or a question. However, as the interviews progressed I soon realised that this wasn't necessary and often having been given space the women would 'naturally' carry on with their story or tell me about something else. Silence too was part of the dialogic exchange, a space for understanding and reflection.

Subsequent to each interview as the method required, critical reflection as interviewer and my own thoughts and feelings around the encounter were recorded to be used as data in order to later identify instances of possible unconscious processes, defences, or transference during analysis. This was then used to deepen understandings of the research relationship and be more alive to my own affective and somatic responses to the participant

#### **4.11. The Final Interview**

In line with the feminist perspective which underpins this project in the third/final interview I shared my thoughts and impressions of the data generated with the women inviting their response in order to try to counter any unequal power relations in terms of objectifying the women. During this time some women reflected more critically than others. Some listened to my initial understandings and interpretations of the data without comment while others were interested in seeing parts of their lives interpreted through the eyes of another and engaged enthusiastically in further discussion. Jade, who I discuss in Chapter Five, enjoyed when I mentioned that I couldn't help but notice the transformative aspects of the things around her home, and how I understood them to relate to her and her academic journey/transition; there were a very many pictures and ornaments of butterflies, and a range of ceramics adorning the room. Jade told me how she had a particular fascination with them. I related these objects to the things she had told me across the three interviews: about not wanting to be the same person and wanting to transform into something 'better'; how she at times in her life had felt fragile, trapped and unable to breathe by her situation; and how she imagined university as a place of safety; her plans to roam abroad. I told her of my fantasy. How, I imagined her before university, as like a butterfly in a jar fighting for air and movement. And, how the imagined safe space of university was like a safe cocoon which enabled her to transform and fly to freedom. Reflecting on this, she was fascinated by this interpretation and was able to confirm my understanding of her transition.

In the final interview, I also offered the women the opportunity to view the thesis on completion. Whilst the women were interested in what I had made of their lives, they were only politely interested in how this translated into a research thesis. Their concern did not extend to the way in which I might represent or indeed misrepresent them as working class, mature student mothers. As a result none expressed a desire to see the thesis on completion.

In the dialogic, warm and gentle atmosphere created in the interviews, I was able to develop a good rapport with the women. The interviews were relaxed and punctuated with laughter, and sometimes tears. The use of a series of three interviews allowed for a sense of story unfolding. Like a jigsaw puzzle, at each interview I was able to get more story in order to make sense of the women's lives. Collecting the data over three interviews enabled a relationship to develop and fostered a sense of trust/understanding. Methodologically this is important and is reflected in the 'depth' (Wengraf, 2001) of data and the highly emotional and sensitive materials generated.

Having repeat interviews also facilitated access to different emerging aspects of subjectivity in different contexts. Perceived hierarchies of gender, class, and status are not only multiple parts of identity. They also come into being in relation to place (Walkerdine and Jimenez, (2012); Edwards and Holland, 2013). A location change, for example from library to home, had the ability to alter the women's presentation. Homes are laden with the dynamics of power within families and the conversation

and the dynamics of the encounter was noted for comparison (Edwards and Holland,2013). This was particularly apparent when I interviewed Elizabeth for the final time at home with her husband upstairs, having previously met her at the University Library. Elizabeth had always turned up early for our previous interviews and was very smiley, enthusiastic and forthcoming. I noted in my research diary how in that instance she was much less forthcoming than previously, but also seemed to lose some power and spark: *“Having been left on the doorstep by her husband, who I felt resented my presence, in this final encounter I felt she was tense and uncomfortable and seemed much smaller in stature”*.

The next section of the chapter critically reflects on some difficulties of the methodological approach from the point of view of a lone, novice researcher.

#### **4.12. Issues for the Lone Novice Researcher**

As has been argued in Chapter Three, bringing psychoanalysis to bear on the research process was presumed to offer perspectives in the realm of affect and emotion out of reach to other paradigms. Its use is not, however, without issue, and some of these have also already been discussed in Chapter Three. This next section turns to the issues I encountered in adopting a psychoanalytically informed methodology for the research, and the associated imperative to utilise my own subjectivity and emotions as research tools, the demands of which, I feel, can be simultaneously ‘burdensome and beneficial’ for the novice researcher (Beedell 2009, p. 103).

Firstly, this kind of psychosocial research is typically used by a 'team' of researchers, often with some members being psychoanalytically trained, or in psychoanalysis themselves (Stopford 2004; Walkerdine et al 2001; Hollway and Jefferson; 2013). There are two important elements of discussion in this point: Team working and training. In terms of Team working, this means that interpretations and possible unconscious defences can be shared, explored tested and challenged by team members, facilitating alternative interpretations and understandings to emerge. Potential or suspected lapses in judgement can also be interrogated (Hollway and Jefferson 2013). As a lone and novice researcher, I deeply felt the lack of others to share my interpretations with or draw on for experience, and at times I did feel overwhelmed and confused by my lack of training and expertise in this field. Whilst I did undergo five sessions of psychotherapy, I had no funds for ongoing psychoanalysis/psychotherapy.

This was in some ways able to be countered by the fact that I had Valerie Walkerdine as my supervisor, and both academically and pastorally she was of massive support. However, I feel that what is demanded by the method goes beyond the role of the supervisor and the supervision relationship. It would have been almost impossible to undertake this type of methodology without a supervisor oriented toward and experienced in this approach. Whilst I acknowledge that supervisors are matched to students and projects which best suit their own research interests, not all academics possess the supervision skills necessary to support a student in this approach. Similarly, what cannot be considered before hand is the kind of relationship one has with one's supervisor and the level of personal

disclosure and trust this approach necessitates. In our relational and dialogic encounters my supervisor and I, created something in terms of space, knowledge and relationship which required authenticity and particular kinds of other knowledge and relationship to be brought to the encounter. What this means is that in order to obtain a greater understanding of the data and negotiate a valid interpretation, through identification and/or confronting anxieties and defences, vulnerable and intimate parts of the self have to be exposed, even if not always verbalised. In terms of transference-counter-transference within the student/supervisor relationship, the dynamics of the relationship entail the supervisor ‘containing’ or ‘holding’ the student’s difficult and perhaps toxic emotions, akin to that of the psychoanalytic process. In adopting this methodology, there are emotional consequences then, for all involved. Indeed, these aspects have been highlighted by Garfield et al (2010) who assert that such a process “blurs the boundaries between supervisor and student as they must both simultaneously engage in multiple roles, each with their own possibility of conflicting boundaries imperatives” ( p.166.) This leads me to my second point concerning exposure and vulnerability.

This method involved me sometimes revealing as much about myself as about my participants. Whilst this chimes well with the feminist principles of the research, it can feel very exposing both in the analysis and writing process, and in a very real sense when presenting or sharing your work with academic colleagues, particularly when they are embedded in other research paradigms. In such exposure I accepted that I was opening myself up to potential criticism and accusations of self indulgence.

Thirdly, it is axiomatic that as a researcher in this paradigm that, I brought with me to the interviews and analysis process my own unresolved unconscious issues, and experienced also, the complicated feelings and emotions of my participants projected into me (Beedell 2009). In the final three years of the thesis I experienced simultaneously, several difficult personal situations which were difficult to negotiate bringing up some complicated and conflicting emotions. The interaction of the two was very difficult to negotiate; working with the sensitive data generated was often very difficult and painful as I reacted to it on both conscious and unconscious levels: there were times, working with the traumatic data, when I found the balancing of empathy and detachment difficult – there were times also when I was unable to work with the data at all. As the above quote from Wengraf states, at other times I was also ‘programmed not to know’ and my own defences sometimes became problematic, preventing the analysis process. As researchers we can’t use our unconscious processes to order. While it might seem to cynics of the method in other paradigms that we position ourselves, through psychoanalysis as ‘all knowing’ Wizard like figures conjuring our emotions like spells, the reality is very different. As researchers we have no control over (nor should we) what we experience and when, and in relation to the deadlines of PhD research, coupled with the length of the analytic process involved, that too can be very problematic.

Beedell (2009) questions whether supervision is an adequate enough space to consider the researcher’s ‘emotional work’ and has advocated commissioning psychotherapists to psychosocial research teams to appraise processes such as

counter-transference, identification and defences and as a space of “decontamination” or offloading (Beedell 2009, p117.) Similarly, Dominice (1990) has highlighted the need for supervision for life history researchers to “address the difficult emotions and burdens which researchers are left with, and need to work through and make sense of them” (West 1996, p. 214). Such provision, as well as easing the discomfort of difficult emotions for the researcher, which may have come to the fore in relation to their engagement with the research material, also perhaps offers some defence of the methodology.

As demonstrated in Chapter Three, researchers in other paradigms are often concerned with the methodological and ontological validity or credibility of this approach and are sometimes suspicious or critical of what might be viewed as the excessive reliance on the researchers own subjectivity and emotions in the analysis. How do we know that you are not simply interpreting these experiences in light of your own? The issue and danger of imposing interpretation and the ‘researcher becoming the researched’ (Beedell 2009, p. 218) is indeed real and one that is grappled within this paradigm (Hollway and Jefferson 2013). In providing a more formal psychoanalytic reflexive space for researchers, their positionality in their own research may be explored and monitored in a way which may serve to dampen concerns by providing ‘more evidence’ to enhance and support psychosocial interpretations. The use of emotion in academia is however highly contested. For some, there is a fear that clouded by emotionality and illogic the researcher will be unable to “see the wood for the trees” and make sense of what is taking place (Stanley 1984 p. 197). Within this opposing view there is only a pretence of logic.

The need to ‘make the familiar strange’ isn’t only important when one is familiar with the research setting. This also applies to familiar academic ways of knowing. Alternative views of the ‘wood and trees’, and ways of knowing beyond familiar paradigms are essential. Far more dangerous for me as a psychosocial researcher are the consequences of not considering the researcher’s emotions, raising questions such as, what does it mean to leave them out of accounts and separate them off? Such an act serves to further divide psychological and sociological accounts. Such a space and practice described above then may be mutually satisfying, and serve to move psychological and sociological paradigms closer together.

#### **4.13. Using Reflexivity as a Methodological Tool and the Research Diary**

Reflexivity is a central tenet of qualitative and interpretive methods within social science research. The process of examining oneself, the research relationship and taking account of what is brought to the encounter being key in understanding how meanings are produced and reproduced within particular social, cultural and relational contexts. While reflexivity is not new within feminist approaches to research, within the psychosocial paradigm, researchers utilising insights from relational psychoanalysis, extend this idea, and use their own subjectivity and experience; emotions, affects and embodied responses to the data as a guide to both interpretation and analysis (Hollway and Jefferson 2000; Walkerdine et al 2001; Stopford 2004). This has formed a central plank of analysis in the thesis. In a section above, I gave an example of the way in which I used reflexivity in analysis in my final interview with Jade. Contained within the subsequent analytic chapters are examples of how I used reflexivity by paying attention to how I feel in relation

to the research encounters and the data during analysis. Taking the reader through my responses to the data, enables the reader to elucidate how I arrived at particular interpretations of the data.

My handwritten research diary then was of central importance in terms of methodology and technique, as a tool of understanding, analysis and interpretation and this has also been demonstrated above in the extract concerning interviews with Jordan and Elizabeth which illustrates the way in which these kinds of records were vital in capturing aspects of the everyday lives of the thirteen working class mature student mothers interviewed. In addition to recording interactions and my thoughts, impressions and feelings around the interviews, etc, I also sometimes recorded my dreams and fantasies, discussing them at a later date with my supervisor to aid and enrich analysis.

#### **4.14. Handling the Data**

St Pierre and Jackson (2014) contend that analysis cannot be separated from what was understood to be data and the way in which it was collected. Having established the way in which the data were collected, and the materials I understood as data, this next section turns to the on going process of analysis, starting with the transcription of data.

#### **4.14.1. Transcription**

Each of the digitally recorded interviews were self-transcribed. Whilst this is a laborious process I found it to be highly beneficial in getting to know the data. Active listening and simultaneous typing helped to foster a sense of this co-created data 'belonging' to me as a researcher. As explained, the design of the interview method required that between the three interviews I listened to and transcribed the data. Transcribing the audio recordings myself enabled me to listen carefully to the dynamics of the interviews, and listen for affective undercurrents by paying attention to: changes in emotional tone; long pauses; avoidances; (Hollway and Jefferson 2005) and recall body language, facial expression/facial tics, to record and compare with my research diary notes taken at the time.

There were however two drawbacks to doing all the transcription myself. The first relates to its high labour intensiveness. The second is an ethical concern, and relates to the transcription of 'sensitive data' and its psychological and emotional impact (Mccosker et al 2001). Gregory, Russell and Phillips (1997) highlighting the potential emotional effect of the transcription of sensitive data on the transcriber, suggest strategies of protection such as the use of journals for recording feelings. As I explain below, such reflections and self examinations were already an important aspect of my research tool kit, and may well have provided some relief on some level.

Following transcription, the textual data transcripts were stored in a locked cabinet on the University campus. The digital audio recordings were stored on a lap top for my sole use and dedicated to the purpose of the research.

#### **4.14.2. Rearing the Data by Hand**

The challenging task of data analysis, according to Spencer et al (2003) requires “creativity”, “systematic searching”, “inspiration” and “diligent detection” (p. 199). I understood these tasks to be best achieved in the case of the present research by manually handling the data, and I decided against the use of computer aided qualitative data analysis software tools such as CAQDAS and NVivo. My decisions were based on both personal and ontological/analytic concerns and supported by the relatively small number of participants in the sample. Firstly, the data created would not be voluminous, rather it would require layered analysis of the same material. Secondly, being dyslexic I struggle with getting to grips with using computerised systems and I feared that the time pressures of analysis were against the training and learning process required. Thirdly, from experience in my Undergraduate and MSc research, I found handling paper records facilitated my getting close to the data: and I enjoyed immersing myself in the data through the application of coloured sticky notes, and scribbling over the data, creating hand-drawn maps and charts of the emergent findings to aid imagination and highlight similarities of experience (for example, identifying key themes/concepts such as trauma, with which to think with). Despite its ‘messiness’, this organised chaos had served me well in the past making the data feel more ‘alive’ (Richards 1999). Finally, I felt that software based on the coding and retrieving of themes, might fragment and de-contextualise the data

(Coffey and Atkinson 1996). This is a process which would be in tune with Cartesian Ontological Realism; a view which considers data be out there, ready to be discovered and coded (St Pierre and Jackson 2014). It would however, be very much against the ontological basis of the project, explained in Chapter Three. Rather I considered it important to reflexively pay attention to the whole narrative of each participant, the affect of interactions and events, and their meaning frames as a ‘whole’. I immersed myself in, and stayed as close to, the original data as possible being guided by the theoretical underpinnings of the project, situated as a poststructuralist/postmodernist epistemology. Within ‘post’ epistemologies, St Pierre and Jackson (2014) have highlighted how there is no method for thinking with theory: there is not a linear trajectory from data collection, to analysis, to representation. Rather it is an ongoing flow of de- and re-contextualisation from its first generation, in concert with theory and extant literature. This is reflected in the different theoretical frameworks and forms of presentation adopted for each of the subsequent chapters. As such a ‘post’ coding approach to analysis becomes difficult to explain and is more an analytic sensibility or “practice rather than method” and “always in a process of becoming” (St Pierre and Jackson 2014, p. 717). The next section is concerned with this practice.

#### **4.14.3. Psychosocial Analytic Practice**

Despite a plethora of academic texts devoted to research methods, a small number of which are explicitly psychosocial and seek to guide and inform practice (Cartwright 2004; Kvale 1999; Stopford 2004; Walkerdine et al 2001) it is only through undertaking our own research are we able to fully realise and (hopefully) understand

the complexity of this process. It has to be lived and experienced firsthand to realise, often with shock, that there is little relation between hygienic models of, and the practice of the research process (Stanley 1984). There is, as Liz Stanley notes, the temptation to present these models of research, rather than the actual process. I shall not do that here. What follows in this section of the chapter is a description of the messy process of psychosocial analysis.

Despite spending years reading about psychoanalytic research methods and knowing how it should work theoretically, I found the practice to be vastly different. In my eagerness to analyse the data and produce a thesis, initially I found myself overlooking central understandings of this approach. Namely, that transcripts cannot be taken at face value, and that this approach is extremely labour intensive, very confusing, emotionally exhausting and that understandings emerge from analysis on multiple levels, moving between data sources, and gaining multiple perspectives which requires time and patience. Something magical didn't happen to the data just because I used a particular interview method and intended to use a particular lens (sadly!). This belies the way the analytic process is presented within journal articles as clear and straightforward. For a very long time I found myself immersed within a quagmire of data only able to see the women's experiences as 'stories' needing to be told. Working with the data was a 'messy' process which involved many levels of analysis and the trial and discarding of many theoretical frameworks, and attempts at writing chapters. Incorporated into the 'messy' process however were the following:

I engaged with the interview transcripts both as single interviews and as a series, charting and considering the way in which the women's feelings, events and stories unfolded and changed across the series. I also made across case comparisons of the data, noting similarities and differences in the lives, experiences and feelings of the women, noting emergent themes and narratives. Each of these processes required a back and forth movement between my research diary and the literature, and emergent themes and ideas prompted new searches in areas not previously considered, for example, literature on trauma; and its relationship to higher education.

The extent to which social researchers are willing or able to engage and work with their emotions in relation to the data varies between paradigms. However, as mentioned above, within the psychosocial paradigm working with one's emotions is a central plank of analysis. The analysis process has been profoundly influenced by the psychosocial work of Stopford, (2004); Walkerdine et al (2001); and Hollway and Jefferson, (2013) each of whom have exemplified their approach. While my analysis draws on each of these approaches and the way in which they have employed their subjectivity, the data were analysed based on a psychosocial approach developed by Walkerdine et al (2001) which analyses the data on multiple overlapping levels, with the aim of identifying affective themes and core narratives. This process is explained below:

At the first level, an overall feel for the data was established and the 'story' of each woman's life considered: the events and their timings, the characters, and their relationships to the women and each other, and how they were positioned in the telling were explored. I noted also, any points of rupture or change in the women's lives and the surrounding affect, for example feelings about embarking upon university, their children starting school, breakdowns in relationships, or other traumatic events. Psychological and material movements, shifts and changes were also paid attention. In this way, sub-plots, or other 'less visible' stories could be pieced together and a better overall picture established. Through this process it became apparent how each woman's social and cultural history and the relationships or absences within these had helped to mould their individual subjectivities. It highlighted the way in which the women's past is implicated in the present and future, supporting a main argument of the thesis.

At the second level narrative accounts were problematised. Looking at words, metaphors, images, inconsistencies, contradictions, or omissions I sought to discover possible explanations for these. I tried to identify any unconscious processes at work within the accounts such as denial and splitting and projection and what might be achieved by these mechanisms in relation to their identities. Here, I also considered the investment in and rejection of particular discursive positionings against the backdrop of broader prevailing social, cultural and historical discourses around areas such as class, lone/teenage motherhood, the good mother, the good student, etc. This element of analysis is made particularly salient in Chapter Six, where the identity work of Jordan, Jayne and Jade as working class mothers is considered in relation to

constructions of motherhood within neo-liberalism and the concept of respectability. However, informed by Stopford's relational approach, I also considered material which was not posited as 'hidden' or 'defended' to be meaningful in this analysis and considered the relational aspects of each biography and the feelings and emotions around these (Stopford 2004). Also at this level, incidents of 'free association' and my own emotional responses to each interview, previously recorded in field notes after each encounter, and during analysis were considered (Hollway and Jefferson 2013). Where I experienced an emotional response to the data I considered these to be indicators of transference from the participant which might be useful to my interpretation.

The third level of analysis was conducted in part with my supervisor, who helped me transcend both the transcripts and what was recorded in the field notes. We considered any unwanted or unconscious feelings or defences in relation to the interviews and data generated, and how I may be more or less emotionally open to particular accounts, since as Wengraf (2000) highlights:

In the interview, *the researcher* also must be assumed to be at least potentially "motivated not to know" certain things that would be upsetting for him or her, and thus subtly or obviously influencing the production of some or all of the text of the interview"

(Wengraf 2000, p.144)

All data were analysed using this process, however, listening to the data and my emotions meant that some sections of the data became the focus of a more detailed analysis of my emotions in order to work with and explore the phenomenon in question. Through this process they became the focus of the analytic chapters. The next section presents an outline of the way in which the data contained within each chapter were analysed in relation to the argument and aims of the thesis. Each chapter then theoretically develops the thesis. However, each analytic chapter contains an account of the way in which the analysis evolved.

#### **4.15. Analytic/ Theoretical Frameworks**

##### **4.15.1 Chapter Five**

A main argument of the thesis is that rather than being understood through discourses of lack, aspiration, motivation and participation in higher education for working class mature student mothers needs to be comprehended as a complex psychosocial issue: and, that these issues need to be realized in the context of real women's lives – how they are lived and experienced affectively and relationally to family, culture, history, time and space. In order to speak directly to the argument and offer such insights, a psychoanalytically informed historical and cultural lens was applied to the data in Chapter Five. Vital to arguments of aspiration are knowledge and understandings of the conditions for change: ways in which change becomes possible or is prevented, and affect might be implicated. Adopting Guattari's method of 'Schizo-analytic Cartography' as a theoretical framework is able to offer an explanation of this process through time and space. In this analysis

space and place become central in the creation, and shifting of embodied conscious and unconscious assemblages (subjectivity) (Walkerdine, 2013). This is a framework that has been used by Walkerdine (2011, 2013, 2014) and through which I could make sense of my own journey into and through academia. There is not the scope within this chapter to fully explain this complex theoretical analysis and the way in which Walkerdine incorporates Guattari's work into her own, but a full explanation and its provenance can be found in Walkerdine (2011; 2013; 2014). Some basic explanation of the concepts, their relationality and functionally is however necessary.

As Walkerdine explains, Guattari understands the unconscious as existing as four inter-related domains of experience which make up a 'Schizo-analytic Cartography'. Each of these four zones act as a mode of perception and are 'meta models' rather than a "definitive structural model of an unconscious process, able to render its truth or meaning" (Holmes, p. 9, cited in Walkerdine 2014). Walkerdine explains these four zones as translating as follows: Firstly, 'the ground beneath ones feet' is the sense of containment one experiences from the rhythms and refrains of 'walking through one's life'; secondly, 'the turbulence of social experience' relates to modes of relationality; the third zone, 'the blue skies of ideas' is supposed as the importance of thinking; the final concept, 'the rhythmic insistence of walking dreams' is the demarcation of fantasy and reality. These four zones form an emotional or affective geography – a psycho-geography (Walkerdine 2011, 2013, 2014). These zones are connected to Existential Territories; a place of sensory experience and affect and where one's subjectivity, as an assemblage, emerges and comes into being, marking the boundaries of affective bodies in an existential sense.

Another vital concept is Guattari's 'Incorporeal Universe'. This is a means of thinking about moving away from existing and familiar territories and towards something strange and unknown, space which can be embodied, but has not yet been created. How to achieve this without being overwhelmed by anxiety and endangering a return or 're-territorialisation' to the safety of the familiar was what Guattari, Walkerdine (2011, 2013, 2014) and now Chapter Five, tries to understand. Following Walkerdine's analytic exemplar, which set out how the concepts may be understood and applied in terms of class transition, I adopted the method of schizo-analysis in the first analytic chapter to 'map' the trajectory of one working class mature student mother, Tanya : from a chronically unemployed woman and mother, to mature student, to nurse.

#### **4.15.2. Chapter Six**

The thesis has also argued that within neo-liberal assumptions around aspiration and social mobility there is an implicit moral imperative for the female working class mind (and by implication body) to transform through the vehicle of education. The data in Chapter Five, were analysed to reveal the more unconscious elements of aspiration, motivation and participation, which the thesis also argues are a vital element of these concepts. The data were interrogated in relation to the women's identity as working class, lone mothers, using the emergent theme of respectability and two dominant constructions of motherhood within neo-liberalism: the 'Yummy Mummy' and 'Chav Mum', to guide the analysis. Psychoanalytic insights and concepts such as 'splitting' and 'projection' were used

to show the unconscious identity work undertaken, providing insight into the 'psychic landscape' of class pathologisation and desire for transformation (Reay 2005, p.911).

#### **4.15.3. Chapter Seven**

The data in Chapter Seven, were analysed in relation to the unexpected emergent theme of trauma. In order to work with this data I adopted the methods of Todres (2007) and Wertz et al 2011. Todres (2007) developed an interpretive method of understanding through the compilation of composite narratives, presented in the first person. These are based on the researchers own understandings through experience and engagement with the data and academic literature (Todres 2007).

Demonstrating similarities of experience, staying close to the text I identified themes emerging from across the women's narratives from their accounts of childhood through to what they feel education has given them. These were felt experiences and meanings and included, feeling 'growing up', belonging, not fitting in, feelings of responsibility, of lack of control, a lack of feeling safe, resilience; feelings and meanings around family dynamics, motherhood, aspiration, study choices, emotional independence, attitudes of friends and family toward education, a place of safety, self change and benefits of education. This analysis was presented as a composite case to suggest the meanings of education, in making links to trauma and higher education. A second analysis interrogated the meaning of one of the emergent themes (meanings) namely; education as a place of safety. Data were then further analysed around this theme to deepen understanding and show specificity of meanings. The data were also interrogated using psychoanalytic concepts to make

connections between the individual women's biographies and their career aspirations.

#### **4.16. Knowing me - Knowing you: Representing Working Class Mature Student others**

In this study I have delved into the most intimate and emotional parts of the women's private and personal social worlds in order to make them public in an academic realm (Ribbens and Edwards 1998). As social researchers, how we select and use data and the manner in which it is eventually presented requires careful consideration. The final interviews with the women, during which, I shared my initial interpretations and received their feedback were invaluable in contributing not only to the analytic process, but also in forming the basis of the way in which the women are represented in the thesis and their 'voices' being heard (Ribbens and Edwards 1998, p. 17). In the three analytic chapters which follow, the women are represented in a way which aims to disrupt and refute the pathologising deficit discourses circulating in relation to working class mothers and higher education. In representing their voices, the words of the women are italicised in the forthcoming chapters.

Issues surrounding selection and use of data were particularly relevant when thinking about and working with the very difficult material around classed childhood experiences and the theme of trauma which emerged from analysis. I wanted very much to tell the women's stories in order to show exactly the massive acts of courage, strength and resilience involved in their lives, but I was afraid that in the telling of their experiences, I might further add to the pathologisation of working

class lives and families and position them as victims. It has been important throughout the empirical chapters then, to emphasise the historical and cultural placing and specificity of these events (Walkerdine et al 2014) and present an impression of the psychosocial forces moulding these events and the subjectivities of the people involved. These issues are reflected in my decision to present Chapter Five as a case study. It centres around the struggles of class and gender faced by one woman, Tanya, who could be understood as a ‘poster girl’ for Government educational campaign, and the way in which she negotiates the successful completion of her nursing degree at a local university.

Chapter six is a thematic chapter centred around two dominant and opposing representations of motherhood within neo-liberalism – the ‘Chav Mum’ and ‘Yummy Mummy’. Here the marginalised status of working class single mother is highlighted in order to refute socio-political and media representations and discourses which, as discussed in Chapter Two, surround this group in a pathologising way in relation to motherhood and aspiration.

Despite the wealth of data I could have drawn on in this project, because of the very sensitive material disclosed in the interviews, I made the decision not to utilise significant portions of data and to omit certain features/characteristics to prevent (and protect) the participants being rendered visible to potential readers. This is reflected especially in the decision to present the emergent theme of trauma and difficult life experiences mentioned above through the use of a composite case

described in the previous section. Because of issues of deductive disclosure (Kaiser 2009) it was also necessary to use new pseudonyms in the last part of the chapter and ensure that the data used did not automatically connect to specific women.

Disconnecting specific events and their series from specific women, I feel has surmounted some of my concern, making the women's self recognition less likely. A fuller account of my rationale, an explanation of Todres (2007) and Wertz et al (2011) approach and its provenance is further set out in Chapter Seven, which considers the links between trauma, higher education and identity. The threat of possible harm to the women through representation is an ongoing concern, beyond the completion of thesis and as such, careful consideration will be given to possible harm in any future academic writings (ESRC 2015).

#### **4.17. Conclusion**

The last two chapters have been concerned with a full presentation and discussion of the entire research process which formed the basis of inquiry, setting the stage for what was found by explaining why and how (Stanley 1984). The present chapter has completed this account and has been concerned with explaining: principles of ethics, how the psychosocial interviews were conducted, the handling of data, the data analysis process, ethical and methodological reflections and a discussion of representation in relation to the working class mature student mothers. In using this psychosocial methodology, I do not suggest that it provides a magic key to a door of conscious and unconscious processes related to the women's aspiration and motivation in higher education, no-researcher or paradigm of research can accomplish such direct access. Rather I contend that the methods used are able to

offer a valid means of understanding the phenomena and provide an alternative version of understanding. I have highlighted however, that it is not without issue for the lone, novice researcher. What follows next are three empirical chapters presented as: a Case Study, A Thematic Chapter and a Composite Case, based on the psychosocial analysis of the data. The chapters make no claims of being either exhaustive or indeed comprehensive in their interpretation of the data, rather they are subjective interpretations of the emergent themes formed through working reflexively with my own subjectivity and emotions and an eclectic range of psychoanalytically informed approaches and techniques brought to bear because of their confluence with the explorative aims of the research. The chapters aim however, to take the reader as a passenger, through the reflexive analysis which formed the interpretation. Without which, interpretations may appear to leave little room for alternative explanations. The next chapter of the thesis, Chapter Five, is a case study which explicitly explores aspiration and motivation through a psychosocial lens, utilising the work of Guattari and the analytic methods of Walkerdine (2011, 2013, 2014), to chart the way in which change and transformation and participation in higher education is possible for one working class mature student mother.

## **5.**

### **Chapter Five:**

#### **Mapping Fantasy, Imagination, Action and Movement: A Case Study of Tanya**

##### **5.1. Introduction**

The literature discussed in chapter Two has made clear that embarking upon higher education is complicated by issues of class and gender which are part of, but go beyond, structural barriers of inequality and oppression. A main argument of the thesis is that these complications and barriers exist at the level of the psychosocial which render them invisible in terms of dominant understandings of aspiration. Such psychosocial processes can make educational transitions difficult and painful to negotiate, surrounded by confusion, conflict and contradictions, and on an affective register there are some important consequences for subjectivity. The thesis has also questioned social mobility as an unequivocal good, and has again drawn attention to the affects, conflicts and contradictions involved in becoming educationally successful. This chapter addresses both these arguments and offers insight into what is at stake for working class mature student mothers, but also their families; the affective risks and the costs of higher education and what these might mean in terms of subjectivity.

Also, addressing a main argument of the thesis, the Chapter argues that rather than a simple lack of aspiration in the working classes as implied within policy rhetoric, it

is the embodied and affective experiences of class and gender, as it is lived and experienced relationally, which are the issues surrounding aspiration for working class mature student mothers in higher education. In focussing on ‘ordinary affects’: “things that happen in everyday life in sensations, expectations, daydreams, encounters, habits of relating and strategies to name only a few, but which result in one feeling something” (Stewart 2007, p. 2), the chapter illustrates how aspiration may be formulated, facilitated and constrained relationally by others through psychosocial affects and affective practices and familiar ways of being .

To do this, following the analytic exemplar of Walkerdine (2011, 2013, 2014), the conceptual apparatus of Guattari’s ‘Schizoanalytic Cartography’ is applied to the data which is able to take into account the affective, relational, historical and cultural elements of change. The data is presented in the form of a case study: Tanya, to show, on an affective register, the conditions for, and the points at which movement and/or stasis may occur during attempts at change. In mapping aspects of the data that relate to Tanya’s affect, fantasies and imagination the chapter is able to provide psychosocial insight into the ways in which aspiration might work, and how change might become possible. Centralising affect, this first empirical chapter aims to offer then, a more nuanced understanding of the psychosocial complexity of aspiration as a context specific process, in relation to real classed and gendered lives and biographies. It lays a solid base for the aims and argument of the thesis, on which, the two subsequent Chapters build.

In so doing it draws on, and builds upon, the literature presented in Chapters Two, and Three which together argue for an understanding of aspiration as a complex psychosocial concept, and the imperative that it be studied as such, using concepts from psychoanalytic theory, which are able to take into account its affective, relational, historical and cultural elements.

## **5.2. Choosing the ‘poster-girl’ as a Case Study**

When selecting case studies for presentation in the thesis, depth of analysis, and space, meant there were difficult choices to be made. The lives of each of the women interviewed are unique and fascinating and the data could be mined at depth to speak eloquently to the research in many different ways<sup>4</sup>. However, in this chapter, I have chosen to present Tanya’s journey as a case study. Tanya was selected because firstly, the themes emerging across the sample, coalesce in Tanya’s case, and secondly, in terms of neo-liberal discourse and government policy, she could best be understood as a ‘success story’, a poster girl for neo-liberal Government campaign and an exemplar for social mobility. Her learning commenced at ‘grass roots’ level in her community, through Government funded initiatives designed to improve and inspire aspiration, social mobility and welfare. Her learning continued at the local college before embarking on a Nursing Degree.

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<sup>4</sup> On completion of this thesis I plan to explore and present the stories of the women as both further case studies in the way I have here, and comparatively through journal papers and presentations.

Not only did Tanya have aspiration, but she managed to complete a nursing degree and become a nurse. While this might speak to the success of community based interventions, it says nothing about how Tanya herself experienced this educational transition and managed to achieve success. How did she manage to move beyond the stoic acceptance of her life and lot, associated with working class experience (Walkerdine 1997; Barker 1989) Where, in fact, did her apparently newly found aspiration and motivation come from? What were the mechanisms which enabled this process, and how did she manage to sustain them? What tensions were created in this? These are all important questions which need to be addressed if other women like Tanya are to be aided to become educationally successful and add to the labour market, and we are to make sense of aspiration in all its psychosocial complexity. A 'Schizo-analytic Cartography' is able to offer such insights (Walkerdine, 2011, 2013).

### **5.3. Standing on the Shoulders of Giants**

In looking at aspiration, and arguing for understandings of its psychosocial nature, Valerie Walkerdine (2011,2013) has utilised the work of Felix Guatarri, a radical psychoanalyst, to highlight the fundamental relevance of both the materiality, embodied and subjective experience of place, in relation to education and class transition. She uses the work as an analytic methodology to think about the way in which place and affect are entangled, and the role of fantasy and the creative power of the imagination, in relation to how change, movement and transition might be possible for the working class subject. She contends, it is the creative power of imagination in relation to overcoming anxiety which creates the potential for

forward movement into new and crucially, safe, geographical and imaginative spaces for subjectivity to occupy (Walkerdine 2013). A sense of being held or feeling held emotionally; ontological safety or “going on being”, (Bick 1968) is central to this movement (Walkerdine 2015, p. 12).

In adopting Guattari’s method of ‘Schizo-analytic Cartography’ in her work, she was able to map the educational trajectory of one working class girl, Nicky, who despite initially not doing well in school, managed to mobilise her fantasy to be a student in order to leave her home town for university and a successful research career. What emerges from this ‘schizo- analysis’, which maps the trajectory or ‘psycho-geographical journey’ of Nicky’s fantasy, to imagination, to action, is a picture of the way in which space, place, the material, the virtual, fantasy and imagination meld and coalesce affectively to offer potentiality in terms of forward movement and change into the unknown (Walkerdine 2013). The present chapter aims to follow this analytic exemplar.

#### **5.4. Applying Guattari’s concepts to consider Tanya’s Transition into Higher Education**

Central to Guattari’s ‘schizo-analysis’ are Existential Territories and these form the major part of this conceptual analysis. Existential territories are experienced through sensory and affective experience of a place. According to Guattari, subjectivity and possibility; who one can be, and where, are formed through four domains of the unconscious which are interconnected and make up an existential

territory. He submits these as: the ‘ground beneath ones feet’, related to holding; ‘the turbulence of social experience’, related to relationality; ‘the blue skies of ideas’, related to thinking; and ‘walking dreams’, related to the imagination. Together, these form an affective landscape, which a ‘schizo-analysis’ is able to map (Walkerline 2014).

Using the concepts explained, expanding upon them and explaining new ones as the analysis unfolds, this present analysis identifies and maps the Existential Territories, real and imagined through which Tanya travels across time and space during her academic transition, and the way in which she experiences these affectively. The purpose in looking at these territories and the associated affects is to gain some understanding into how Tanya made the transition from a chronically unemployed woman whose life centred around the family and the Estate, to becoming a university student and a nurse; the prerequisites - how this gradual transformation came about and developed.

Tanya is the first person in her family to go to University. Like many working class lives, Tanya’s life and career were not strategically planned in a series of informed choices as middle class lives tend to be (Ball et al 2002; Reay 2009) and neither does Tanya wake up one morning and suddenly decide that she is going to be a nurse. Her journey and transition are far more gradual and unfolding. Tanya gathers her aspiration along the way, “swept away by a becoming other, carried beyond her

familiar existential territories” (Guattari 1995, p. 93 cited in Walkerdine 2011, 2013).

In this analysis I try to identify the acts of imagination or ‘waking dreams’, and the relational mechanisms and forms of holding, which facilitate and threaten this risky move from her *routine* on the Milburn Estate into the uncharted territory of higher education and beyond. The following section presents the reader with a brief overview of Tanya’s material existence in space and place. An understanding of the ‘ground beneath’ Tanya’s feet, it’s ‘holding’ nature and processes of relationality, are central to this analysis.

### **5.5. Introducing Tanya - Space, Place and Materiality**

Tanya<sup>5</sup>, is a 34 year old single mother to two sons; a 1 year old and a 14 year old , and is in the third year of a nursing degree at a local post 1992 university. Living separately from her partner Scott, who is father to her youngest son , Tanya lives and was brought up in Milburn<sup>6</sup>, a council estate in the South Wales Valleys, part of a post-industrial community once centre stage in the worldwide production of steel, iron and coal, and later home to major manufacturing. The shifts from these industries towards knowledge and service based industries meant a loss of employment in the area. But there were other losses too. From my own experience of living in a community which centred around industry, I know there is a very strong sense of camaraderie, and relationship boundaries are fuzzy between

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<sup>5</sup> All names have been changed for purposes of anonymity.

<sup>6</sup> Milburn is a pseudonym changed for purposes of anonymity.

friendship and family. Walkerdine and Jimenez' (2012) work in 'Steeltown' has illustrated how, for the residents of post industrial communities the rhythms of everyday life, as affective practices, provide a strong sense of community; a means of bonding, of mutual support, of sticking together and *getting through it* or *getting on with it* providing the habitants with a sense of safety and ontological security. As Reay et al (2009) highlight, coping and resilience in adversity are traits often more subscribed to the working classes, tacit 'givens' within working class contexts, being read as stoicism. Bit by bit, familiar ways of being, the familiar affective rhythms and practices that forged a sense of community and family, have slowly been eroded. This process of loss then can be understood as social and affective. It is psychosocial.

Since the 1980's, the Milburn estate particularly, is an area of high unemployment, ill-health, family breakdown, long-term reliance on benefits, notorious for high levels of deprivation, violence and crime, and it has been pathologised both locally and in wider national media. When chatting to the education support worker on the estate who lives there and, who put me in touch with Tanya, she angrily and resentfully remarked upon how historically, whenever the media interviewed anyone from Milburn it was always outside the same rundown, almost derelict buildings in the precinct. It was as if to the outside world these buildings had to symbolise the broken down lives and hopelessness of the people living on the estate. There is then a strong understanding of how the residents there are constructed and viewed by the outside world (Hey and Bradford 2006). This class inequality, lived and experienced at the level of the gut (Wetherell 2012) through what Reay (2005)

terms ‘a psychic economy’ is important. Drawing on recent class research, Wetherell contends that class position generates a specific affective style and the relational nature and affective patterning of class and material inequality could be more pervasive in sustaining difference than other indicators such as lifestyle choices because:

affect follows, regulates and composes social relations and social value. Hinterlands of exclusions, vicious differentiations and pockets of pride, fear and envy are created (Sayer 2005) along with sets of comparisons and subjectifications blighting life chances (Charlesworth 2000; Walkerdine et al, 2003; Rogaly and Taylor 2009)

(Wetherell, 2012, p.111).

But, within the estate there is still a very strong sense of belonging, of reciprocity and sameness, within and across families and the community . Both Tanya’s parents and her sister live on the estate as well as her mother’s siblings. It is ‘close knit’, the community acting as an extended family to the residents, and not just in terms of kinship ties. It is a place where according to Tanya, friends and neighbours *are like sisters*, and support workers *like mothers*. We might assume that the concept of family then, both real and imagined, and what this concept might offer the residents: a place of relational belonging, of safety, of protection , to be important to our purpose in understanding, as I try to develop and illustrate below.

The analysis entails identifying affects associated with the existential territories Tanya inhabits. In the following section I begin to construct an affective map of movement through time and space, through embodied affective places or existential territories, to a dreamed of future, in order to consider a way in which the possibility of becoming other, and educational success came about for Tanya (Walkerdine 2014). The starting point of this analysis is Tanya's existential situatedness in Milburn.

### **5.6. Affect, Life Before Education and the 'Schiz'**

It is certainly not my intention to pathologise Tanya's working class life. But, it is impossible to escape the fact that her life has been difficult, and she has experienced some major traumas and emotional stress<sup>7</sup>. Tanya told me that her mother's disability and father's shift work meant that from the age of 10 she *took responsibility* at home for domestic chores, and caring for her younger sister. She left school with no qualifications, her only employment being a part-time barmaid at a local club before her pregnancy at 20. The pregnancy was unplanned and her boyfriend left her for another woman whom he had also made pregnant. Disappointed and let down, Tanya describes her life at this time as doing her *own routine* centred around cleaning and caring for the needs of her baby and her wider family:

Tanya: *I built my life around my mother and my nan. I would go to my mother's...I would clean my house in the morning and then go down there (Mother's house) and*

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<sup>7</sup> Some details of events have been omitted for purposes of anonymity.

*clean her house, then I would go to my Nan and see to my Nan, go back to my mother, make tea, come home put the baby to bed – do it...sort everything out – do it all again the next day and that was it until Jason was about 9.*

These familiar locations; the homes<sup>8</sup>, and estate or as Guattari terms, the Existential Territories, are real sites where, according to Guattari, Tanya literally comes into existence in time and space; the landscape, the sights, the sounds, the sensations, the smells, tastes, the everyday routines all, according to Guattari, are ‘refrains’ which, unconsciously and affectively ‘hold her in place’ and give her a sense of “going on being” by marking the affective boundaries of her affective body (Bick 1987; Walkerdine 2010; Walkerdine 2015). They are also the places where Tanya learned a particular type of femininity. Through a complex set of identifications, she learned how to be a daughter, a granddaughter, a sister, a mother and a woman, living on the Milburn Estate. She presents an identity centred around motherhood, family and the domestic sphere. It is a form of idealised Welsh working class femininity central and prolific in many post-industrial communities, echoing the legend of the ‘Welsh Mam’ (Rees 1988). As Page and Jha (2009, p. 106) contend, girls are still often trained to be housebound, caring and self sacrificing and a common trope my own mother used to convey a young mother’s respectability was “she’s a good little mother, she never goes anywhere” .

Several things are important to keep in mind as the reader moves through the schizo-analysis. Firstly, Tanya’s *own routine*; the refrains which ‘hold her in

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<sup>8</sup> For the purposes of this analysis the existential territory of home relates to Tanya’s own home, her mother’s home and grandmother’s home since she spent equal time in each, with the same people.

place' (Bick 1987; Walkerdine 2010; Walkerdine 2015) which, form part of her subjectivity and ways of relating. Secondly, the effects of these ways of being; the affect created. Through her *own routines*; the different refrains or affective practices centred around her care of the home and family, femininity is embodied in a particular way and the practice produces inter-subjective affective bonds which facilitate and deny certain conscious and unconscious emotions, feelings and actions within the family unit. These rhythms may be understood as 'containing' for Tanya, the family and indeed the wider community. In object relation terms, this sense of containment is vitally important because it is crucial to existence. It is this sense of being 'held', according to Esther Bick (1968), which gives us both a sense of separation from the mother and hence a sense of self, and a continuity of being (Walkerdine 2011, 2013). In other words in this Existential Territory, Tanya learns how to be a woman who *manages...gets on with it*. Something that historically within her community has been an essential lesson to learn in order to survive the anxiety of economic uncertainty (Walkerdine and Jimenez 2012).

When I interviewed Tanya, she appeared anxious and highly strung. I did not feel that this was in relation to our meeting, rather that it was her usual disposition. Despite having never met her before, she was very forthcoming. After hugging me enthusiastically to thank me for the biscuits I had brought, she started to tell me her story before I could get her to sign the consent form and turn the tape recorder on. Immediately our relationship was informal and familiar, eased I think by the way the community is used to the involvement of community based agencies. I was introduced to her by a community worker who was *like a mother* to her and there

was an already implied level of trust and perhaps safety. After the interview I received a text saying how nice it was to meet me, and apologising for having cried during the interview – something she said she hadn't done in some time. The interview, taking place in Tanya's home was saturated with palpable affect and I noted in my diary how:

*at times her talk was like a wall of water coming at me and afterwards I was completely exhausted, had a headache and needed to go to bed. Interviewing her felt like I was juggling with jelly, as her narrative jumped around from emotional story to emotional story.*

While we talked, despite her admitted anxiety for almost clinical standards of cleanliness and neatness in her home (I would have eaten my lunch from her kitchen floor), she ignored her baby son, who, more a 'whirlwind' than most toddlers, repeatedly pulled things from cupboards and emptied them over the floor, put ornaments in the washing machine, smeared food on the leather sofa, climbed onto a chair to play with the microwave and repeatedly threw Tanya's mobile phone and the television handset onto the tiled floor, both which fell to pieces each time. At the time I felt overwhelmed by this and despite her exasperation and the obvious anxiety caused by his undoing of her domestic work, she wasn't inclined to intervene. She told me that to avoid this unbearable situation with her son, she spends as much time as possible in other places. I felt this, drew attention to the emotionally amplified relational way in which Tanya occupies this Existential Territory. This was confirmed throughout the interview through her statements such as *I'm on pins sometimes ...I was hysterical...I would feel bombarded.* This

point will be further demonstrated and made clear through the data used throughout the chapter. The next section considers the affective, relational way in which Tanya has historically occupied these existential territories.

### **5.6.1. Cleaning and Taking Responsibility From a Young Age**

In the Existential Territories of her mother's house and grandmother's house Tanya needed to take responsibility for domestic and caring roles from a young age. Tanya says that she, both then and now, feels under-valued and dominated by what she feels are unfair caring expectations placed upon her. She feels that her mother has *ruled my life sort of thing...I'm not being nasty*, and that her efforts are never good enough for her family. Tanya came to learn at a young age that she had responsibility for keeping everything and everyone going. While this might be an exaggerated responsibility in that it was felt by Tanya rather than explicitly expressed of her, this situation was anxiety provoking to her.

Tanya: *but I think I had a responsibility when I was young – I would say 10...because my sister was younger she was like 6 – there was four years between us but like I was always the one that had to go to the shop, I was always the one that had to do this and that. I can even remember younger than Jason (son) ironing uniforms for school – my mother would do it but I would want it prop...you know perfect like, you know it had to be...the crease had to be perfect in my blouse and everything like that, but I did take responsibility I think from a young age looking back. You know like reflecting back, even down to like I was in junior school and my*

*sister was in infants and even down to I had to pick my sister up from school. So they would leave us out of school early just to go down the bottom end, like the infant side to collect her so I could take her home.*

Since a child Tanya's standards of neatness and cleanliness could be described as to the point of the neurotic, and she admits that her cleaning *routines* are part of her life. What Tanya describes since childhood is described by her as OCD behaviour. When she started university, despite leaving for her placement at 5.30am, she would have to clean the house before she left. Not being able to do her *routines* was unthinkable at this time, – *oh don't even talk about it*. She is unable to *imagine* not doing these things because of the level of anxiety this would produce. She told me that she could not relax unless it was done, and that it gave her a sense of achievement.

### **5.6.2. Becoming a Mum and Feeling Grown Up**

Also within these Existential Territories Tanya became a single mother, being abandoned and let down by the baby's father. Outwardly at this time she projected to the outside world a feeling of being strong and feeling *grown up*, brought about she says by her early responsibilities, *...but how young was I really!*. Aided by the support of her mother to move into her own council home, what she did at this difficult time was *to cope... to manage... to get on with it like a grown up*, like other women on the estate have done before her, pushing away the pain and anxiety of the situation.

### 5.6.3. The Nightmare

A few years later, Tanya was involved in a horrific incident where her friend and her friend's baby were battered by a partner, the baby dying as a result. Tanya says that she does not know how she coped with this *nightmare*, that *it is like a gap in her life that [she] just doesn't mention because [she] doesn't like talking about it*. Her friend, *who was like a sister*, subsequently moved in with her for some months in order for Tanya to support her. However, despite always being close growing up together, she says that the incident had a destroying effect on their relationship;

Tanya: *instead of making us stay like sisters, it sort of parted us kind of thing and she went out with a boy that I used to go out with – he went to prison and when he came out Tracey married him...I could write a book... but you are better off getting on with it.*

### 5.6.4. Managing and Getting On With It

What this analysis describes thus far, is an existence in a time and place which is simultaneously safe and unsafe for Tanya. There is familiarity and safety in the affective daily rhythms or refrains, but there are also troubling, anxiety provoking family dynamics and she has experienced huge trauma, loss and disappointment. One way of dealing with difficult affect is to defend against it by not thinking about it. To switch off from it, push it down or block it out and carry on. As shown above, this was a familiar trope used throughout the interview (*you keep going..., I*

*try to block it out and carry on..., you are better off getting on with it..., you just carry on with things don't you..., you have got to cope with that...).* Although difficult and painful, outwardly and consciously Tanya has coped, perhaps by drawing on the resilience and stoicism ascribed to her working class context. *Managing and getting on with it* is what needs to be achieved in order to achieve successful femininity on the Milburn Estate. During our interview I was able to witness Tanya doing just that on two occasions.

The first was in the way she chose to not intervene in her son's escapades described above. The second was when her sister, Cheryl telephoned and sent her text messages fifteen times, each time the phone being allowed to ring, intruding on the interview. Each time Tanya carried on with what she was telling me over the ringing in the background, ignoring the phone calls. This was despite my asking her on several occasions if she would like to stop for a while and answer, as it might be important. She told me that she didn't want to because her sister *will only have a go at me* for being unavailable to them. The last text message she received read, *answer your phone you ignorant bitch*. This 'backroom view' (Mannay and Morgan, 2015) gave me a clear sense of the demands and expectations Tanya had described her family placed upon her. But, it also provided insight into the inter-subjective dynamics of the family and the affect surrounding the relationships.

Whilst these interruptions didn't seem to bother Tanya as much as they did me, and she was able to block these out far better than I, I felt she only achieved this in a

very limited way. The affect, the anxiety was still very palpable to me. In trying to make sense of this, working with the data later I returned to how I felt during the interview and also paid attention to what I was feeling when re-reading the transcripts. From both I got a sense of chaos, helplessness and overwhelm. As mentioned earlier, after the interview I had a headache and needed to go to bed: I was exhausted. These feelings contrasted starkly with the ultra neat and clean home with which I was presented, and Tanya worked so hard to maintain. I took these feelings to be incidents of transference, pointing towards how Tanya might be feeling at a psychic level. Tanya's environment or Existential Territory could be understood as reducing her power to act, and she was taking steps to take control and manage this threat through her cleaning and her central role in the family. By doing something like cleaning obsessively, she was active and in control of something which might have helped to persevere with a sense of existence.

Helplessness, overwhelm and exhaustion are not options for Tanya. It is the 'refrain' her cleaning routine formed in childhood, which enables her to keep on going and feel safe in this Existential Territory. It is not difficult to imagine how any aspiration in the midst of such psychic survival gets lost. Keeping safe both materially and psychologically are what becomes paramount.

### **5.7. Possibilities for Change in the Existential Territories**

On the estate Tanya's options and possibilities are limited. The ones she mentioned were being unemployed with children, ritually cleaning homes all day; being a bar

maid working in the local club or like her friend on her access course, she could be a dinner lady at the local school – these are her ‘choices’. How then do other possibilities open up for Tanya? It is the ‘schiz,’ which destabilises the ego, which according to Guattari makes this happen. This next section of the analysis describes this process for Tanya.

### **5.7.1. Relationality, ‘Learning to Live’ and the Schiz**

With some other local women, Tanya attended a course which took place in a local community centre on the Milburn Estate called ‘Learning to Live’<sup>9</sup>. She very much enjoyed attending this educational class and felt *it was like switching off, before having to come back into reality again, but that was like a switching off point you know*.

During this time she enjoyed the close support of the education worker, Leanne, who was fantasised and imagined to be *like a mother* to her, and nurtured and encouraged her. Leanne’s support and ‘spoon feeding’ in the early days;– getting to know the women on the course and their lives, who they are connected to, what has happened to them, their stories seemed to enable a sense of feeling properly supported, making the women feel valued. In a sense, this fosters an understanding of learning, growth and development within the context of their own lives. Rather than denying the past in order to change and move on, and trying to make the women into something else, the women were able to acknowledge their past and take

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<sup>9</sup> Pseudonym for Community Education project changed for purposes of anonymity.

it with them on their journey; the people, the relationships, the culture and traditions of how things are done in the area. There is a sense of constancy and change is gradual: it is like bathing in the sea when the tide takes you but you don't notice until suddenly you became aware that you are very far away from the others on the beach, suddenly you are somewhere else (in space and place) .

That she is able to switch off from life outside suggests the space as one of relaxation or holding. Outside of that space, the analysis, in considering Tanya's existential situatedness has suggested that Tanya might feel that psychically, she has to fight for her existence. Guattari's work is based on his experience of patients with psychosis, who tend to split off difficult realities, going instead into fantasy in order to feel protected and safe. While it is impossible to say the extent to which this was felt consciously at the time by Tanya, we might assume that at the level of unconscious fantasy a split occurred, creating a place where Tanya felt safe, away from *reality* where life can be painful.

According to Guattari, when we are in situations which are so full of affect, there is danger of being submerged by anxiety and sensation. In an earlier section of the analysis, I suggested that Tanya tries to control her messy and chaotic reality by literally cleaning it and making it neat and tidy. It is hard to imagine the huge psychic effort it must take to keep managing in this way. I suggest that there becomes a point when feelings/anxiety can no longer be resolved in this way for Tanya. It isn't hard to imagine how psychically one might get to the point where

the feeling of being caught in the only place one knows; a familiar territory, but engulfed by the sensations and affect of the space, is perhaps, even more terrifying than the unknown. In this analysis, it is at this point that something opens up for Tanya, making change a possibility.

According to Guattari, having existing models on which to model or imagine change, are vital to this process. Through her participation in 'Learning to Live' she has been provided with such a model: Leanne, who was fantasised as being *like a mother*. Through her relationship with Leanne, we might understand Tanya as able to start to construct her own cartography (Walkerdine 2011) bringing forth a schiz an attempt at change through participation in further education. So, for Tanya the initial experience of education was a place of escape, where she could *switch off* and break away from feelings of anxiety and other unwanted affects and feel more relaxed. In this way then, we could say that education initially becomes a means of managing painful affects and is a containing place of safety. This illustrates "the inner realm is where the crucial shifts in bedrock begin to throw a person off balance, signalling the necessity to change and move on to a new footing in the next stage of development" (Sheehy 1976, p. 29-30, cited in Walters 2000).

Thus far, the analysis suggests that Tanya's feelings of relaxation and belonging, which evoke a sense of safety or being held/contained, versus feeling anxiety, created a point of tension. It is this point of tension, or schiz which allowed Tanya to think, imagine and fantasise about other possibilities in other places; other places

she might be able to *switch off* and feel safe. In this case, it is the local college, based in the town and away from the estate.

### **5.8. A New Incorporeal Universe and a Line of Flight**

Guattari uses the concept of ‘Incorporeal Universe’ to think about how it is possible to move from familiar existential territories into new, but as yet, unembodied places (Walkerline 2011; 2013; 2014). According to Guattari, it is through Tanya’s ‘waking dreams’ or fantasies and imagination that she is able to create a new Incorporeal Universe. Based on the sense of holding from her ‘Learning to Live’ course, she is able to imagine applying for University, studying to become a nurse, and learning to drive in order to get to the University and her necessary placements. To enable her do this she uses existing aspects of her subjectivity and draws on her affective routines/refrains. According to Gestalt therapist Perls, ‘learning is the discovery that something is possible’ (quoted in Walters 2000). In this way learning occurs when people can recognise and enrich the knowledge they already possess (Walters 2000). Tanya decides that she would like to become a nurse. In our interview, Tanya had emphasised how, she had always been a caring person. This narrative is part of a wider discourse of suitable work for women and a naturalisation of both their capacity to care (Hollway 2006) and their simple and sincere desire to do so. However, in effect, she uses her ‘caring’ as a line of flight that can take her toward something else. Enrolling on an Access to Care and Health Professions course at the local University, she uses skills she has honed in the family – what she feels she is good at and reproduces that somewhere else (the university and the local hospital), providing a sense of security and familiarity, allowing a sense of

anchoring to the past whilst moving forward. In connecting her aspiration and desire to learn to something she knows, in this case caring, it enables her to try to work out how to move to something different. Significantly, she is also building upon previous learning experience and the positive unconscious affect and safety she has already experienced in other learning environments. For Guattari, the unconscious is only tied to the past so long as there is nothing to capture an investment in the future (Walkerline 2011, 2013). In treading this familiar ground, a sense of safety is produced which enables her to move beyond the imagined Incorporeal Universe and to a new place, bringing a new Existential Territory into existence and making it a reality - in this case a post 1992 university to pursue a nursing degree .

This new Existential Territory is again a place surrounded with affect for Tanya, and there is much emotion and excitement around her acceptance to university:

*Tanya: "I'm pleased to tell you, you have been accepted". Well, I just burst out crying...I was hysterical and they were all going "oh its alright, its alright," and I was going 'oh thank you, you don't know how much this means to me and all this' – I feel emotional telling you, I was so chuffed – unbelievable, so chuffed I was innit. Well it was an eye opener! The first week in uni you just sit there thinking oh my god what are they on about, wha ,I was sittin like that (demonstrating a blank expression) I sat there now like that thinking I aven't got a clue.*

## **5.9. Re-Creating Family and Community in New Existential Territories and Other Women as Transitional Objects**

In these new Existential Territories (University and later the Hospital) Tanya is unsure of what she has to offer the nursing profession. This new ‘Transversal Subjectivity’ (subjectivity across different territories) is fragile and at risk at this time (Walkerdine 2011, 2013). Lacking in a traditional educational trajectory, qualifications and work experience, she lacks confidence in her abilities and she needs reassurance from tutors. Her life skills, resilience, empathy and communication; skills of the maternal space (Walsh 1996), are pointed out to her as surprising resources, reinforcing a ‘line of flight’ towards incorporating those life skills into a new subjectivity as a nurse (Walkerdine 2011, 2013).

### **5.9.1. Friends who are Like Sisters**

For Guattari, the gentle, safe, processual nature of transition is vital to successful action, movement and change. A change that is too sudden, or feels unsafe, would result in overturning the de-territorialisation. Without a sense of safety, and expressed support an ‘assignifying rupture’ is at stake, whereby the subject falls apart through an annihilating anxiety, re-territorialising to the old and familiar (Walkerdine 2011; 2013; 2014). Again, feeling ‘held’ then by the support of others, is key to Tanya’s continued transition into and through Higher Education. This section of the analysis further considers the gradual unfolding of Tanya’s aspiration and motivation to participate in higher education and the elements which facilitated and supported this. It is important to emphasise however, that Tanya does

not embark upon this next part of her journey alone. In order to tread where no-one else in her family has (University), she needs the support of other women like her, the friends that are *like sisters* in the local area who have also set their sights on a nursing degree. In this way a nursing career becomes something they can literally and psychically imagine and experience together in order to get swept beyond their familiar territories and open themselves up to gently becoming other (Guattari 2000; Walkerdine 2011).

In reflecting on her transition into university Tanya told me how essential support was to her journey: *you gotta have support Mel, you have*. She explained how when she started university she missed the close support, reassurance and ‘mothering’, provided by the course leaders in the community and local college, and craved this nurturing and containing element at university. The widening participation agenda has had implications for tutors and lecturers at university, and as personal tutors, tutors are encouraged to make themselves available to their students (Hey and Bradford 2009). Among the university staff, there was no-one to fantasise into the role of *mother* in this space. The mothering, sought by Tanya is a role which university staff are unable to commit to or don’t envisage as part of their remit. Feeling unsafe and lacking in confidence at this time, she was in danger of a re-territorialisation. Her relationship with another woman, who had made the transition to higher education at the same time became central to this Incorporeal Universe fully becoming an Existential Territory; a place in which she is able to come into being in a new and imaginative way as a student nurse. Knowing other

women like herself, seems to be essential for Tanya if she is to know and recognise herself in this new territory.

In order to feel safe, Tanya sought support from Linda, another woman student on her course, living locally to her and in similar circumstances, but viewed as more knowledgeable or “expert” than herself in terms of their nursing degree. In this respect, she could be fantasised into the role of mother. This advice and guidance developed into a more reciprocal arrangement whereby the women studied together and *bounced off each other*, learning becoming a shared endeavour and their relationship developing into a firm friendship. Without this relationship, Tanya claims she couldn’t have completed her first undergraduate year.

Her position in higher education became more precarious, again threatening a re-territorialisation when her maternity leave meant that she had to join the next year’s cohort. However, this situation was eased via both women’s strategic planning and a social networking site engendered a virtual relationship that acted as a point of contact and meant that on her return from maternity leave Tanya once more had a woman connected to her community she could identify with and share her journey.

Since Tanya had come from the previous year’s cohort, this positioned her as the expert, and she gained much pleasure and satisfaction from providing advice and guidance and this relationship also developed into a friendship and studying together. Later when Jo, her new friend, was doing her first placement, Tanya recognised that she would need reassurance and put her in touch with another point

of contact, linked to their community : *Zina is nice, she will be good to you* . Having her support recognised and appreciated (unlike at home) was very much valued by Tanya. During my visit she showed me the cards and notes of encouragement, thanks and congratulations that the women had exchanged, which demonstrated the salience of their relationships.

These points of contact developed into an informal support network system involving several women. The women who were more ‘expert’ in education, supported others who were less so, and a point of contact with someone like themselves - a means of touching base or keeping their foot in their community and culture while learning and moving forward was always maintained. Understood within the context of the post-industrial communities of which these women are part, where boundaries between family and friends are fuzzy, these connections are important. They gain strength and support through their sameness and they provide a sense of keeping together, of continuity and safety. They are in fact drawing on the same resources which, described earlier, historically in times of difficulties and transition held their communities together (Walkerdine and Jimenez, 2012). The women have themselves established an informal system of “paying it forward” or generalised reciprocity, a sociological concept important to social cohesion (Levi-Strauss 1949). It is this mutual and acknowledged support, the best bits of family life and community, of caring and feeling cared for, appreciating and feeling appreciated, I consider are key elements to Tanya staying in higher education.

In his theory, Guattari adjusts Winnicott's transitional object to include faces and landscapes. In these terms, the women may be understood as transitional objects, 'comfort blankets'<sup>10</sup> (Winnicott 1971) which allow Tanya to feel safe, held or contained giving her a continuity of being as she moves forward in her educational trajectory. The other women simultaneously enable her to anchor herself to her past and her culture in order to feel safe. Guattari terms this process as 'fixing into being' (Walkerdine 2011, 2013). But there is also the sense that one by one, these women themselves become 'expert', looked up to, and they are able to experience the role of container in a way that is appreciated and satisfying, giving them confidence in their own abilities and a sense of safety which allows further forward movement. In that sense they are both container and contained. What Tanya did then was to draw on the concept of family and community, and the refrains/affective practices of her existential existence in Milburn which gave her a sense of safety. She then, transferred and applied these to a new Existential Territory; the University, to create the sense of a new family and community, melding new and established refrains/affective practices. From what Tanya told me, despite her longing for, there isn't equal reciprocity and appreciation in her own family unit. She finds this in the women at 'Learning to Live', the College and University. It might be assumed that when Tanya experiences nurturing and reciprocity, Tanya fantasises others – friends, community workers into ideal and fantasised roles, endowing friends to be *like sisters* and community workers *like mothers*. They are the family relationships and affective practices which, from our interview, I got the impression she wished she had and fantasises them as such. A significant element of being able to stay in university then is about Tanya's ability to imagine and fantasise

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<sup>10</sup> Guattari does not use this term himself

family and community and then make those into a reality. She re-creates a new family and community in a new existential territory, but crucially it is linked to and based on her old one. Sadly, these informal support networks are not always available or easily accessed for mature students. Their absence could be assumed to result in a re-territorialisation; the affective pull of one's old life and identity to become stronger, preventing movement and change but providing continuity and security and the safety of familiar identities, familiar affective practices and ways of being. There have, however been other dangers of re-territorialisation during Tanya's educational journey and it is these that are the focus of the next section.

#### **5.10. Exploring the Reaction of Tanya's Family to her Education**

As I have suggested, Tanya could be understood as a 'poster girl' for the re-generation project on the Milburn Estate; however, as research suggests, addressing issues of intergenerational poverty and social mobility via higher education is far more complicated than raising aspiration (Walkerdine 2011, Archer 2013, Leathwood and Hey 2009; Hey and Leathwood 2009). As discussed in Chapter Two, for the working class subject the discovery of aspiration and desire to succeed can be felt as threatening to both self and others creating tensions between autonomy and belonging, safety and risk, stasis and transition (Reay 2005). As shown in earlier sections, Tanya's transition is one laden with affect, and her desire to be a nurse is not experienced in a straightforward way. She is deeply ambivalent, torn between the affective rhythms and expectations of her centred around her old life and subjectivity *I would still do my cleaning* and the possibility of new becomings; being someone else, somewhere else (a nurse in a doctor's surgery or hospital ward).

Although thrilled at being accepted to university and managing to stay in education to pursue her nursing degree, her complex relationship with her wider family as a 'border crosser' (Lucey et al 2003, p. 287) and cultural and gendered expectations around family and motherhood, are a constant threat to her studentship; both a source of anxiety and conflict. For Tanya it is not lack of aspiration that is problematic but rather the complex relations and affective practices within which Tanya's aspiration is ensconced or anchored (Walkerdine 2011). The analysis then needed to pay attention to two intimately intertwined sets of affect connected to risk and issues of safety: those of Tanya and those of her family in relation to her new subjectivity as student nurse.

In their study, Britton & Baxter (2001) found that managing conflict and changes to identity was more arduous to working class mature students than their middle class counterparts, and negotiating alteration in family relationships was particularly difficult for female students in comparison to males. The following extract highlights the precarious nature of Tanya's position, and once again illustrates the complex set of emotional and relational challenges inherent to working class aspiration and educational transitions in terms of gender, class and subjectivity.

#### **5.10.1. Relational Sabotage**

Tanya describes a day when her eldest son was ill, she was pregnant and just before going into her first year examinations she received an abusive telephone call from her sister.

Tanya: *I don't want to argue or I don't want arguments – life is too short for arguments and all that. But like they do...they have...given me a terrible time, because well...and I think and my friends do say - your sister is jealous, she is jealous and I just think she is pathetic some of the things she does. Some things she has said. It is awful. Dreadful what she has said – like phoning social services, you should be ashamed she said, you should be in the house with the baby, ...you shouldn't be in uni...what kind of mother are you leaving your son... and I said Scott what can I do, I can't win – whatever I do is wrong, it's not, it's not good enough..... – I do feel guilty coz like I said to Scott, even a few weeks ago - I am finishing, I am quitting, I said I need to go back to what I used to be before – my mother, I need to be there all the time and doing. He said Tan you can't, you can't and then I convince myself I gotta, I gotta finish, I can't do this anymore – I should be there for my family. But I think well I can't be... you keep reflecting back, I wish I was like I was before, oh god I've sat there some days and cried and think I should be, I should be the daughter I used to be. But then Scott do say she do rule you, she used to tell you what to do...I try to block it out and carry on.*

This very powerful narrative explains exactly what is at stake for Tanya and the pains of her transition. It is perhaps, not hard to imagine this incident from the point of view of how difficult this might be for Tanya; the guilt of desire directed away from the home and family, having her mother identity called into question by the implied neglect of her child and being threatened with Social Services intervention. She is being pushed and pulled between the needs of two greedy institutions: family and university (Edwards, 1993). It is perhaps easy also, to understand the effect this

might have; the threat of a re-territorialisation, - *I convince myself I gotta finish.*

And, a longing for her old life and her old *own routine*, for things to be the same as they used to be, and her old identity: *the daughter I used to be*. But the situation is more complicated to understand. Why such a verbally aggressive, vitriolic and spiteful attack on a sister who is pregnant and sitting a exams to become a nurse? That day Tanya had to choose between her future career as a nurse in the 'caring profession' and being seen by her family as a 'caring mother'. Having weighed up the situation, she felt she had no other choice than to go to University and sit the exam. Her son was poorly but not overly so. She was confident in his level of maturity and had given him instructions to further add to his safety and her peace of mind. So, where is the sisterly support that one might expect from the 'close knit' family that Tanya says she is part of? Why the attack?

Tanya and her university friends understand this reaction as sisterly jealousy (Lucey 2010). But, what exactly is the sister jealous of? I contend that Cheryl, her sister, is not spiteful and jealous in any straightforward way. For her, perhaps there is much more at stake. Lucey (2010), has highlighted the way in which:

...sisters can carry the threads of powerful desires for one and other and previous generations, creating unconscious alignments that reduce the boundaries between individuals, and influence motivation and behaviours. (Lucey 2010, p.449).

There is then a need to shift the focus of the analysis slightly to understand what Tanya's education and qualification as a nurse might mean to her sister and wider family. What is at stake for them? Of course it could just be a case of the family being aggrieved because Tanya is no longer so available to them to clean and care, presenting them with a practical problem. But, I want to consider this situation at a different level and look at the inter-related affective patterning, affect which is relational, inter-subjective and circulating within the family. This part of the analysis focuses on the 'turbulence of social experience'.

Such an 'envious attack' (Lucey 2010) could be understood as a desperate defence. Firstly, Cheryl may indeed be jealous. This jealousy might be located as being formed from Tanya's changing subjectivity and movement away and the way in which this attacks Cheryl's own subjectivity through her own lack of movement and change. Cheryl may also unconsciously recognise the dangerous journey of becoming 'Other' on which Tanya has embarked and the risks entailed to identity. Because of her identification with Tanya, in order to protect her own identity, as a defence she may need to position Tanya as a 'bad' mother/ daughter who 'selfishly' invests in education away from the family and community. This would act to bolster her own identity as the 'good' mother/daughter, who remains loyal, shoring up her own sense of belonging and ontological safety. Such a counter attack, may however, also be understood to defend a threatened way of life and being in the world, where Tanya herself has been a mother figure to all the family. In this way, we could hypothesise that Tanya, as the fantasised mother figure, has helped to keep the family going, by providing them with a sense of safety, containment and

continuity of being. For the family she is the nurturing object of safety, she fulfils a role within the family which she has to seek outside for satisfaction. Aligning herself with others, and moving away from the family unit she previously ‘built her life around’ disrupts the rhythms and affective practices within the family, routines and refrains which until now have helped them manage, cope and survive both at the level of the family and the estate.

These are also, practices which have defended against the shame produced by the gaze of the Other, who, as described earlier, look in on their world and find it wanting, as place where, as Tanya comments, *people do knock you for living*. In sticking together as a family in its immediate and wider sense, it is harder for the outside to get in, harder to penetrate the protective skin or membrane (Bick 1968; Willoughby 2004; Walkerdine and Jimenez 2012) that has needed to be formed in order to shore up a sense of respectability and decency. Any break in this membrane then, such as a mother figure wanting to ‘escape’ the family, can be understood as problematizing their existence within that Existential Territory, perhaps reducing their own power to act within the space. In an unconscious way, the family could be understood as trying to preserve something they feel as intrinsic to their survival. Without Tanya, who will keep them safe?

The family have then found it difficult to accommodate and negotiate this change with Tanya. Tanya’s mother, *will be glad when it’s finished and things go back to normal*. But, Tanya is clear of the direction her life is taking, spurred on perhaps by

a friend who after doing the access course had become a dinner lady at the local school. As she insisted:

Tanya: *I don't want to be that! I don't want to be that, I haven't worked this hard just to do nothing...*

Melanie: *mm*

Tanya: *But, like I say, she thinks [mum] it's coming to an end now, I know...she gotta realise that when it's the end it is still going to be the same, coz you know that week I was off with Ben<sup>11</sup>, when I couldn't go to Uni because he had just come out in chicken pox, I sat here and I thought I could never go back to this life - this ticket is going to take me now - here.*

The thought of a re-territorialisation and being a dinner lady and *doing nothing* like her friend is unthinkable and perhaps terrifying at an unconscious level. Her old life, totally *built around* family and the domestic sphere is something that Tanya no longer wants to imagine. Now six weeks before graduation, she is no longer so tied to her cleaning routines; *being in Uni have taken it away, it have. It has given me something else to think about* – she has other things to imagine. During the interview Tanya became emotional and visibly upset. It is interesting that this occurred, not when describing the terrible traumas, her difficult life experiences or her family's attitude towards her. Rather, the emotion was evoked when she talked about being accepted into University and when she talked about the pride she had in

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<sup>11</sup> Son's name changed for purposes of anonymity

her eldest son who, she wanted to better provide for, be a role model to and, because *it have rubbed off on him* had his own aspirations to be a doctor.

Tanya: *(Crying) if it weren't for him I wouldn't be doing it now. Coz I wanted something for me and him, you know (crying and sniffing)... So they said to him, when we went to the parents evening, "what do you want to do Jas", and he said to me, "well I gotta say mam, I do want to be a doctor, and I am like Oh. My. God."* *(said with pride).*

Melanie: *(laughing)*

Tanya: *You be the doctor and I'll be the nurse in your practice is it? ...so we laugh about it like..*

Melanie: *Yeah*

Tanya: *and coz Scott (Partner) is good with the computer...I said he could be the receptionist*

Despite the 'price of the ticket' that Tanya feels she now holds (Friedman 2013), these scenarios very much point forward and entail action, movement and change. In these acts of fantasy and imagination, there is real aspiration and real hope for the future for the family as a whole.

### **5.11. Conclusion**

Following the analytic exemplar of Walkerdine (2011, 2013, 2014) using the conceptual apparatus of Guattari, this chapter applied a psychoanalytically informed historical and cultural lens, to offer ‘a schizoanalytic cartography’ of Tanya’s educational journey into and through higher education (Walkerdine 2011, 2013, 2014). This mapped the affective landscape of change as a way of tracing the possibility of becoming other and the points at which change may become problematic because unsafe (Walkerdine, 2014 ).

The analysis has shown the way in which Tanya used the creative power of her imagination in order to create safe places into which her new subjectivity could gradually move and occupy. In the analysis her imagination functioned as a site for experimentation that allowed Tanya to explore different possibilities. This was supported by a relationship that increased Tanya’s power to do so. The relationship with Leanne at ‘Learning to Live’ enabled Tanya to experiment and practice new ways of being in a new and contained way. By using her imagination, Tanya could practice and change the way in which she attended to her Existential Territory, and higher education was able to come into being as a real possibility.

Central to movement and change was a sense of ontological security. Imagining education as a place of safety, she used her caring skills, honed in her ‘old life’ as a line of flight towards becoming a nurse in a ‘new one’. This has shown both the

historical and material specificity attached to Tanya's aspiration, a future possible self and her desire to be a nurse.

The schizo-analysis of Tanya's participation in higher education is able to illustrate the way in which individual and social histories are also affectively contained through space and place. Her participation was laden with affect and often threatened by the cultural and gendered expectations around family and motherhood.

Clearly, Tanya didn't lack aspiration and she successfully, although not painlessly negotiated her way into and through higher education. What threatened and complicated her education were the complex relations and practices in which her aspiration was ensconced or anchored. The family found her transition difficult and painful to negotiate, highlighting what is at stake not only for Tanya and women like her, but also their families. The family carried with it an affective history and biography of feeling that threatened to re-territorialise Tanya. The movement from one Existential Territory can then be precarious. There are affective risks and costs for all.

In order to prevent feelings of overwhelm and a re-territorialisation back to her own life, Tanya sought support from local women which developed into a wider network of support. *Friends like sisters* were vital in her educational success. In bringing her affective history into a different environment; higher education, it provided her with a sense of security and safety. In psychoanalytic terms the women may be

understood as transitional objects, ‘comfort blankets’ (Winnicott 1971) which allow Tanya (and each other) to feel safe – contained or held providing a ‘continuity of being’ (Bick, 1968; Walkerdine 2011, 2013) as she moved forward in her educational trajectory , whilst simultaneously anchoring herself to her past and her culture in order to feel safe. Evoking an imagined sense of family and community was key and a sense of safety was constituted in the affective practices of family and community which Tanya and her friends brought with them to education, to meld with and create new affective practices and refrains in the new learning environment. These relationships provided her with the right emotional support, increasing her sense of well being and her ability to act in that environment facilitating her participation in higher education. This allowed her to continue to ‘fix into being’ her new sense of self . Crucially for the thesis, it has shown some of the many ways in which, *Higher education remains one of the crucial sites of struggle for those who, in order to survive and thrive, need to construct alternative epistemologies and other validation processes* (Collins 1991, p. 204, cited in Walsh 1996, p. 193).

The analysis has shown also, that affect is complex and dynamic in that it defines our capacity to be acted upon and to act. Tanya’s case illustrates the way in which subjectivity is a process of becoming between this relation. The former came from the outside in the form of her environment and her family and the latter manifests itself from within, and is felt by an increase or decrease in her ability to act. Tanya’s original Existential Territory could be understood as reducing her power to act. In the analysis this was controlled and managed through her obsessive cleaning and

daily management within the family, which could be understood as helping to preserve a sense of existence .

The schizo-analysis has been able to place the concept of aspiration outside as well as inside the self, unfolding across time and space in relation to the others and space and place. Unlike other approaches; it has been able to suggest unconscious process involved in aspiration, motivation and participation and how, on a psychic level change becomes possible. It has shown the way in which aspiration and motivation works at the level of the family and community. Acknowledging and making allowances for the ways in which working class subjectivity in the present, has been moulded by historical, cultural, and economic forces from the past, enables us to move beyond deficit understandings and discourses of lack .

This first empirical chapter has formed the foundation on which the following two chapters build. Speaking to a main argument of the thesis, it has presented the psychosocial complexity of aspiration, motivation and participation which are currently not taken account of in Government Policy, and provides further evidence to add existing literature and refute notions of a poverty of aspiration in the working classes . It explored the psychic/affective landscape of class in which aspiration, motivation and participation are formed, regulated, enabled, and constrained; relationally, culturally, historically, geographically and temporally by conscious and unconscious processes – and the implications for subjectivity as a working class

mature student and mother. It has provided empirical evidence for the imperative of aspiration to be understood as a psychosocial concept and studied as such.

It has shown also a need to understand aspiration, motivation and participation in the context of real women's classed lives, and the historical and cultural processes which helped shape them in order to counter dominant deficit discourses and ideological understandings of working class underachievement. In moving beyond attitudes and opinions, it has exposed the heart of the real dilemmas, fears, anxieties and ambivalences occasioned by the shifts required of working class mature student mothers. Highlighted here was Tanya's affect around motherhood and the way in which this influenced her participation in higher education. The next Chapter, Chapter Six, further explores aspiration, motivation and participation through the lens of constructions of motherhood within neo-liberalism.

## **6.**

### **Chapter Six:**

#### **‘Chav Mum’ versus ‘Yummy Mummy’: Aspiration and Motivation as a Moral Imperative of Neo-liberalism and its Constructions of Motherhood**

##### **6.1. Introduction**

When forming the thesis research questions I was interested to discover the ways in which motherhood might mediate studentship. Informed by my own experience and the relevant literature (Edwards (1993) and others) my focus at the time was very much on the ‘juggling act’ required of mature student mothers, demanded by family and university; the affect this may arouse and the consequences for subjectivity, relationships and everyday life (Edwards 1993, p. 62). There are still some important practical and psychological issues to be explored within this area of research. However, as I worked with the data and the thesis evolved, I became more interested and aware of the different psychosocial elements of aspiration and motivation. As I considered aspiration, I felt I needed to think more about the classed themes which emerged in relation to working class women as mothers. Normative femininity, based on white middle class ideals is highly excluding in terms of aspiration and success. As discussed in Chapter Two, only certain kinds of individuals and bodies are able and apparently willing to be aspirational for themselves and their children (Gillies 2007). As Ringrose and Walkerdine (2008)

contend: “It is upon the working class woman’s mind and body that the drama of possibility and limitation of neo-liberal reinvention is played out” (p. 227).

There is a duality that surrounds the mother – it is both a universal identity and yet simultaneously one that varies historically, temporally, geographically and culturally. As a subjectivity, motherhood is a felt experience, but also one which is socially constructed and vigorously policed and regulated (Hollway 2006). Being an individual self in Western society is to some extent compulsory, but being the ‘right’ kind of self is dependent upon one’s social and structural position (Gilles 2007, p71). Nevertheless, being the ‘right’ kind of mother, is essential. Kim Allen’s and Jayne Osgood’s (2009) work around the meanings and identities of motherhood and the way in which they show it has been transformed within the discourses of neo-liberalism is particularly helpful here. They have shown how constructions of motherhood are represented in both socio-political discourse and contemporary popular culture by two figures: the ‘Yummy Mummy’, who has it all and the ‘Chav Mum’ who wants it all – apparently for nothing.

‘Yummy Mummies’ are understood as white, middle class professional women, seen to embody freedom, choice, respectability, and aesthetic perfection (Allen and Osgood 2009), and, who as ‘Top Girls’ (McRobbie 2007) can ‘have it all’. They can consume themselves into being, displaying all the right markers for belonging and acceptance (Ringrose and Walkerdine 2008). They are oriented towards economic participation and self regulation. Representations of the working classes are significantly gendered, and in stark contrast, there are particularly horrible and outrageous depictions aimed at women (Gilles 2007), who are considered morally

repellent (Lawler 2005). Disadvantaged mothers specifically, are represented as being “ignorant”, “uncaring”, “irresponsible” and “undeserving” (Gillies 2007, p. 17). While unmarried working class mothers have always been a target of social stigma, the caricature identity of the ‘Chav Mum’ is seen to embody many of the problems of contemporary Britain, as aggressive, highly sexed, young, single mothers, living off the state (Tyler 2008). It has become a common pejorative identity position come to represent the “non respectable working classes” (Tyler 2008, p 22), not based on knowledge but more to do with anxiety, fear, desire and projection (Skeggs 1997). These two polemic identities of ‘Yummy Mummy’ and ‘Chav Mum’ come into existence in relation to and dependent upon the ‘Other’, as emotional rhetoric.

As I argued in Chapter Two, mothers, as well as being expected to raise the next generation of citizens, are also expected to better themselves, *‘enterprise their way out of ‘traps’ (Macdonald et al 2001) and assemble a range of efficiencies, networks and capitals in order to envisage and pursue a fulfilling and productive future’* (Allen and Taylor 2012 p. ?). Both masking and in spite of structural inequalities, within neo-liberalism, there is a moral imperative for the ‘bad’ working class mother, to embark upon a self-reflexive project of improvement, and to aspire to be the ‘good’ middle class mother of value and worth to her children and society. There is then a need to present these current understandings of denigration and moral imperatives to become respectable as they exist in the data in order to understand how they are affectively lived, and the consequences for subjectivity.

The participants in this study talked about a constellation of reasons for embarking upon university. However, motherhood was a theme interwoven within these reasons in various ways. Within their narratives, the subjectivity of mother was omnipresent. This chapter considers the affective dimensions of aspiration and motivation through the lens of classed motherhood. Nine of the thirteen women in the sample had experienced single motherhood and this chapter narrows its focus to this marginalised and socially vilified position (Tyler 2008). Although no longer ‘teen’ single mothers, this is a position around which their identity as mother was formed and is still very much part of their current subjectivity as mothers. Based on middle class values and assumptions, the model of the ‘good’ middle class mother – a figure of respectability in society, is one which other mothers are unable to fit into for validation. ‘Respectability’ is an instrument by which women are classed by means of their behaviour, appearance and child-rearing practices (Skeggs 1997) and it is able to signify moral authority. Acquiring or increasing ‘respectability’ is a vital means of garnering social worth and legitimacy, but it is a challenging and very problematic task to those who live on the margins by dint of social and economic disadvantage (Gillies 2007). May’s (2008) work around lone mothers has shown that individuals with a ‘spoiled identity’ work to manage a more moral presentation of self.

The chapter uses data from interviews with Jordan, Jayne and Jade. It argues that within neoliberal constructions of motherhood, characterised by the polemic identities of ‘Chav Mum’ and ‘Yummy Mummy’, for these marginalised women, the decision to embark upon higher education could be understood as a response to calls

for ‘transformation’ through education based on a ‘moral’ imperative. This is related to the stigma and shame surrounding lone motherhood and a desire to claim a ‘respectable’ identity for themselves and their children via the vehicle of education. This chapter simultaneously addresses the first three of the research questions set out in the Introduction to the thesis, and argues then that aspiration, motivation and participation are, for the women considered here, linked to a desire to renegotiate their mother identity and achieve ‘respectable’ motherhood.

The next section turns to the data in order to illustrate how the constructions of classed maternal identities within neo-liberalism discussed above are lived and experienced, (re) negotiated, defended against and aspired to by Jordan, Jayne and Jade. It reveals the affective landscape of class, influencing their aspiration, motivation and participation in higher education which may render their decisions as based more on a moral imperative rather than agentic choice.

## **6.2. Introducing Jordan, Jayne, and Jade.**

The kind of narratives that follow, can be found scattered across many of the participants interviews, but space and the desire to give ‘voice’ to the women has necessitated that this chapter focus only on the narratives of three women; Jordan, Jayne and Jade. Although no longer in their teens, Jordan, Jayne and Jade became mothers as teenagers, and through being abandoned by their children’s fathers, had no choice but to parent alone, and have since relied upon the state for much of their regular income. As such, their financial resources have been very limited and their

social status is undermined by negative stereotypes associated with an ‘underclass’ identity (Clavering 2010; Murray 1996). If they are to meet the requirements of successful femininity demanded by neo-liberalism, they must repudiate their ‘failings’, and regulate, alter or abandon their working class selves (Walkerdine et al 2001; Allen and Osgood 2009). The way in which this is lived affectively and achieved is set out below.

### **6.2.1. Jordan – Avoiding a “Jeremy Kyle Situation”**

Jordan, 22, was the youngest woman in the sample and at the time of our interview lived in her mother’s privately owned home, with her two year old son, her mother and her younger brother. Of the women in the sample, Jordan expressed the most explicit and direct link between motherhood and education early on in the first interview, explicitly citing her son as a motivating factor above all else. She told me that previously she had been *a bit off the rails* and discovered she was pregnant at 27 weeks gestation, just before her 19<sup>th</sup> birthday. Never imagining herself to be a mother, being abandoned by the baby’s father (a man in his 30’s), and being so far along in her pregnancy before discovery, she told me how initially she had been *absolutely devastated* and *traumatised* by the lack of choice attached to her predicament. Jordan did not have the option of a termination, nor did she have the option of shared parenthood. In our first interview, Jordan described how she needed to quickly adapt, saying *[I] better buck my ideas up now and really get on with this and make something of myself.*

Jordan: ...so that was just like you are having a baby and that’s the end of it.

Um...absolutely devastated to begin with...but obviously now the best thing that ever

*happened to me. And er, he's the reason I went to university - because I thought I can't just have a job now, I've got to have a career and I was always interested in teaching so I just thought – go for it – try it out you know. I finished college while I was pregnant and then just went from there really.*

Hey and Bradford (2006) have described how the working class mothers in their study of a 'Sure Start' Programme<sup>12</sup> (which supports families in disadvantaged communities) were aware of being stigmatised as 'bad' parents. This act of symbolic violence is something that Jordan is well aware of. Jordan described how she feared being caught up in what she termed as a *Jeremy Kyle situation*. Jeremy Kyle is a morning television show that although on the surface presents itself as a programme which seeks to solve problems for people, is, in reality a brutally negative and derisive portrayal of lower class lives for entertainment purposes (Guardian 2008). Centred daily around questions of paternity such as "who is the child's father?", here mothers, who very obviously lack various forms of capital are portrayed in a de-contextualised void as overtly sexual, lazy, irresponsible, lacking morality, delinquent, welfare scroungers often involved in criminality and drug taking. As mothers they are configured as lacking respectability: the 'Chav Mum', who is a vessel of humour, disgust and moral outrage (Tyler 2008; Allen and Osgood 2009). Presented in this format, the women 'guests' are the antithesis of the 'good mother' demanded within neo-liberalism.

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<sup>12</sup> Sure Start is a UK Government based initiative, set up to bolster the family through the improvement of childcare, early education and health and family support.

The stigmatising identity of the ‘Chav Mum’, a ‘failed form of femininity’ within neoliberal discourse (Allan and Osgood 2009, p. 2 ), is one that Jordan feared as a working class young woman and was not one that she was prepared to take up willingly.

*Jordan: I didn't want kids. Ever. I really, really didn't. I had no desire to have kids at all. Um, I know that might have changed at some point because I was only 19, but it was more along the lines of all this stigma about single, young single mums and it was a bit like, it's bad, it's bad, so I was more along the lines of my life is over, what are people going to think of me, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.*

Aware of the dialogic and judgemental ‘Other’ (Skeggs, 1997), in order to avoid the negative affect of shame produced through the judgement of this stigmatised form of motherhood; a ‘spoiled identity’ (May, 2008), *Bucking her ideas up* and *making something* of herself becomes a moral imperative for Jordan . Despite embarking upon higher education, Jordan told me she does not have any desire for learning for its own sake (Ball et al, 2001), ‘... *education is not my thing but I know I have got to do this...*’. Rather she positions her motivation for returning to education and to have a career as a teacher as an investment in economic stability for her son, as the actions of the ‘right’ kind of mother; the successful female subject of neo-liberalism (Walkerdine et al, 2001). Chiming with the aspirational language of government social inclusion agendas (Hey and Bradford 2006), now a mother, a working class ‘job’ was no longer good enough, ‘middle class’ careers carry far more stability and prestige than working class jobs. Like the mothers in Hey and Bradford’s (2006) Sure Start study, Jordan responds to a fear of stigmatisation by drawing on a discourse of ‘self-improvement’ (2006, p.61). In ‘bucking her ideas up’, she is

trying to make herself 'respectable' (Skeggs, 1997). As a feminine identity, 'The teacher' holds a completely different status to the 'Chav Mum'. This re-negotiation of her motherhood identity through education offers a psychological defence against her young, single mother status, its vilification and the affect it evokes in her and others. It also bolsters but extends her feminine identity from the private to the public sphere where she can perform to an audience the ascribed qualities of caring and nurturing ascribed to this role and 'good' motherhood, making her both responsible and respectable, while trading a set of middle class skills on the jobs market.

#### **6.2.2. Jayne – Wanting to be a 'Boden Mum'**

Jayne is in her 30's and lives with her husband and two children in one of several rented Housing Association properties on an affluent estate, in an affluent area, having recently moved from a much less affluent neighbouring town. Like Jordan, Jayne became pregnant at 19, and the father was not interested in a relationship with Jayne and raising a baby. Unlike many of the women participants, who describe difficult and somewhat neglectful childhoods, in contrast Jayne could be understood by her own admission as having been *spoilt*. An unexpected third child, and only girl, born to older, *old fashioned* parents, Jayne, *had an absolutely idyllic childhood. My parents were wonderful. My Mum was... everything she did was FOR ME and everything my Dad did was WITH ME*. Describing herself then as naïve and innocent, the annual carnival queen with long golden tresses, Jayne had told me she had *nice* friends and did not mix with the other *slaggy village girls*, who she reflects were much more *wordly wise* and sexual than herself. Here Jayne is constructing

herself as Other in order to distance herself from a particular kind of imagined working class sexuality and claim moral superiority.

Understandably perhaps, for Jayne's mother, discovering her daughter to have become pregnant and have her sexuality displayed so publically was a loss and a massive shock and she took the news of her pregnancy badly. Having broken laws governing 'respectable' working class femininity, for a few weeks Jayne was ostracised by both her mother and her 'aunties' (mothers friends), who closed ranks in punishment and disapproval of her predicament and behaviour. Jayne also felt she had *lost everything*; as well as her *respectability* she lost her car, her 'nice' job as a secretary and her freedom, all markers of the 1990's girl power discourse of having it all. Jayne describes how *being looked down on* as a single mother felt at the time:

*Jayne: I know this sounds awful but I felt like scum. I felt like...coz it is... where I come from it is quite a small villagey town and everybody seemed to know me because my Mum was quite a prominent person in the community and everybody seemed to know my Mum being a lollipop lady and other things that she had done and...I felt like...if I walked through the village everybody was looking at me and talking about me.*

Melanie: *So did you feel ashamed then?*

Jayne: *Yeah, yeah I did. I felt quite ashamed.*

Melanie: *Why, why did you feel ashamed?*

Jayne: *I think because I was brought up differently – I know that sounds quite snobby and, I was brought up well.*

Melanie: *Yeah*

Jayne: *And the only other girls that I knew of that had got pregnant on their own and stuff were quite rough really (laughing), and I really felt like I had let my mum down, and I think she felt the same.*

Melanie: *mm*

Jayne: *(laughing) she definitely felt the same (laughing) you know.*

Jayne grew up in a context where there was blanket disapproval and disavowal of young single motherhood; *my mum always said if I ever had a child before I was married I wouldn't be allowed to wear white.* Within that social world and community pregnancy outside of marriage was not something that happened to 'respectable' working class girls like Jayne and her friends. In reality of course, it often did. When Jayne later got married in her late 20's she wore ivory: *she wouldn't let me wear white*, indicating her mother's remaining sense of shame and a pervading sense of punishment and power, marring Jayne's happy ending in a white gown fit for a 'princess'. From her mother's perspective, through the virginal symbolism of the white gown, Jayne would be pretending that she is something she is not. Jayne's and her mother's respectability then both rested on her displaying the correct femininity, symbolised through a dress of a different shade.

Now in her thirties, she still hates walking down the road in her home town and fears seeing people she was in school with. This judgement of her, whether real or imagined, is still able to produce an affective response. Guattari would understand this as the affect attached to a familiar refrain, where feelings and memories are evoked through walking through our everyday lives (Guattari 1995). Despite the passage of time, the shame and stigma attached to being a lone single parent, and letting her parents down, is still very much present for Jayne and talking about this during our interviews was still able to provoke an emotional response.

Jayne makes direct links between motherhood, aspiration, education and gaining respect for herself. Her experience at the primary school gates as a working class mother, who still carries the stigma of lone parenthood with her is a motivating factor in her embarking upon higher education in order to train as a teacher. Aware of the 'gaze of the middle class 'Other' (Lawler, 2008), she longs for and desires to have what she perceives other *well groomed, posh* women to have; respect signified through appearance, and career status, and to not be looked down upon. In evoking the 'Yummy Mummy' as gold standard aspiration, she is aware also, how wanting more, and being dissatisfied with a working class occupation may invite the label of 'snob' and expresses a little embarrassment at her rejection of this kind of role.

Melanie: *So what do you think returning to education has given you as a whole?*

Jayne: *(pause) (sighs) respect for myself. I definitely respect myself A LOT more.*

Melanie: *mm*

Jayne: *I feel like a, (sighs) a - when I started taking my daughter to school (tuts) the school that she goes to – all the parents there – they are a lot older than me, they have all had their careers they are all doctors and solicitors and pilots and things like that. It is a very kind of posh primary school*

Melanie: *mm*

Jayne: *...that's not private, you know. And , I used to dread picking her up and taking her down there because I just felt like I didn't belong, I felt like they looked down upon me and things like that*

Melanie: *mm*

Jayne: *Now when I go there, I, it makes me feel like I have got a lot more respect for myself, and I feel like I (pause) (sighs) I dunno, I think people probably – if they knew what I was doing- I think they would respect me more, you know*

Melanie: *What do you think has given you respect then – for yourself – what's changed so that is it the thought, that you are going to have a different career?*

Jayne: *yeah, I am going to HAVE a career. I mean there is nothing WRONG with working in Tesco's or...or anything like that, but I just, just I don't know, I don't know, I think...my mum calls me a snob*

Melanie: *mm*

Jayne: *and maybe I am, but I just, you know I look at some of the women down the school and you look at them and you think, oh you know, I respect them because they look like they have a good job and they look well groomed and stuff like that*

In the above narrative, Jayne can be understood as evoking the distinct identity of the ‘Yummy Mummy’, described by Allen and Osgood (2009) as affluent older mothers, who have established a successful career before starting a family and who are willing and able to spend large amounts of money on consumer goods for self and family (Allen and Osgood 2009). In comparison to this group of women - the ‘right’ kind of neo-liberal subjects and mothers, Jayne feels ‘Other’ because of her perceived marginalised status.

However, in addition to education, it is clothing and displaying the right kind of consumer knowledge and life style which Jayne uses to navigate herself toward ‘respectable’ motherhood and distance herself from the other working class mothers at the school gates. These women, are, through their dress codified through their appearance of wearing *a lot scruffier, a lot more revealing clothes*. These are a group of working class women that, unlike the older mothers (the ‘Glen<sup>13</sup>’ Mums or ‘Boden’ Mums as Jayne calls them), Jayne thinks don’t deserve respect and strongly wishes to dis-identify with in order to prove her own respectability. As an article in the Daily Mail reported, ‘Boden’ is a fashion brand aimed at ‘Yummy Mummies’, it’s success founded on selling a picture perfect British lifestyle of traditional, yet fun, affluent but not flashy. In that way, it is more than just a fashion brand it is “*a lifestyle fantasy, denoting its wearers’ aspirations and symbolising their values*” (Dunbar 2012). In the narrative below, Jayne explicitly sets up the two maternal constructions discussed earlier; ‘Yummy Mummy’ against the ‘Chav Mum’.

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<sup>13</sup> Glen is a pseudonym for the area in which the women live, changed for the purposes of anonymity.

Jayne: *whereas there's, a couple of others that are down there and you don't - look at them like that and I know it is not all about appearances but, (sighs) I don't know, I think it is just – education and working hard at something to get where you want to be. I think that, that deserves respect, I really do*

Melanie: *mm*

Jayne: *whereas somebody who comes out of school, can't be bothered to do anything that doesn't deserve respect at all. So I feel now, I mean I know I did some courses and everything straight from school, and I had a pretty, you know I had an okay job, if I was still in it now I would probably be on sort of quite ok money, but there is no education behind that really. It's - I was just a receptionist, you know (laughing) so*

Melanie: *So what are those other mothers like – the ones that you wouldn't want to be like?*

Jayne: *(pause 2) Um, smoking, drinking - I assume – it's not that – they do smoke, I have seen them smoking and stuff like that and they just, I dunno they are just a bit um (sighs) (pause 2 seconds) I suppose just, they don't come across as being educated at all*

Melanie: *mm*

Jayne: *They seem like the type who have come out of school and are just not doing anything with their lives, you know*

Melanie: *Is that in the way that they look, the way that they talk or the way that they act – or all of those?*

Jayne: *I would say the way they TALK DEFINITELY*

Melanie: *mm*

Jayne: *Language I think is a big thing. You can, I am not saying sort of that educated people don't swear but it's, it's the use of the language which I think is different*

Melanie: *Yeah*

Jayne: *Um (pause) (embarrassed) sometimes the way that - oh it is really difficult because in (local town) you have got what we call the "Glen Mum Look" which is like Boden clothing and that sort of thing and, an there is a definite divide – you have got the ones who you just know (placing her hand on the desk in front to demonstrate) they are there and then you have got the "Boden Mums" there (indicating a different part of the desk) and it is kind of like - I feel like I am in between*

Melanie: *Yeah*

Jayne: *You know (circles her hand over the table) I am still not a Boden Mum yet (laughing) you know if that makes sense*

Melanie: *Totally, so the other mums, the ones who are not "Boden Mums" what do they wear – how would you classify them in relation to the "Boden Mums"?*

Jayne: *Um...very...the dress...they tend to dress a lot scruffier, a lot more revealing*

Melanie: *Right*

Jayne: *They um...(pause 1) kind of like bend over and you can see their thong – that’s...it’s just not pleasant is it, you know it’s just not...it doesn’t look nice. I feel like such a snob (laughing)*

Melanie: *No, not at all (laughing) – these things are important. So thinking of those mums again, in terms of how they act, how would you say they act differently to the ‘Boden Mums’?*

Jayne: *(pause 2 seconds) (takes a breath) Um, I would say that the ‘Boden Mums’ are far more bitchier. You can see they look down their noses at people – not all of them but a lot of them do. My, my group of friends, they are...I would class them as ‘Boden Mums’*

Melanie: *mm*

Jayne: *and they are (whispering) SO BITCHY. Oh my god – they are terrible. And I, you know I, I suppose I join in with them but when I first started hanging round with them, I did used to think oh my god, this is really bad (laughing) you know you can’t say things like that*

Melanie: *So do they say things about everybody or...*

Jayne: *Yes, absolutely everybody - it is not just the non’ ‘Boden Mums’, it is about everybody. And um I would say it was jealousy but then they have got nothing to be jealous about. They, they all my friends are ABSOLUETLY loaded, and I, I am the poorest of all of them*

What Jayne makes explicit here is that class can be spotted a mile off (Walkerdine et al, 2003; Skeggs, 1997), it is performed and is a marker, written onto minds and bodies. Here Jayne evokes a middle class stereotype of the working class woman, the ‘Chav Mum’ and sets it up against the ‘respectable’ and affluent appearance of the Boden wearing Glen Mums as un-deserving of respect because she presumes them to be uneducated, rough, women who drink and swear. These working class women do not make the ‘right’ display of femininity and motherhood at the ‘posh’ school gates, and as such these ‘failing subjects’ of neo-liberalism are pathologised by Jayne (Walkerdine 2003). Through her affective response to the non- ‘Boden Mums’ an affective boundary is drawn between them and herself and a point of dis-identification is created (Allen and Taylor 2012). Based on appearance and fantasy/imagination rather than what she actually knows about the women, this reaction could be understood as being produced through projection, and desire, and anxiety to make and mark herself ‘Other’ in relation.

The codified appearance of the respectable ‘Boden Mum’ is significant. This is a fantasy that Jayne has indeed invested in. *Not a Boden Mum yet* but aspiring to wear this brand herself, Jayne is unaware that those with the capitals (Skeggs 1997, Lawler, 2008) to don this apparel are already, within the fast pace of consumerism, starting to tire of it and are seeking other ways in which to signify their individualism and identity as aspirational successful feminine subjects. As an article in the Daily Mail explains: *Mothers are starting to tire of turning up to the school gates all wearing something immediately identifiable as Boden* (Dunbar 2012).

Jayne's desire to belong to the Boden Mum group of women has nothing to do with the women's positive qualities and their personal characters; according to Jayne, they are bitchy, talk about everyone, including the children of other Mums and *look down their noses*. But these are the qualities that working class women often ascribe to women in higher social classes, women they understand to be 'better' than themselves (Skeggs 1997). In this way, and in terms of neo-liberalism, these women are getting it right. Their performance of femininity is authentic to Jayne. The personalities and values they actually hold are less important than the values and identity that are conveyed through their clothes and performance. The Boden Mum's at the school gates come into being for Jayne through their ability to consume and perform motherhood correctly (Ringrose and Walkerdine 2008). That these women might be envious or jealous of others, or have their own insecurities surrounding their position or identity is unthinkable for Jayne, because in Jayne's eyes, and within discourses of neo-liberalism, they are the 'top girls' (McRobbie 2007) they 'have it all' (Walkerdine 2003).

In her work 'Retaliatory Discourse; The politics of attack and Withdrawal', Lynne Layton, (2006) discusses her experience with patients who repeatedly re-create 'doer-done- to' relational configurations because of the shame of their own vulnerability, which is understood as weakness. She asserts that:

while they struggle to feel safe with others, in fact they keep staging experiences in which they are either the perpetrator or the victim, in which they either attack the other or angrily withdraw (Layton 2006, p. 19.)

Here then, the verbal attack towards the other working class Mums, which Jayne herself participates in, could be understood as an affective response which creates an affective boundary (Ahmed, 2004) and a means of both marking them as Other and of defending against unwanted feelings and being seen as the marginalised working class 'Chav Mum' Other. It is then an emotional site of both control and resistance for Jayne (Boler 1999 cited in Leathwood and Hey 2009). In identifying with the aspirational Boden Mums and being part of their group, however marginally, this could be read as facilitating some dis-identification with the other polemic and stigmatised maternal identity of the lone, teen mother she once was, and the working class woman she is still.

As was shown in the narrative above, through her expectation of a career, and thus potential acceptance by others, Jayne has gained a growing sense of respect for herself. This is intrinsically linked to class and the gaze of the middle class other. However, it is not a straightforward desire to be middleclass. Indeed as a participant in my research she self identified as working class. Neither does she consider that teaching is a middle class profession; *I think teachers are more working class than if you were say a doctor or a solicitor or architect or...you know*, incidentally the professions of the 'Boden Mums' or their husbands, illustrating that despite her self-improvement, she still feels they are 'better' than her, illustrating the 'impossible' dimensions of aspiration and social mobility for the working classes. Anticipating material transformation to her life, she describes her life living on the margins:

Jayne: *You know the streets around there are quite nice, it's not Bygone Avenue...which are all the big posh houses, but it is a nice sort of area. Um (tuts)*

*where I live now is where all the big posh houses are...even though I don't live in one of the big posh houses I am surrounded by them*

She likened her position to an episode of the television programme an 'Idiot Abroad' she had seen, where the presenter, who visits 'bucket list' destinations went to a small cave in Jordan with a vista of a beautiful palace. Taken by the view he famously stated "I'd rather live in a cave with a view of a palace than live in a palace with a view of a cave".

Jayne: *And it's that sort of thing...that's how I feel about my house. I live in a small tiny house but look out on beautiful houses, beautiful scenery, lovely rolling hills and...like that.*

The irony of her use of this inter-textual reference of an Idiot Abroad is almost painful for me. Still feeling hindered by her working class past, the spectre of shame around lone motherhood and the lack of having married into money as some of the other mums at the school gates did (in my youth- a working class girl's dream! – and a dream Louise had for herself) she feels career-wise she cannot compete with the 'professionals' on the school gate because she lacks the capital to fully belong. As such she sees herself as belonging on the margins or borders of middle class life; aspiring to wear the right apparel to be tolerated by the 'Boden Mums' and looking out from her own cramped home onto other more affluent homes. It's a tiny house that barely accommodates them as a family, but it is in a location, which, for Jayne, oozes 'respectability'. Despite geographically not being very far from her home town and the street she hates walking down because of the negative feelings evoked, psychically the distance is immense and helps defend against the feelings of a 'spoiled identity'. In that sense, she is abroad. Despite that; *I'm not a Boden mum*

yet, Jayne herself feels she is 'passing'. In this re-negotiated identity she is existing on the margins.

This is less, as a "hybrid" (Lucey et al 2003), and more a form of ventriloquism.

This is a location she purports to be happy with, at least on the surface . One might assume however, that only ever being accepted on the margins is less psychically comfortable for her than perhaps is stated. This is itself worthy of exploration, but is beyond what can be achieved within this chapter. Within neo-liberal discourses of self as project, Jayne's subjectivity and sense of self as 'respectable' might be understood as one she hopes to one day consume fully into being (Bauman 2001 in Walkerdine 2003.) There is the danger of course that Jayne will never be a "*Boden Mum*". Because molten capitalism and markets function by linking to desire, by the time she can afford to buy the clothes she sees as markers of the respectable 'Yummy Mummy', the 'Yummy Mummies' at the school gates will , according to the press, probably have tired of the look and moved on to another fashion and brand which speaks of their projected identity. If she wears the clothing past its ability to signify, she will be getting it wrong. For now at least, she feels the gaze has shifted a little in her favour and is a more comfortable one; from her home she is looking out upon middle class respectability and at the school gates she joins in with the bitchiness of the *Boden Mums*' looking down on other working class women who on many levels she can identify with and project unwanted parts of herself into. Vitally for Jayne she at least feels she is no longer being looked down on.

Like the majority of the mothers in the study, having a degree and a better career was not thought by Jayne as enough to alter her class position. Mothers did, however, feel that their own education would offer their children social mobility and respectability, both through being a role model in education and the expected change to material circumstances anticipated. This takes us to the final case which illustrates and supports the argument of the chapter.

### **6.2.3. Jade – “I didn’t want them to be me”**

Jade is a highly reflexive woman and although initially cautious in our interviews, (I felt positioned as a social worker), she was very open and thoughtful about her life. Since childhood Jade had the fantasy of going to university. She told me the subject she studied was never important to her, the degree certificate, ‘proof’ of her achievement and thus her worth to others was what mattered to her. She wanted to be recognised and validated as a particular kind of person; intelligent, educated and respectable. After a difficult life, which included *running away*, and an unplanned pregnancy in her teens, now in her late 20’s and a lone parent with two further children, the identity position of ‘single mother’ and the need to provide a positive role model for her children forms part of the affective aspect of her aspiration and motivation. Like Jordan and Jayne, participation in higher education at this point in her life can be understood as a moral imperative for Jade.

Growing up involved within the care system, and through the various struggles she has experienced in her adult life which have brought her into contact with

Government agencies, Jade has been very aware of the negative gaze of the ostensibly middle class 'Other'. Having previously been in care, a drug user, and as a single parent of three children supported by benefits and living in council accommodation, she is keenly aware of her perceived 'abject' status (Ringrose and Walkerdine 2008; Hey and Bradford 2009), 'spoiled identity' and the unfair personal value judgements surrounding herself and her family (May 2008).

Academic success although longed for, wasn't felt to be a possibility before now:

*Jade: You know because I came from this family where nobody went to university and nobody really expected you to do it...my family kind of has two sides...so my...for my Gran, my Gran was living in a council flat but before that, my Great Gran was very middle class, you know*

Melanie: *mm*

*Jade: so that side of the family kind of, they are the ones that went to (breathless)...university and went on to be officers and everything else*

Melanie: *mm*

*Jade: and our side of the family was the side that didn't do anything*

Melanie: *mm*

*Jade: and I suppose I didn't like being one of those people who wasn't doing anything.*

The affect and longing surrounding the above statement cannot be conveyed on paper. When I was interviewing Jade, I was aware of her breathlessness. When I thought about it later and revisited the three interviews, I noticed that she often used

the phrase *I felt like I couldn't breathe* in relation to the place she lived and the block of council maisonettes which was her home. Listening to the data, and paying attention to her tone, I felt her breathlessness illustrated the envy and wish that she had been born into the '*very middle class other side of the family*', where expectations and life chances, she perceives would be very different. She would not be *suffocating* in her council maisonette. There is a strong reparative element, of a lost class life denied to her by circumstances beyond her control. Within this extract there is a distinction made between the middle class side of the family who become *officers and everything else* and are looked up to, and her own side who *didn't do nothing* and within fields of social judgement can be looked down upon. There is also a very conscious desire to distance herself from and dis-identify with *our side of the family* and an 'unacceptable' identity position of *being one of those people who wasn't doing anything*, which within neo-liberal discourse constructs such a self as a pathological failure. Like the other women presented earlier, growing up around the political rhetoric of the 'evils' of single motherhood conveyed through media interest in working class women (Skeggs, 2005), Jade knows that despite liberal discourses and living in *a more enlightened world* as she puts it, as a particular kind of mother - single, working class and in receipt of benefits, she is pathologised by others.

As Barbara Ehrenreich (1990) contends and concurs:

While ideas about gender, and even race, have moved, however haltingly, in the direction of greater tolerance and inclusivity, ideas about class remain mired in prejudice and mythology. 'Enlightened' people, who might flinch at a racial slur, have no trouble listing the character defects of an ill-defined

“underclass”, defects which routinely include, ignorance, promiscuity, and sloth (Ehrenreich 1990, cited in Tyler 2008).

Across the three interviews, it became clear that she wants to deflect, disprove and move beyond these determining judgements, explicitly because of the way she feels they reflect on her children. She does not want them to be ‘stained’ in the same way she feels she was and is, understanding from her own experience and class position growing up that her children can be viewed within such rhetoric and discourses not merely as ‘less than’ but as a threat to society and social order (Gillies 2007). Who she is understood to be in terms of identity; what ‘kind’ of mother she is in terms of class and ‘respectability’, reflects onto and has consequences for her children. This is intergenerational transmission at work and she fears the perceived sins of the mother will be visited on the children.

The children’s father lives some miles away and though involved in their life peripherally, Jade does not consider him as a suitable role model, feeling him to be more interested in drug-taking. She describes him as having ideas to do things but lacking ambition and drive to achieve them, and his unwillingness to change was a major factor in the relationship ending. Jade feels very strongly about ambition and achieving goals and described to me how she likes to set herself targets and work out a thought through plan of how to achieve them. Indeed she demonstrated her ability to do this in her planned move to Wales in order to attend University, when she made the risky and brave decision to leave the family’s familiar surroundings,

routines, and bonds behind in order to achieve her academic goals. She explained that whilst she was in her familiar surroundings and involved with the same friendship groups it would have been hopeless trying to change. She also demonstrated this during our interview when she took me through her detailed plans for the next five years in terms of education, career and location.

Jade is aware of the impact of her past and present actions on her children, not least of all perhaps because of the devastating impact her mother's own problems and choices had on her and her life.

*Jade: ...all those bad things and you don't really want to admit to doing those things when you have got children but, you know there is nothing I can do about that now. All I can do is go okay, that was bad and I shouldn't have done it but...I'm not like that anymore.*

As a lone mother, with no extended family in proximity she is keenly aware of her parental responsibility and strives to be a positive role model, something she says she lacked. Through her learning on access courses and in going to University, she wants to teach her children what she feels to be valuable life lessons: firstly, how you are recognised by others is not reflective of how you are on the inside, she wants them to recognise their self worth as individuals, beyond other's misrecognition; secondly, she wants to demonstrate that people themselves can develop, change, transform - they can be other things in other places, understand themselves, their context and material surroundings differently. She feels that while

often circumstances are not ideal that does not mean one needs to feel victimised. Importantly, she wants to teach her children to have self worth, imagination, aspiration and goals, and the need to plan and take action in order to achieve these and challenge injustice and limitations. This is indeed a tall order for someone lacking the various capitals (Bourdieu 1986) which facilitate and foster these easily. As a working class mother living in a 'deprived' area, Jade worries that her children might *fall into the same traps* that she did and make the 'wrong' choices and investments. In being a positive role model she is trying to save them from the distress of those traps. As she says, very poignantly:

Jade: *I'm not going to stop them, if they really want to do something but I want them to realise that it's maybe not the best decision - you know and the only way I can do that is by picking myself and moving on. You can't - if you are down in that rut you can't really tell them not to be there...*

Melanie: *No*

Jade: *So you have to pick yourself up and you have to move on and you have to do this, so yeah. I just didn't want them to be me (laughs). That's one of the reasons me and my ex split up and stuff. It is because I didn't want them to be where I was in 10 years time, you know.*

*I just didn't want them to be me.* Here Jade is saying something important about the affective dimensions of her own classed life and subjectivity, how it might feel and the need to protect the children from the *same traps* which have helped shape it. Like many aspirational working class parents, she wants more for them than she received herself (Walkerdine et al 2001; Sennett and Cobb 1972). Jade had no

positive parental role models who gave to her a sense of self worth. Being in care and moving regularly, there was no parental interest and encouragement in her schooling and there was no-one to demonstrate that change can be a real possibility. Jade had to figure these out for herself by searching for a sense of self worth and self esteem. Along the way however this involved *falling into traps*; traps of self destructive behaviour, of self harm and drug misuse, and unsuitable and unrewarding relationships. Initially perhaps these might have provided an unconscious and false sense of safety and of comfort through the familiarity of pain and no reward, the doer-done to relationships described above (Layton 2006) before becoming just painful and confining and unbearable. Jade told me of the conscious decision she had made to improve her life, what it involved and the consequences:

Jade: *Well I had to cut ties with people that I knew weren't really the best sort of people for me. Um I know I hurt quite a lot of people doing that but I had to be selfish (small laugh) and just think right I've got to step away from that now and ignore it....But I started the process really early on...I think it is quite a gradual process and I think that you have to think that - okay, the future I want is there so it means right now I am going to have to start making changes, I think you just have to kind of – you go through a grieving process with it, like you are grieving the person that you were at the time, even though I didn't like the person I was.*

Leading by example in her endeavours in higher education, what Jade is trying to transmit to her children then are the aspirations, hopes, and desires she has for all

their futures. She wants to illustrate how change is possible. Although through the move and her studentship, the family's material existence is improved, by government classification they are still a vulnerable family living in poverty. But according to Jade financial reward is unimportant to her. Having a positive sense of self, the family being seen by others as of value, having a sense of belonging and being able to get by are important. Using the meagre resources she has by middle class standards, she uses herself as an example to her children by *picking herself up*, trying to bolster in them a positive sense of self, efficacy and respectability. In showing that this is possible she hopes to deflect shame and cushion them from the unfair judgement and disrespect their class and material position in society attracts. In this way, going to university in order to be the 'right' kind of mother is a moral imperative. Despite the structural inequalities stacked against her, and the affect that these inequalities arouse, Jade is trying to be 'a future oriented and self regulating subject' (Walkerdine and Ringrose 2008). As she explains:

Jade: *I couldn't really...and having the children, um deciding to go to university with the children was quite important. Kind of for selfish reasons you know because it is something I always wanted to do but also they haven't really got anyone else to look up to and if I don't go to university then I am kind of saying it is kind of okay to give up on your dreams...*

Melanie: *mm*

Jade: *I wanted to teach them that it doesn't matter how hard things are, you can pick yourself up and move on with your life and get where you want to be*

Melanie: *mm*

Jade: *So that's quite important*

Melanie: *Is that something you felt was lacking in your childhood?*

Jade: *Um, yeah, I think so. I've always been quite independent (pause) (laughs with embarrassment) so I think that probably has something to do with it.*

Melanie: *...Mm, so do you think some of it is about proving something to yourself and proving it to others as well?*

Jade: *Yes. I think living in Northville people kind of saw me as, you know I was a single parent I was living in a council flat...you know I had been through quite a troubled teens and that's all I ever was and I got quite...people pigeon holed you know, and I didn't really want people going oh well she has got three children and she is on her own and she lives in a council estate. Because as much as people think we are in a more enlightened world people do still look down their nose at you and I didn't want that because it kind of reflects onto the children then, isn't it?*

In the sections above, Jade describes the way in which she and her children are misrecognised through the markers of the 'Chav Mum' and the moral markers of underclass. She felt that to her neighbours in Northville all they would ever be is a 'trouble' family, 'shaped by disparate discourses of familial disorder and dysfunction... fecund and excessive femininity, of antisocial behaviour and of moral and ecological decay' (Skeggs 2004 p. 87). The stigma of the 'spoiled' motherhood identity she felt others offered her in her old hometown was confining and

inescapable. Moving away to attend university provided the opportunity to move away from and defend against the pathological identity position on offer and re-negotiate her mother identity through the new position of mature student mum in a new location. This new position allows her a more 'moral presentation of self' (May 2008). However, this new identity is not without its contradictions, and an alternative working class discourse around the 'good mother', as someone who has no desires for herself beyond her family, is also invoked. This slippage of *selfish reasons* suggests that personal desire alone might not have been enough motivation to enter higher education alone. Rather the desire to defect and manage a 'spoilt identity' and claim a more moral and respectable identity around motherhood, which also reflects upon her children, is a powerful source of motivation.

### **6.3. Conclusion**

Within neo-liberal discourse of a fair, meritocratic society, in responding to calls for self improvement Jordan, Jayne and Jade's decisions to embark upon higher education could be read as simply choice and agency. However, as the thesis has argued, this belies the rich psychosocial complexity of aspiration. In considering the ways in which neo-liberalism has transformed meanings and identities around motherhood (Allen and Osgood 2009) the chapter has argued that for the women presented, aspiration and motivation to participate in higher education were formed from a moral imperative, based around political and cultural constructions of the 'good' Yummy Mummy' and 'bad' 'Chav Mum'.

The data used has been analysed to illustrate the way in which moral imperatives implicit within neoliberal discourses of reflective modernism (Giddens's 1991) and constructions of 'good motherhood' and 'respectability' interact with the affective dimensions of motherhood, providing insight into the 'psychic landscape' of class pathologisation and desire for transformation (Reay 2005, p.911). Centralising affect as a relational force, the chapter has highlighted the ways in which subjectivity is shaped through neo-liberalism and its discourses and how emotion as rhetoric is able to produce how we feel about ourselves, others and how we are aligned with them. It has shown how as a response to a situation and to the world, affect is able to influence change (Wetherell 2012).

The chapter has illustrated how desire to renegotiate maternal subjectivities perceived to be pathological, into the 'right kind of mother' was a significant aspect of their aspiration, motivation and participation in higher education. Such a renegotiation of identity allowed the women to move away from past, classed 'spoiled identities' centred around the figure of the lone teenage mother (May 2008), the affect of which still reverberates in the present, and negotiate and claim a more 'respectable' form of motherhood and femininity, more in line with discourses of the 'good' mother within the contemporary landscape of neo-liberalism. Being able to display respectability through, education, career, appearance, the ability to consume and the desire for the 'correct' things was central. The women in this chapter also demonstrated a need to distance themselves from, and dis-identify with, other working class lives and bodies felt to embody the identities they were trying to escape.

Resonating with Tanya's experience in the last chapter, Jordan, Jayne and Jade's aspiration, motivation and participation were laden with affect. Also like Tanya, the mothers in this chapter clearly did not lack aspiration themselves, and wanted something much better for their children than they had. They saw themselves as role models to their children, this evidence again challenges the idea that working class mothers lack, and that they are unable to transmit, aspiration to their children; disrupting reductionist discourses of intergenerational transmission.

Building on the conclusions of last chapter, this chapter has further highlighted the emotional, affective and relational nature of aspiration, motivation and participation in higher education as a working class student/mother. In considering the affect surrounding the women's motherhood, it has provided a further dimension to the psychosocial complexity of aspiration, motivation and participation in higher education for this group of women, and the need for contextual understanding in relation to real lives. Resonating with the schizo-analysis in Chapter Five, it has shown the ways in which the past is able to affect the present and possibilities for the future and how old and familiar interweaving affective routines might prevent change by forming affective ruts (Wetherell, 2012). Jade's story adds weight to the importance of space, place and imagination in change occurring; and both chapters have demonstrated that the '*processes which position us are also those which produce the desires for which we strive*' (Henriques et al, 1984, p. 205)

The next chapter, Chapter Seven builds upon these conclusions and further interrogates the emotional and affective nature of aspiration, motivation and participation in higher education and turns its focus to exploring the links between trauma and higher education, and identity.

## **7.**

### **Chapter Seven:**

#### **Making links between Trauma, Higher Education and Identity: An Imagined Place of Safety**

##### **7.1. Introduction**

Previous chapters have made reference to the trauma experienced by the small sample of women interviewed, both in childhood and their adult lives. It is to this issue that the present chapter turns. This chapter finalises the core argument of the thesis by using the emergent theme of trauma within the data to demonstrate the extent of the psychosocial complexity of aspiration. The chapter presents a multi-levelled analysis to interrogate the data in relation to this theme and establish how it might be connected to the women's participation in higher education and issues of identity.

There are two distinct but connected analysis sections in the chapter. Firstly, the chapter uses a composite case analysis to show the similarities in experience across the women's lives, which could be understood as being intrinsically linked to historical and cultural issues of class inequalities and oppression. In growing up, many of the women described stressors and issues in their families such as poverty, job insecurity, domestic violence, alcohol abuse and mental health problems. The latter three of these issues could be understood as coping mechanisms linked to the

managing, the coping, the getting on with it, a Hobson's Choice<sup>14</sup> method, connected to the class stoicism and threats to ontological safety which Chapter Five has highlighted. To ensure that this very sensitive detail of the women's lives cannot be traced back to the individual women, this analysis is presented as a composite case. The composite case highlights how and why aspiration is so difficult in marginalised families, when just trying to survive is what is paramount. This analysis is also able to offer empathic understanding by creating an affective resonance through which the reader may connect with the data and the psychosocial issues faced, and, what might need to be surmounted in order for aspiration to flourish. Such an analysis exposes ideas of intergenerational transmission, but also disrupts them. Chapter Five highlighted the way in which ontological security or a sense of safety was central to movement and change. This final chapter adds to this argument by considering the meanings of higher education for the women interviewed.

In making links between trauma, higher education and identity, the thematic composite case analysis aims to reveal the commonalities in the women's experience in terms of what could be considered as a traumatic set of family experiences and events. Emerging from this analysis is what can be described as a set of shared meanings. Having identified these shared meanings, the second part of the thematic analysis shows their uniqueness. This second analysis section returns to extracts from original accounts to provide concrete examples elaborating on this theme, to express what it means to need to escape and the different versions this took across

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<sup>14</sup> The choice of taking either that which is offered or nothing; the absence of a real alternative.

the women's lives. In this section of the analysis new pseudonyms have been applied in order to further avoid deductive disclosure (Kaiser 2009).

As explained in Chapter Two, trauma was not an initial research focus. When I embarked upon this research, I expected to hear about psychic conflict and re-negotiation of lives and identities, which might be painful for those affected and difficult to hear. These struggles have been reflected in the two previous chapters. Unexpected, however, were the unsolicited accounts and levels of appalling psychological trauma (Parr 2000). I was fascinated by the difficult stories of the women's lives, but in truth I was at a loss as to what to make of them in relation to my research. That these accounts of trauma were elicited in the psychosocial interviews, aside from speaking to the efficacy of the method of data collection, suggests that this is not only something the women felt a desire to discuss, but also is intrinsic to their identity and subjectivity.

Also significant, was that at the time of interview some of the women students were still experiencing chaos in their lives. Despite this, each woman had stayed the course in Higher Education. Given the drop-out rates of mature students, and the literature around this group which highlights the many difficulties faced, and the way in which this is compounded by class and gender, this might be considered remarkable. They have each managed to achieve something that many commentators insist they cannot. As I worked with the data, I became aware that the

women's career aspirations might also be connected to their personal biographies on an emotional and affective level.

These issues raised a broad question as to the links between trauma, higher education and identity. This chapter aims to develop some links between the three and piece them together using a psychoanalytically informed psychosocial approach in order to consider how trauma may be understood beyond the stories the women told and be consciously and unconsciously implicated in the women's educational journeys.

The chapter addresses the first and the fourth research questions set out in Chapter One. The elements of the chapter's argument are complex and as a result there is a need to take the reader through the various steps of thinking and analysis. This commences below with an explanation of the ways in which I worked with the sensitive data.

## **7.2. Working With Sensitive Data**

Making the links between trauma, higher education and identity has been a difficult process and I tried several ways of working with and presenting the data and findings in a psychoanalytically informed way. The material is supremely rich and there is definitely much untapped potential ripe for further development. However, ultimately this was impeded within the thesis by a number of factors which, when in orchestra, made me reconsider my approach. My lack of psychoanalytic training, my inexperience and status as a lone researcher, several difficulties in my personal life,

and concern about my own mental well-being at the time were influential in how I eventually worked with the data and presented the findings. The psychoanalytic inflection has been much 'lighter' than originally anticipated and these methodological issues are discussed in Chapter Four of this thesis and again reflected upon in the concluding chapter of the thesis.

Doing justice to the women's accounts theoretically and giving voice to their individual traumas in any great depth could not be achieved within the scope of one chapter. Indeed, this project could be a thesis in itself. In terms of presenting and analysing the data around the theme of trauma, I needed a means which could present the psychosocial complexity of the women's lives, and the traumas, particularly before university, in order to refute the simplified 'can do' fantasy which circulates within neo-liberalism, hiding a raft of structural and psychosocial barriers (Mannay and Morgan 2013) and pathologising marginalised lives. It needed also, to present the commonalities of the women's past and present lives. Conveying depth, and the felt aspects of their experiences in a way which could remain true to the women's voices and evoke in the reader a sense of empathetic understanding and resonance was essential. In order to do so it was important that the reader be able to feel and connect with, on an emotional level the biographical context of their participation in higher education.

Fear of further pathologising marginalised lives, the emotional resonance the women's stories had for me, and because I wanted to show the extent of the trauma

overcome, meant that for a long time I could not get beyond presenting the trauma itself. I felt myself to be stuck and in some sense drowning and overwhelmed, unable to see beyond the trauma and make any possible connections to the links to higher education that I strongly thought and felt in my body to be there. The overwhelm I felt in working with the data, I felt to be telling me something important. It is perhaps not remarkable that one might find such traumatic stories upsetting, particularly if one is unused to such stories. However, having worked in a Forensic Unit for mentally disordered offenders as a medical secretary for twelve years, I was used to transcribing the most horrendous details of lives and extremely sensitive material. Those stories however, didn't evoke in me the response of overwhelm and a sense of suffocation that I felt in relation to the women's stories and I took this to be telling me something very important about how at times their lives might feel as marginalised working class girls, women and mothers.

Coming to the realisation that I could in fact analyse and present the data differently but still convey a sense of the psychosocial difficulties in the women's lives was liberating. I decided I needed to not focus on individual traumas but rather acknowledge the common existence, the similarities of biography and experience, their context and their effect/affect, and what that might tell me, in order to explore the suggested links to the 'space' of higher education. I felt that until I had made these critical connections and written them in the form of a chapter, I couldn't confidently theorise or interpret other aspects of the data. Learning how to manage and work with the concept of trauma, through the use of a composite case, developed

by Todres (2007) and later Wertz et al (2011), was in essence, the lynch-pin to the development and presentation of the whole thesis.

The next section presents the starting point of making links between trauma , education and identity. Following this, an explanation of how I utilised the work of Todres (2007) and Wertz et al (2011) to develop the composite case is provided, before going on to present the data as a composite case.

### **7.3. Finding the links between Trauma, Education and Identity**

The connection between trauma and education, although perhaps surprising and relatively unexplored, is not entirely new. Janet Parr (2000) also made this connection when like myself she began her research looking at mature students in higher education, as a mature student mother herself. Using loosely structured qualitative interviews to produce her data, she too was shocked by the amount and severity of the trauma in the lives of her participants. In her book “Identity and Education: The Links for Mature Women Students,” Parr (2000) describes her impression of the women she interviewed as:

fighting for personal survival, not in a physical, but in a psychological sense and education is the vehicle they are using. For all the women, education could be seen as therapeutic in its broadest sense.

(Parr 2000, p.118).

This therapeutic aspect that Parr describes is something I too felt in my own data, but I could not explain how this therapeutic aspect played out in everyday life. Parr concluded that for her participants, desire to return to education went beyond simple explanations of gaining qualifications they had failed to get at the traditional age. Rather, there was a need to redefine or rework aspects of their identity associated to trauma. This included wanting to change what I understand to be psychosocially formed negative self images they held, relationally influenced by the behaviours and attitudes of significant others in their lives. In considering the links between trauma and the women's decision to enter higher education, she posits a 'multi-step situation, for example, early school leaving, plus an unfulfilling job, plus trauma, plus possible relationship problems, plus a number of unknown factors in any order or combination' (Parr 2000 p. 129-130 ) which place the women back in education as mature students. Although not discussed in these terms, there is a sense in Parr's work then that psychosocially formed and lived issues and experiences are being played out in higher education as a form of psychic resolution.

While Parr makes these very important links by contextualising the women's participation through the painful stories she recounts, and which mirror those of the women in this study, beyond the inspirational stories of positive transformation, she is unable to make clear conclusions about how this might have occurred. While Parr probes the links the women themselves make within their explanations and expressed motivations, she doesn't go beyond 'rational explanations' in order to explore and develop those links or consider the implications of class, culture and

history in relation to the women's biographies. As a result the mechanisms and dynamics of what might be happening in this space are not examined. What happens in higher education, as opposed to any other space or activity that might bring about such change is still under developed.

### **7.3.1. Trauma and Mega Trauma**

The use of the term trauma is contentious. For some theorists, the term social suffering is preferred, arguing that as a term 'trauma' pathologises and medicalises experience and phenomena (Kleinman et al 1997; Berlant 2004). Here, I am using the term trauma in its broadest sense to encompass not just an event, but rather experience which has had a profound negative impact, enough to alter a world view and sense of safety in that world, leaving the subject fragmented. Internally something violent seems to have taken place, mirroring the violence felt to have occurred, or having actually occurred in the external world (Garland, 1999).

Many lives are touched by some kind of trauma over the life course, for example divorce or perhaps unplanned early pregnancy, and these were scattered over the lives of all the women I interviewed. What were presented by the women I look at in this chapter, weren't 'just traumas', they were often 'mega traumas' (Parr 2000, p. 100): – emotional/physical abuse and violence; sexual abuse; domestic violence; murder; attempted murder. Often, these traumas were followed by compulsive, self abusive/self destructive behaviours and even attempts at suicide. These could be considered as defensive coping mechanisms, in order to control and manage the

difficult psychological feelings/affects surrounding the events, my response to which in the data, as mentioned, was a sense of overwhelm.

I use the term ‘event’ which implies that they may be isolated incidents, when in fact, as the following composite narrative illustrates, the women’s lives could be understood as a series of traumatic events/experiences. It is a sense of the longitudinal aspect of these traumas which are pivotal to psychosocial understandings of aspiration, motivation and participation in higher education in relation to working class women as mothers and students.

Although unique, there are also similarities in the women’s biographical accounts, with a central narrative running through them. They are versions of a similar story, with variations of similar themes repeated though their life course thus far. These are the ‘doer-done to’ unconscious patterning of relationships which Layton (2007) has described and were identified in operation in the last chapter. Although the trauma started in childhood, it was often repeated in another form in adulthood, the emotional tremors still being felt in a very powerful sense and continuing to shape the landscape of adult subjectivity as working class, mature students and mothers. Often, as one negative relational influence of power and control went (from home or school), it was replaced by another, perhaps in a different form or version. Relational patterns were being repeated and replayed. It became clear from the data, that before education the women had experienced several things in common: in childhood particularly, but again continuing into adulthood, not having their

emotional needs met; a sense of having no or little control over their own lives, yet feeling responsible for the welfare of others - a sibling or mother; history of behaviours which could be understood as defence mechanisms; reported low self-esteem, a lack of confidence and self belief; and a lack of a sense of control, protection/containment (at home and school) which made them feel unsafe.

As a researcher, and on a personal level, I do not wish to add support to the damaging assumption that working class families are inherently dysfunctional, and apportion parental blame. Rather, I submit that the women were in a psychosocial pattern of psychically lived and socially delivered class and gender relations in a particular historical, cultural and economic context resulting in adverse consequences at the level of the marginalised family (Bradford and Hey 2007). In many respects the struggles here transcend individual biographies, and represent and are produced from wider socio-economic and political changes and cultures and identities in flux (West 1996). We must assume that the parents of the women presented here were caught up in their own psychosocial struggles and did the best they could in very difficult circumstances

Val Walsh's (1996), feminist work: 'Terms of engagement: Pedagogy as a healing politic', reminds us that subjectivity is formed first in the mess and pressure outside of the University, bearing the signs of those strains both in terms of being and meaning in the world. What is brought to higher education in terms of experience, social identities and positioning will then influence the meaning that education

holds. In order to show how this might be so in relation to the data, and understand the women's trajectories and desired transformation in any meaningful way, we need to look at the women's lives long before their participation in higher education. We need to consider the contextual and relational production of their subjectivities, the trauma, and importantly how the melding of these made the women feel in terms of affect and their sense of self, and the way in which they were negotiated. Trauma and its effects/affects are after all relational. Doing so may help to reveal the meanings of education for this group of working class student mothers.

#### **7.4. Developing a Means of Analysis and Presentation**

Concerned with moving closer to felt meanings of lived experience in research and psychotherapy, Todres, (2007), has developed an interpretive method of 'Embodied Enquiry' through the compilation of composite first person narratives. He uses themes as means of organizing shared meanings which may also be faithful to unique experience. In this way it is a means of expressing the general in the particular (Engle 2009); 'the dance of the unique and the shared' (Todres 2007, p.66 in Engle 2009). Todres' research in his own clinical psychotherapeutic practice, was concerned with clients being asked to describe a situation within therapy which they could see or understand as something which also carried a greater sense of freedom. The study, involving ten participants, provided narratives of movements of insight, hope and self-acceptance and an analysis of key themes and their meanings: structured freedom, self-insight and the power of the narrative before and after moments of insight which were then presented as a composite narrative Todres (2007).

Wertz et al (2011) have utilised and developed Todres' work on Embodied Enquiry (2007) and composite first person narratives as a method of exploring various types of phenomena in health and social care, including the experiences of student nurses, male parolees, women going through the menopause and experiences of teen obesity, in a felt sense in order that 'the essential meaning of and the themes within the phenomena become clear' Todres (2007, p.9). Both Todres (2007) and Wertz et al (2011) employ the method phenomenologically, based upon the perception of phenomena as they are presented in awareness.

The goal of using a composite narrative in the first half of the chapter was to express an embodied, relational and affective understanding of the commonalities of the women's experience across the course of their working class lives thus far. It is intended that the reader be able to relate to the themes presented in a personal way, by creating a resonance which allows the reader to use their imagination and 'be with' (Wertz et al 2011) or connect to the women and their psychosocial experience in a felt sense (Wertz et al 2011). The goal in terms of ethics also, as mentioned in chapter four, was to disconnect specific events and their series from specific women, thus helping to protect the women from obvious self identification.

The method draws a composite picture emerging from the women's narratives. It is a reflective story presented as a first person narrative. The use of 'I' is essential as it is meant to represent a composite working class mature student mother, who typifies the broad experience of the sample within a temporal, cultural and economic context

(Wertz et al 2011). The composite narrative is not a simple recounting or telling. It is an interpretation by the researcher in several significant ways: through extensive knowledge of the data and the relevant literature, and through reflexivity (Wertz et al 2011). Individual narratives are unified with reflexive understandings to locate the affective experiences of the women in a psychosocial context and provide an understanding of the meanings of education within the lives of the women; in order to make links between trauma, higher education and identity. In this sense the resultant composite case is an interpretation emergent from within myself as researcher and working class mature student mother. Central to the method is to arrive at a number of themes which are common across the women's accounts. Thus, the emerging themes are the data. The use of a composite is then to present all the stories as one, and thus to allow the reader to see it simply and to further protect the participants.

#### **7.4.1. Developing a Composite Narrative**

In arriving at this interpretation I used the following: firstly, my extensive knowledge of the data, having worked with it, reading and hearing the women's narratives and making previous alternative attempts at interpretation, over a number of years (the former an aspect which Wertz et al deem essential); secondly, my knowledge of the literature around class, mature students and trauma, a selection of which has been presented in Chapter Two; and thirdly through my own reflexivity as a researcher, using notes from interviews and reflections from my research diary, and drawing on my own subjectivity as a working class mature student mother. I also used my own emotional responses to the data as a guide.

Staying close to the text I identified themes emerging from across the women's narratives from their accounts of childhood through to what they feel education has given them. These were felt experiences and meanings and included, feeling grown up, desire for belonging, not fitting in, feelings of responsibility, of lack of control, a lack of feeling safe, resilience; feelings and meanings around family dynamics, motherhood, aspiration, study choices, emotional independence, attitudes of friends and family toward education, a place of safety, self change and benefits of education.

These were then worked with and interpreted to present key themes within the composite case, around the meanings of education for the women. I have presented the embodied interpretation in such a way as to incorporate the experiences and feelings of the majority. I have therefore presented shared contextual experiences and the psychosocial meanings of education as I feel they relate to trauma . It is acknowledged that this is not exhaustive, and equally the composite case could be compiled in other ways to show other meanings in relation to other phenomena. Individual meanings and suggestions as to the way they may have come about, are explored in the second part of the chapter's analysis. In compiling the composite case, I have used the women's own words, and have taken sentences from across the interviews with different women, placing them together to tell a composite story. This facilitates a sense of the women's own voices being heard, an aspect of the research about which I have felt passionately, since having the privilege of the women share with me such painful times in their lives.

These individual narratives are brought together with my own reflexive understandings and emotional responses as researcher, having worked with the data since 2011 (four years), and using my subjectivity as a working class mature student mother. Presented in this way, it shows how the past is implicated in the present, and the way in which subjectivity unfolds within and across different temporal and social locations. It shows also, the meanings around education across the life course thus far. The next section presents the composite narrative, following which the significance of the isolated themes is discussed.

#### **7.5. A Composite Narrative: A Future Haunted by Phantoms of the Past, which Impact Upon the Present.**

*I liked school and I was clever, but I wasn't particularly good at it because it...everything was quite disrupted around me. I often missed school. I found it really hard to concentrate on school and home life as well. I think my whole childhood felt quite difficult really. There was a lot of family shit going on; it was a lot of chaos and violence. My dad was quite controlling and I felt trampled over. My mum was a bit strange growing up, I think she was quite ill herself. I think she had mental health problems. There was nobody for me to talk to at the time.*

*They wanted me to do well in school but they never really actually pushed me, they just said, "we knew you would do alright". I definitely think I push my daughter a lot more than my mother pushed me. I think my parents sort of thought you know as long as you WORK, you know work hard, you don't necessarily have to go to university – but they wouldn't have accepted us bumming around and doing nothing,*

*they wouldn't have accepted that at all. I felt they just expected the same for me as they had had; to work ,to live, and just get on with it.*

*When I was growing up, they didn't give me the attention I needed, but they had a lot on, you can't give something that you don't have. I am very independent, I got used to managing on my own or sorting things out for them. I often acted as a bit of a "washer" between other family members. I never went to my parents with my problems and stuff about school , even when something really bad happened. After a while, I just found it easier to walk away from school. I was bunking off sometimes or pretending to be ill but it was never picked up on, no-one really noticed what was going on for me. Come exam time I just didn't put the effort in.*

*Growing up I felt a bit messed up and rejected. I ended up with an eating disorder and self harming. I got a bit involved with drugs and all those bad things you don't really want to admit to doing when you have got children, but you know there is nothing I can do about it now.*

*I've had problems with depression quite often. I suffer from anxiety and terrible panic attacks. All the things that happened in my life really affected my confidence and self esteem, and I've got involved with the wrong people and made some bad choices in my relationships with partners, which have ended up with me being physically and emotionally abused. When you have a kind of abusive family you don't learn very good relationship skills and you are not a very good judge of people.*

*Growing up, I felt different to a lot of my friends. They wanted to just have kids and stay at home kind of thing. It's not that I didn't want kids, I just wanted to get out. I*

*remember saying to one of my friends “when we leave school, we’ll get a flat together and we’ll get jobs, and I remember her looking at me as if I was crazy you know, because people didn’t get flats together. You know, you grew up and you married and you moved into your own home, you know what I mean. I still see that girl who I spoke to about moving in together...she got pregnant when we were 15 and you know, she didn’t leave that council estate that she grew up on.*

*I got pregnant at 17 but the relationship was difficult and I ended up on my own. I was gutted. I felt abandoned because he didn’t want to know but I thought I’ve got a child. I have to get on with it. I felt ashamed, let down and abandoned.*

*I came to university kind of for selfish reasons you know, because it is something that I always wanted to do, but also my kids haven’t really got anyone else to look up to and if I don’t go to university then I am kind of saying it’s kind of ok to give up on your dreams. I wanted to teach them that it doesn’t matter how hard things are you can pick yourself up and move on and get where you want to be. I just didn’t want them to be me.*

*I felt like I was...had nothing, you know I am unemployed, she is going to have to go to school – she hasn’t got a Dad in the picture...her mother didn’t have a job and I was thinking oh bless her, I’m letting her down – look what I have done to her, I’ve brought her into this world, know what I mean, but education has built me back up to say I am worth something. I can do something and I am gonna go on doing something you know...it has been, it has been a hard old slog to sit up all night and do my essay and stuff and still have to get up in the morning, know what I mean. I want a nice stable environment for my children.*

*I'm hoping that seeing me work hard she will think well, you know this is an option, you know I can do this. And I say to her all the time about her going to university and I make sure that she knows that she is going to university.*

*I've always been quite independent. I've learned to rely on myself emotionally. My mum is a lot better now, and she does help out with the children and half terms and things like that.*

*I think the benefit of being quite bright was that it made me kind of resourceful so that...one of the things about being homeless is that it is deadly, deadly boring...I think that's part of the reason people are drinking all the time, because there is nothing to do – but I didn't mind checking into a library for hours, you know, and killing time that way - looking things up and stuff like that and instead of, I dunno hanging out somewhere, I would go to a court room and watch trials going on and things like that because it was free entertainment and warmth, plus discarded cigarettes. That stopped it from becoming a very depressing lowering experience.*

*When I was thinking about coming to university, I was thinking what can I do, what am I good at and I thought well I had been in the library reading and keeping dry in the past and in my room reading and keeping out of trouble for many, many years before that, and I know I can read, I know I can talk – I can do all that and I didn't have enough confidence to try a different subject.*

*I always wanted to do something worthy, you know worthwhile, something that made a difference you know. I didn't want to be doing any old 9-5 boring, unfulfilling job, or working in a shop, I wanted a career. I wanted to make a difference and help people. I didn't want to be in and out of dead end jobs.*

*I think particularly with my circle of associates, they kind of didn't want anyone changing because it would show the fact that they weren't changing, that they were doing the same things they have been doing for 10-15 years. A lot of my family and friends just don't understand it at all, they don't know what's involved and their world views can be so narrow, it's so frustrating. They think it is going to go back to being the same. But it can't. They think I have got big ideas. I think some are frightened by it in a way.*

*In University, having people who think along the same lines as you and understands what you are doing is important. My friends in university are like me and they have all have seen the struggle I have done and they all say you have done so well, and it does, it does build you up. It is important to have support and role models, people to inspire you or do it with you. I'm so much more organized these days. I've never been so organized, but you have to be. I think a lot of people thought I would fail and I have proved them all wrong.*

*Going to university has been so important, coz at one point when the baby was a couple of months old, I had so much on, so much stress in my life outside of university and I was trying to do assignments and stuff. Don't get me wrong, the work has been stressful in itself. But if I hadn't had university I think I would have gone under, I don't think I would have coped. It has been my little safe haven. I think it has kept me on the straight and narrow personally, I do. It gave me stability. It gave me something to look forward to – something that I knew I could do and hope for a better life. It was my switching off time before having to come back to reality. It has kept me sane. When I went there, I didn't have to talk about my life before. They didn't know me. It was like going into the unknown world and it was my little*

*space, my little safe haven. So it held a lot of...I am going to miss it very much. I'm already thinking of other things I can do when this is finished...like learning Welsh because my daughter goes to Welsh School, or doing a photography course, or applying for a masters or maybe becoming a midwife or computers.*

*So to be able to go back and achieve things has been fantastic. I feel like such a different person now. I'm a lot more confident within myself and I seem to get on better with people on my course – like we are on the same wave length. I had friends before, but I was like always the weird friend who wanted to go off and do crazy things and they all wanted to stay in the same place and when I am at university it is not like that, everyone is kind of in the same boat helping each other out and stuff. I can think a lot clearer now. I felt quite bogged down before, suffocating, heavy – like my head was kind of – like I would get lost in there. It was a kind of maze and no way out and I don't get that any more and I can think a lot clearer. I don't hate myself anymore, I don't feel like everything is my fault. I'm in control now... whereas I wasn't years ago. There was never anything for me and I think I needed something for me. I think maybe I have come a lot further than I am aware of and it has given me light at the end of the tunnel.*

*I think education, I think sometimes it is an olive branch to get on with your life, to change something. Even if it doesn't change JOB ASPIRATION it gives you something for you, it gives you something to focus on and it also challenges you to leave your child be a bit independent, have ANOTHER sort of little life away from you so you don't wallow all over this child and smother them, you know.*

## **7.6. Embodied Interpretation of Key Themes around the Meanings of Education**

The purpose of the composite narrative was to evoke for the reader, a contextual empathic understanding of the meanings of education across the life course and a sense of the affect around these meanings, in order to try to make the necessary links. The embodied interpretation suggests key themes around the meanings of education for this particular group of women, having grown up in marginalised working class families in 1980's/1990's in Britain. It shows the struggles and tensions within the families and their consequences for subjectivity and well being across the life course. Feeling emotionally abandoned, uncontained and in need of protection; managing, coping and surviving in these families both economically and in an ontological sense was the priority. There is the definite sense that education is 'not for the likes of us' (Cotterill et al 2007 p. 249), working to earn money is what is essential. Returning to education, meanings are framed around realising long held and imagined goals (Parr 2000), that lack of support, means and resources made unachievable for them as traditional age students (Walkerdine 2011). The meaning of education was also connected to the importance of being a role model to their children and encouraging aspiration within their own families (Edwards 1993; Mercer 2007; Leathwood and O'Connell 2003; Reay et al 2002). One aspect of this was explored and demonstrated in the last chapter. Meanings also, are related to economic security for themselves and their children, which is also, as has been demonstrated in the previous chapters, on a psychic level connected to ontological safety. Meanings of education were also, connected to expanding their world views (Parr 2000; Walsh 1996) through imagination and a desire to move beyond their current situation or existential territories, and 'open themselves up to becoming

other' (Guattari 1995; Walkerdine 2011, 2013, 2014). Having become mature students, reflexive understandings of higher education point to meanings of education as unsafe, because of the stress and turbulence of embarking upon something new; becoming students and the changing family dynamics involved in this process (Edwards 1993; Clouder 1997). However conflicting with these, and more prevalent and prominent are meanings of education as a means of escaping difficult realities and emotions (Quinn 2010). Hope and a fresh start; an opportunity to renegotiate their subjectivity is also understood (Walsh 1996; Mercer 2007). The women feel it has brought about self insight and a different self understanding (Shannahan 2000; Walters 2000; Pritchard and Roberts 2006) and a sense of control. It is a place of coping. It is a place of safety and belonging.

Having identified the shared meanings of education, enabled by the composite case method, the second part of the thematic analysis, goes on to explore the uniqueness of these meanings through the issue of safety. The next section focuses on and further interrogates the particular emergent theme from the data; education as 'a place of safety' by drawing on existing literature and psychoanalytic concepts in the analysis. The subsequent analysis expresses what it means to need to escape and the different versions this took across the women's lives. In so doing, this also builds on the conclusions of Chapter Five which argued the necessity of a sense of safety and ontological security as a pre-requisite for change, movement and its continuation; movement from one existential territory to another. However, before moving to that section, it is important to first highlight an ethical dilemma which appeared in the writing of this chapter.

Maintaining anonymity, whilst presenting rich, contextualised accounts is a challenge in qualitative research (Kaiser, 2009). In presenting this section of the analysis, issues of internal confidentiality (Tolich 2004) or deductive disclosure (Kaiser 2009) needed to be addressed. As a researcher, the welfare of the women in terms of the research, has been a priority throughout the process. Having taken steps to protect the women's anonymity in the research thorough the procedures discussed in Chapter Four, and the composite case presented earlier, in this section I found I needed to reveal details of the women's experience otherwise the analysis would not get at the specificity I felt crucial to the explanation. I was concerned that through an additive effect across the chapters, this may result in deductive disclosure. After much deliberation, the way in which I have tried to surmount this, is by applying alternative pseudonyms at this point forward in the chapter. Whilst I could have tried to present this section by reporting that 'one woman told me X, another woman told me Y', I felt that using names might be important in terms of connecting to the composite narrative and suggesting an embodied experience for the reader, bringing to life the experiences of real women. Names are suggestive of personhood and without a name I felt the data might loose some power to resonate with the reader. In presenting such detail of the women's lives also, I have been careful to not include data which might obviously connect them to previous chapters. As a result of this concern, a section detailing the women's chosen educational pathways was also removed from Chapter Three. From this point forward in the chapter, the women are referred to as Maria, Claire, Fiona, Paula and Donna.

## **7.7. Higher Education: A Conflicted Space**

For the women, Higher Education was imagined as a place of safety. Like Tanya, presented in Chapter Five, who saw education as a place to switch off and relax, so others also experienced this space. Indeed, another participant, Paula, described it as *my little safe haven*. Initially, this didn't make sense to me. Although, aware of the very positive benefits of higher education, supported by the literature discussed in Chapter Two, I understood also, there to be affective risks and costs to higher education. As a mature student, it certainly wasn't a place that I understood as safe. I reasoned that perhaps the idea of a place of safety might not be being experienced in any straightforward sense. Perhaps instead, psychically sitting alongside and in relation to the affective risks and costs, thus rendering higher education a more complex and conflicting space.

### **7.7.1. Higher Education: Safety, Protection and Containment**

The psychoanalytic work informing the thesis tries to move beyond a split between an actual space/place and our affective mind-body experience. Viewed through this theoretical lens, the imagined space of education, as a place of safety or protection could be understood as an imagined or desired space of containment. Returning to the literature with a different reading in mind, one which went beyond a binary understanding of risk and safety, I discovered some disparate literature which helped to form links with the more substantive literature around mature students and identity (West 1996; Quinn 2003, 2010; Walters 2000). Like Janet Parr's work, each of these studies of mature students have focussed on the affective elements of motivation and participation, noting the often difficult life experiences that mature

learners bring with them to university. Each of these researchers have considered the space of higher education and what it offers mature students, beyond its 'transparent' academic function (Quinn 2010).

Walters (2000), drawing on and supporting earlier ground breaking work by West (1996), concluded of her own participants in higher education :

‘higher education provides, a good enough (Winnicott 1971) holding environment and nurturing relationships to enable them to reconstruct their self concept, their self esteem, their meaning perspective, their frame of reference, their life and other skills: to regenerate their self’.

(Walters 2000 p. 277)

As the composite narrative shows, there are many points in the women's lives when they have felt emotionally abandoned, uncontained, and unsafe, and in need of protection, safety and containment. Below I want to show how we might understand this containment working in the imagined space of higher education by first again retracing history.

I started to consider the ways in which the women separated and connected differing aspects of their lives, roles and subjectivities, and the need to do so or not (Edwards 1993). I found the concept of Virginia Woolf's "A room of one's own", used by Montgomery and Collette (2001, p. 305) particularly helpful. Woolf's

feminist text argues for both a literal and figural space for women authors, a productive and fertile space of development and self improvement denied to them by patriarchy. I began then exploring the idea of conceptualising university and education in terms of a literal and figurative/symbolic space; an imagined space of possibility, of productivity, of escape, of retreat, of reflection, a space for the self, perhaps a defensive space where the psyche can rest and escape from the pressures and pains of everyday life, yet be productive and develop. As I moved between the literature and the data, I became aware that Maria, Claire, Fiona, Paula and Donna each described what could be understood as having escaped to ‘a room of one’s own’, a place of protection and safety via education in their earlier lives. The following section, explains this assertion.

### **7.7.2. Finding a Room of One’s Own: Escape, Safety and Resistance**

#### **7.7.2.1. Claire:**

For Claire, unhappy at school and home her desire as a teenager to *just be in the music room with my violin teacher all day...teaching his students and he was quite happy for me to do that* could demonstrate a room of one’s own. At the time, she was in the midst of a vortex of emotions and pain through a recent family separation/relocation, bullying and sexual assault. This room was a place where she could express herself and show her musical accomplishment. From what she told me, in this space she felt, safe and contained.

#### 7.7.2.2. *Fiona:*

Similarly, Fiona's experience could be understood in the same way. As a teen, painting, and her love of words meant poetry and writing stories became a source of escape, expression and containment. When she was feeling *rejected* by her parents and foster parents and having *no sense of belonging anywhere*, she escaped to this 'room of one's own' for comfort. We could say also, she later returned to this room when, as an adult taking drugs (another room of one's own) she used to sit up all night making collages and painting, the precursor to her enrolling on a Ceramics course.

#### 7.7.2.3. *Paula:*

Paula's teen experience of having a 'room of one's own' could be understood on a more 'unconscious' level as far more subversive. As a teen Paula felt *trampled over* by what she felt to be her father's military-like control of education, homework and her working class femininity:

Paula: *My Dad, my Dad was very, very forceful um, his friend's children were um having A's, I had to have A's, um you wasn't allowed to cut your hair, you wasn't allowed to wear the clothes that everybody else wore. You had to do whatever he said you had to do basically. Um, subjects you chose at school he had to approve them, and you HAD to stay in and do your homework – he had to see your homework, even though he knew nothing about it, he was SO forceful that he flipped me the other way*

Melanie: *right*

Paula: *so um I had glandular fever when I was in year 4 and I lost 5/6 months of study which was never copied up and I had my GCSE's then*

To miss five to six months of schooling at this stage of her school career would be seen to have a devastating effect on her examination results. However, for Paula, who describes a catalogue of control and pressure that left her *never feeling good enough*, Glandular Fever must have felt like a relief. At last there was a reason for her not being 'good enough' and she could escape her father's expectations which she felt she was never able to meet. Unconsciously, this situation may have allowed Paula to reclaim some power back, if she was ill for an extended period, she couldn't be accused of not working hard enough, neither could she be accused of not doing as she was told, thus it allowed her to be positioned as the desired working class 'good girl' her father needed her to be. Her prolonged school absence allowing her to escape to 'a room of one's own' – a place of safety and relief.

#### **7.7.2.4. Donna:**

Donna also used to escape to 'a room of one's own' – both in the literal sense to hide from her father's domestic abuse of her mother and their drinking, and in the imaginative sense in that she found escapism in the world of books and literature. Indeed this is something that Jeanette Winterson, writes about in her work. The author, from difficult childhood circumstances in a working class background, describes how finding safety in the room of books allowed her to navigate a safe passage to Oxford University and a successful career as an author:

Books for me are a home. Books don't make a home - they are one, in the sense that just as you do with a door, you open a book and you go inside.

Inside there is a different kind of time and a different kind of space

(Winterson 2012 p. 61 ).

It is this difference in time and space, this escapism from something painful to something else, which is vital to understand when starting to make links between trauma, higher education and identity. Such a space, which provides purposeful activity, could according to West (1996), provide “a sustaining self object ambience” or a sense of self coherence at a time of feeling fragmented in other milieus (Wolf 1988 cited in West 1996).

### **7.7.3. Returning to a Room of One's Own**

There is then, evidence which suggests the women having previously constructed imagined places of safety within education, away from the turmoil of their lives during adolescence. This could be understood as a repeating relational pattern of defence and coping. Indeed, when Paula later undertook her degree, her *safe haven* enabled both physical and emotional separation from the domestic abuse she was experiencing at the hands of her violent and controlling partner at the time. Rather than merely a transparently understandable space of education, for Paula it was a space of protection (Quinn 2010).

The dynamics of education as a ‘protected space’ have been explored in Jocey Quinn’s (2010) work. She also found that the diverse group of women students in her research made links between studying and selfhood, imagining the space of university as a protected space away from painful realities. Constructed from their own desires and linked to belonging, for them it was a refuge against external threats of many kinds; physical, emotional and intellectual. Using Burgess’ work around the understanding of ‘dangerous spaces’ (1998), and echoing the words of American Sociologist W.I. Thomas (1928), she contends that “what is perceived to be real, is real in its consequences” (Burgess 1998, p. 116 in Quinn 2010, p. 454). In this sense then, in imagining the university as a place of safety and protection the women in the present study can be understood as creating their own reality. However, this imagined space is also a material one with limits, and is subject to the constant threat of intrusion of others, as was illustrated in Tanya’s experience in Chapter Five.

It wasn’t until the final year of writing this thesis that I discovered the work of Linden West. Working and writing around the same time as Parr, but going beyond her project, in his book “Beyond Fragments” he uses a psychoanalytically informed psychosocial approach (though not termed this at the time of writing in 1996) to explore the identity of adults in higher education, and their motivations for participation. Like me, he challenges the notion that learners use the space of higher education only in the pursuit of vocational qualifications. He contends rather, that “motivation and learning are rather to be understood as part of a struggle for authentic selves and stories against a backcloth of oppression and

fragmentation” (West 1996, back cover) . Indeed, the lives, struggles, themes and findings of West’s study, mirror those of the participants here.

Previously unaware that psychoanalytically informed work so close to my own project existed, I eagerly read the book which I felt validated my own understandings and methods in terms of themes and findings and the need to understand participation in the context of past as well as present lives. Through this work, I was reminded of something very important about complexity and contradiction; that the same concept can hold different meanings and feelings simultaneously. As a novice researcher, the validation of one’s findings is a relief – there is safety to be found in coming to the same conclusions as a seasoned academic, having never previously known about their work. However, such safety was also very disappointing; I hadn’t infact ‘invented the wheel’ and not only that, West’s work is very close to how I wanted to do it! I shall return to West’s work below, but for now the point I want to make is the realisation/reminder that concepts can hold contradictory meanings and feelings was another piece of the jigsaw in understanding the connections between trauma and higher education, and its dynamics as a space.

I had previously understood that higher education could be both safe and risky and that these might co-exist, but I hadn’t fully grasped that the meanings behind safety and risk are also more fluid and dynamic.

#### **7.7.4. Risk as Safety**

According to the literature and indeed their own experience, the women are embarking upon an educational transition which is fraught and dangerous for identity and subjectivity in terms of class, gender, age which produces conflict and tension. However, there is simultaneously safety within this risk which dissolves our understandings of binary positions. Not only can the university simultaneously be a place of safety and risk, but the meanings of those terms can also be fluid and contradictory. Indeed, this can be demonstrated through the example of Donna, and again re-tracing history.

#### **7.7.4.1. Donna:**

When as a teen she felt her father to be becoming sexually interested in her, the threat to her safety could no longer be managed within ‘the room of books’ and learning at home. At the age of 17 she ran away to another part of the county, living homeless and sleeping in abandoned cars. For her, there was safety in this inherently risky situation, which she once more negotiated through her use of the books and time spent at the public library before eventually being old enough to apply for benefits and student loans which enabled her participation in higher education. Later, her participation in the ‘risky place of education’ would in fact offer her more safety and security than she had known in several years, and would secure her financial position and a home.

Indeed, this financial aspect of participation and being *better off than we have ever been* was common within the group. Bursaries attached to teaching courses, student loans, and changes to tax credits and working hours collectively positively

influenced both the women's willingness and ability to study, in the sense that they had nothing to lose financially and in many cases much to gain .

The way in which risk as safety/safety as risk can play out in the present in relation to higher education is exemplified through Fiona's move into higher education.

### **7.7.5. Safety as Risk**

#### **7.7.5.1. Fiona:**

Fiona's move into education could be understood as particularly risky. She moved herself and her children in order to study, knowing no-one in the area and having no family support, no car or practical help. In practice, having to be well organised involved getting the children ready for school and taking them across the city on a bus to school before going on another bus to University daily, and of course the same home. For Fiona however, organization also meant something different . Unlike some of the other women who incorporated education into family life, Fiona tried to completely separate rather than connect the identities of student and mother, and spaces of University and home. Organization for her is done psychically as a means of *segmenting* her life and providing a sense of safety and containment. She feared that *if they mixed I wouldn't be able to do either particularly well* and needed this separation *in order to place where I am*. While on the surface this seems a pragmatic approach, from a psychoanalytic perspective, compartmentalising or splitting identities in this manner may be viewed as a defensive strategy to manage the anxiety and tensions with which her life is fraught. For Fiona this separation is a

struggle for identity and safety. She seems to understand herself differently in the two spaces.

I returned to this theme in our second interview where Fiona takes this further and explained how indeed, she feels it is related to anxiety and self defence. She explained also how she tries to not draw on any of her life experiences in her work at University. While making a conscious split between two spaces she feels to conflict : higher education and family, she is also splitting off the past and even conflicting aspects of her present, which are threatening to her new sense of self in the University. Fiona herself uses the metaphor of a room to illustrate her feelings and how not being able to separate things has affected her health in the past. This felt lack of coordination and coherence suggests a sense of fragmentation of her self as a response to anxiety in her milieu , which can be terrifying . This response could be as a result of something she feels is missing relationally; a sense of safety and security.

Fiona: *(pause 2 sec) um (pause 3 sec)(voice lowers in volume and pitch) I don't think I would be able to organise anything particularly well. Um (pause 2 sec) I think I would be quite muddled up and (pause 2sec) it would be quite hard for me to relax and to concentrate on anything if it was all jumbled up together.*

Melanie: *mm*

Fiona: *almost like when you walk into a room and somebody has gone through trying to find something and they have emptied boxes out and stuff and I think that is what it would be like really kind of disheartening and um...*

Melanie: *Do you think they would encroach too much on each other and...*

Fiona: *I think the bus journey between Uni and home both directions kind of gives me that space to go ok and break the connection between Uni Fiona and home Fiona, you know.*

Melanie: *mm*

Fiona: *so without some kind of space it would just get muddled up and confused.*

Melanie: *mm, and would that cause you a lot of anxiety?*

Fiona: *mm, I think so (even quieter)*

Melanie: *and perhaps, do you think it may stop you...well perhaps not stop you but, well hinder both?*

Fiona: *(laughs) yeah (saying this ironically as if this were obvious)*

The reflective space created when travelling between university and home , is something that is mentioned by the participants in both Britton and Baxter (1999) and Edwards (1993) studies of mature student women. This space could also be understood as ‘a room of one’s own’. For Fiona both spaces represent a means of negotiating different and conflicting elements of herself. Being separated geographically by a bus ride, enables further mental separation and distance. A transformation between *Uni Fiona and home Fiona*; Fiona as student and as mother taking place during the journey. It can also be viewed as a transitional space (Winnicott 1971 ) in that it provides a safe passageway from one state to another.

Fiona’s strategy of *segmenting* or compartmentalising can be understood as a

defence mechanism to manage both the tension and anxiety of both past and present. Similarly the way in which she understands herself between the two geographical locations of her old town and new town are different. Fiona recognises that the affect circulating through the landscape, sounds and rhythms of Jamesville<sup>15</sup> and the relationships she had there were holding her in place and preventing change.

Fiona: *I think... where we lived before had so much history in it, so much had happened that it would have been impossible to do anything about it whilst I was there. So think, think moving and doing all that has kind of meant I can build myself again*

Melanie: *yeah*

Fiona: *(quietly) so that's kind of given me that kind of safety that I can...do things you know*

It is these organizing boundaries around the self that create a sense of safety for Fiona. As Clarke (2001 p. 10) suggests, "Splitting is therefore a means by which order is created from chaos and boundaries are formed and maintained around the self". Often spending weekends at University when the children are with their father, Fiona fiercely defends her "room of one's own", claiming it for her own purposes. As a highly reflexive person and from experience, she has learned the consequences of being unable to split off unwanted feelings and told me of a time before higher education, the last time she self harmed when she didn't feel safe.

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<sup>15</sup> Pseudonym for home town altered for purposes of anonymity

Fiona: *I think um (pause 3 seconds) (Change in tone) the last time I self harmed I really scared myself and I think that's kind of (pause 3) we...I went to the doctors and um he wouldn't do anything and I was like...I DON'T FEEL SAFE YOU NEED TO LOCK ME UP.*

Melanie: *mm*

Fiona: *I don't feel safe in myself, I don't feel safe with myself, and they wouldn't do anything at all. They didn't offer me any help or anything.*

Melanie: *mm*

Fiona: *So...I think from that point on it was me going ok, you are going to have to re-evaluate where you are...*

Melanie: *mm*

Fiona: *figure out where you are going*

Melanie: *mm*

Fiona: *coz you can't carry on this way*

Melanie: *mm. Had you had the children at that point?*

Fiona: *Yeah, I had the two oldest...but I found out like three weeks later I was pregnant with my youngest (laughs)so...um I feel very lucky because really I don't think he should have survived.*

Having previously moved around a lot as a child due to firstly her father being in the military and subsequently having to move between foster parents, Fiona told me how she had felt she had never belonged anywhere. Like Tanya and her friends in Chapter Five, relationships, and creating a sense of belonging have been an important aspect of her feeling safe and secure within the space of higher education.

Fiona: *So I suppose I didn't like being one of those people who wasn't doing anything...I know a lot of people say this but I really didn't feel like I fitted in. University seemed to be somewhere where you made friends and they were on your wave length and you kind of kept them and I suppose I kind of wanted that...*

Melanie: *So perhaps a way of meeting new people?*

Fiona: *Maybe a way of belonging to something*

Melanie: *right yeah*

Fiona: *(lowers voice) yeah, maybe a sense of belonging, that's my, that's where I am, that's where I belong*

Melanie: *mm. Do you think perhaps a place of safety as well?*

Fiona: *I suppose it stops me feeling quite so alone. It has been hard over the summer because all my friends have gone.*

There is then a sense that for Fiona the imagined space of higher education is providing what Winnicott (1971) would understand as a 'good enough' holding environment (Walters 2000), which is enabling her to feel a sense of belonging, safety and protection, aspects she feels were missing both in her childhood and in

her life before education. There is also a sense University is a space in which she is able to place herself and come into being (Bick 1968; Guatarri 1995; Walkerdine 2014) she recognises herself and understands herself through others' recognition of her (Bakhtin). Understanding this through relational psychoanalysis and the subjects' need to be involved in intense relationships and create bonds with others, higher education could be seen as a mechanism to creating these bonds on a very deep and emotional level and perhaps enabling one's 'real' or authentic self to be seen (West 1996). As Dominice (1990) asserts, and is supported by the findings of Walters (2000), and West 1996:

As they trace their education throughout their lives, people reveal that they often enter adult education classes to repair, compensate for or fill in the gaps of their past. They dream about the university because earlier in their lives they did not have the chance to study. They embark upon personal development because they hope to overcome and to recover from old wounds of the past. They decide to update their work skills in order to move ahead (Dominice 1990, p.206).

These understandings of the space of higher education go far beyond the more transparent meanings of its function in society.

This final section of the chapter explores what appear to be links between the women's personal biographies and their career aspirations.

### **7.8. Subject and Subjectivity: Repairing/Renegotiating Selves through Repairing others**

A desire to *give something* to others in need of help, was a motivating factor in choice of studies and imagined career for all the women I interviewed , but for the women below, I think this is particularly important and is highly relevant to how we understand aspiration and motivation. Fairbairn's (1952) view of 'repetition compulsion', is useful here. Painful feelings, self sabotaging situations and self destructive relationships may be recreated through the life course as a means of perpetuating ties to significant others (Mitchell 1998). Similarly, Srinath's (1999) work within the Tavistock Clinic has shown that people who have experienced trauma can harbour a desire to "rescue" others. These 'rescue phantasies' (p.143) act as a defence mechanism. She explains that while there may be reparative elements to this behaviour, it can also be an endeavour to attend to the 'survivors'' own intolerable feelings of helplessness, impotence, guilt and humiliation via projective identification of those feelings into others. (Srinath 1999, p. 143).

As girls, the women felt powerless to protect themselves, but felt primed through gendered cultural and family expectations to protect their siblings, or mothers from an array of difficult situations from adult disability, mental illness, alcoholism, violence within the home, bullying, and money pressures – and significantly, the detrimental impact of these things on their own well being. Alice Miller (1987 1990, 1993) has told of the destructive psychological consequences of providing emotional support to one's parents (West 1996). The task of protection is an impossible burden for a child. All the responsibility is offered without any of the power and resources to significantly affect anything. As girls, they could only ever

be partially successful in their attempts to care and protect and their own needs for care, love, support, attention were often left unmet by the adults around them and perhaps denied in themselves as a means of self protection, through discourses of independence. A common theme was the women's expressed independence from childhood. We might understand that the women learned to care for others rather than learning to care for themselves in a psychological sense. Used to not having their own emotional needs met, they may have developed their self-esteem through making the lives of others better.

The women could be understood as trying to fulfil this need for nurture and containment vicariously. Often this was apparent in the women's opening lines during interview: *I've always been caring*, said Maria, who was entering the caring profession ; *It's a long background to me, I had a troubled teenage life*, said Paula, the Youth Offending Team Volunteer. Another striking example is Donna's experience of high level domestic violence against her mother and her decision to research gendered violence. As is Fiona's ambition to be an art therapist, righting the negativity, criticism and lack of support and encouragement she had in school when she took solace in these. Claire initially wanted to be a social worker but decided to do a PGCE, perhaps mirroring the support she felt from her supportive and encouraging music teacher, a person who could be conceived of as an internalised good object. In studying for and aiming to enter into caring and nurturing professions, they are able perhaps to unconsciously recreate and rework their own issues. In this sense the space of higher education is therapeutic. Once again the context is a familiar one as are the relationships. The women might be

read as being drawn to situations and others who are in need by identifying with their pain and seeking to relive it in order to relieve their own pain. Here the women would get to play out what was (is) missing in their own lives. As Claire commented in our second interview in relation to her teaching placement in a prison, and an inmate who produces good work in class but lacks confidence because of what she says has happened in his life:

Claire: *and it's nice to make them believe in themselves because a lot of them got such low self esteem...and I think maybe I can relate to that because no matter how well I do, it still remains low.*

Here Claire is herself making an explicit assertion that education is a complex psychosocial space.

The women could then be seen to be giving to others what they need/needed themselves. In placing themselves in such contexts, they also recreate the situation where they are responsible for the needs of others, however this time, they are studying and training to have the ability, skills and resources in place in order to be able to manage and be effective in their endeavours of support and protection. Taking place in new existential territories, these new skills and experiences mean that their role in the scenario, real and imagined has changed. Through projection, this would enable powerful affects such as impotence, guilt and humiliation to now reside in others. Being in a more powerful position could be perceived as helping the women feel safe and more in control.

Indeed, my own desire to research working class mature student mothers could also be understood in this way. I am also replaying the past from a different position, hoping to arrive at new understandings and endings. This supports the assertion made by Henriques et al (1998) that, who we are is inextricably linked to the memory of who we have been and the imagination of what we might become. For these women, there is a distinct sense of their lives being haunted by echoes from the past, being played out in the present and future.

Of all the participants Fiona was the most interested in my research. At the end of our final interview she asked me about my findings and we had a discussion about challenging and traumatic childhood experiences and how they might be connected to women entering to higher education. Much later in the research, still puzzling over how to piece together trauma, higher education identity, I returned to the interview with Fiona. I noticed a remarkable comment which unbelievably had not come to my attention significantly before. One of the last lines on the last page of our interview Fiona said to me: *“even saying domineering parents harms their children- if these women are going back to education, if that has really done them long-term harm, then maybe it’s made them more resilient”*.

Fiona’s words struck me. Despite all her hardship and struggle, she was able to take something positive away from her difficult experience. Despite lacking in the things that most children have growing up, Fiona positioned her parent’s lack of care and support as almost a gift. For Fiona, there was some understanding that there is a

connection with resilience and success in higher education. Being able to see the difficulties of her life in this positive sense both demonstrates and is testament to her own resilience.

### **7.8.1. Resilience**

Participation is risky for mature students because the potential of failure could further damage low academic self esteem (Waller, 2005). We might assume this particularly for this group of women, since it's not just their identities as students which are fragile, the past traumas have meant that they have learned particular ways of being in the world through their marginality. But as Fiona highlighted, they may have also learned a particular kind of resilience which is, in fact, facilitating their participation in Higher Education. Again resonating with earlier chapters, they have learned to cope and to manage and *get on with it*. They have grown up in the context of having to live through and psychically survive adversity. Survival - in their family and even beyond their family was what became essential.

Previously understood as a personality trait, more recent understandings of resilience are as a process which may be learned and developed. Mutual support and caring through reciprocity are understood to be important components in resilience. While the women may have at times lacked these from a parental source, we might assume that through the need for survival in a relational sense, they were able to be resourceful in seeking pockets of support and caring which enable them *to just get*

*on with it or carry on* – a familiar trope used by the women throughout their interviews. As West (1996) powerfully argues:

For the adult as well as the child, relationships create the legitimacy and security to enable a person to manage and integrate scattered, diffuse experience. For adults as well as with children, affirmation, holding and inclusion, especially for those on the margins, provides a basis for existential legitimacy, core cohesion and authentic engagement in the world.

(West 1996 p. 208)

Indeed, we might understand this resourcefulness as being evident in Chapter Five, in Tanya's ability to seek such pockets of support to aid her journey into and through higher education. This adds a further dimension of resilience to the reciprocal relationships which Tanya and her friends engineered. The women might then be understood as used to performing a resilient identity, and bring with them to the space of university a remarkable resourcefulness and resilience. They are then able to draw on inner resources based around psychic survival, honed through negotiation of past trauma which perhaps enables them to bear the conflict of their marginal position in higher education.

## **7.9. Claiming and Reclaiming Identity**

For the women I interviewed, discovering new abilities and new selves, through higher education offered a means of reclaiming or claiming for the first time, positive self aspects such as raised self esteem, confidence (Mercer 2000; Pritchard and Roberts 2006) and self efficacy, and power and control over their own lives

against the power and control of other relational influences past and present. The imagined space of education provides a break in a cycle offering them a 'room of one's own' and a 'place of safety' within themselves.

In my final interview with Fiona, I asked what she thought would have happened if she hadn't gone back into education.

Fiona: *(pause – replies in a low voice) That's a really hard question, I am not sure what would happen to me. I think I would be very miserable.*

Melanie: *mm*

Fiona: *Um, mmm, it is really hard because I don't feel like the same person*

Melanie: *Are you detached from that person?*

Fiona: *Yeah almost, It's kind of like, my life before university is kind of like watching a tv screen of somebody else's. I know it is my life, but I don't really feel anything towards it – if that makes sense*

Melanie: *mm*

Fiona: *So I imagine, what I think I would be doing is the same thing I was doing before and feeling very miserable and stressed out*

Melanie: *mm*

Fiona: *My mum says that I look like a completely different person, like I am walking differently and I am talking different and I am standing differently and I approach everything – much, yeah, a lot different (laughing).*

There is a distinct and embodied change in Fiona. She feels like a different person having disengaged and detached from old subjectivities and difficult emotions, in effect splitting them off or dis-associating. This detachment from her past reality might be understood as a coping mechanism, to master, minimise or tolerate the affect surrounding it. This embodied, change hasn't just been felt by Fiona, importantly it has been noticed by others. She is able to recognise her changed self through someone else's recognition of her.

The findings of the data analysed in this chapter concur with both Walters (2000) and West's (1996) studies. Put most succinctly by and borrowing from West (1996) we may conclude that:

to rebuild and move beyond fragments of a life; a university may represent a space to understand self and others somewhat better and to revise a personal narrative as part of the process of rebuilding and constantly reshaping a life. Supportive people and institutions seem to be crucial in the struggle to tell new stories and construct a more authentic self in the process .

(West 1996, p.154).

## **7.10. Conclusion**

In developing links between trauma, higher education and identity, the chapter has argued that although advocating the more social role of higher education, the way in which these working class mothers utilised higher education as a means of self

transformation is more complex than government agendas of 'self as project', or Institutions themselves currently take account of. For the women presented here, although intimately entwined with vocational aspiration, there is much more at stake psychologically.

The data presented in the chapter concurs with, and adds empirical evidence to support the findings of the limited but important academic literature and research studies by Parr (1996); West (1996); Walters (2000) and Quinn (2003, 2010), which has sought to make links between education, trauma and identity, and considered the space of education beyond its transparent academic function.

In making links between trauma, higher education and identity, and focusing on the meanings of education within the women's past and present lives, the theme of higher education, imagined as a place of safety, was interrogated. As a place of safety it was understood as a place of escape, containment, protection, psychic organisation and relational belonging for Claire, Fiona, Donna, Paula and Maria. We might understand these meanings as being constructed from their own desires, based on a traumatic set of family experiences and events. Building on the conclusions of Chapter Five, the chapter has shown that imagination, fantasy and ontological safety, were key elements of aspiration, motivation and participation in higher education for the working class mature student mothers. Further suggesting that holding and containing relationships are central to this sense of safety.

As Walters suggests (2000), although not an initial aim when embarking on higher education, the outcome might be similar to therapy. Although therapeutic in some sense, education has not been a panacea for the difficult situations the women have experienced growing up and living marginalised lives. It can however be understood as having reparative elements and to have opened up something new for the women (Walsh 1996; Walters 2000; Quinn 2003, 2010). As Walsh has stated, *‘Those whose place is not reserved as of right or privilege in higher education hunger after meaning, and soar as we make it, for ourselves and with each other, be we students or tutors’* (Walsh 1996, p. 192) and that is certainly the case for the women here. Higher education was a place to form new personal narratives through new re-negotiated understandings and embodied identities. For example, Donna is able to become a researcher of gendered abuse rather than the girl who ran away to escape it and Fiona becomes the art therapist, not the girl whose teacher told her, she couldn’t draw. In this way they have been able to, to some extent, move beyond the stories of trauma and assert some control in the present over the past. These new embodied identities have increased their confidence, their self esteem and their sense of efficacy in the world.

The women’s chosen educational trajectories and careers, which align with their intimate past traumatic experiences, have illustrated the imperative of psychosocial understandings and the place of affect and emotion in aspiration, for the working class mature student mothers.

Despite being positioned within pathologising discourses of lack because of their marginalised status and difficult earlier lives, the women were able to bring with them to higher education learned and acquired resources such as independence, resourcefulness, emotional independence and resilience which they were able to build upon in the 'space' of higher education, to help them negotiate a path beyond their trauma. We could understand the women using their traumas and difficult life experiences as a line of flight towards new imagined futures and careers, re-negotiating new subjectivities along the way. Having each managed to achieve something that many commentators say they couldn't do, conceptualisations of the role and potential of higher education as a 'space' of transformation of self and lives needs to be reconsidered more fully. Although not without controversy, there is then a need to expand the way in which we conceptualise higher education as a space, beyond academic knowledge and economic prosperity and consider its place in the global context of working class women's lives. Understanding its potential as a 'psychosocial space' which may facilitate 'psychosocial mobility', in terms of a move from the past and change is vital. This requires moving beyond universal understandings of higher education as a rational and material space towards one which considers it as an emotional and imagined space of empowerment, containment, belonging and safety.

In researching women's lives as mature students, often much deeper aspects are revealed than one might expect. These 'accidental' stories often only come to light or are hinted at in the pursuit of asking other research questions. That such stories surface in research not explicitly focussed on this area is a curious finding. The

question is, then, how often do these stories remain hidden because either research methods could not tap such intimate narratives, or such discoveries were beyond the remit of the research. We can't then know, how many other stories there are hidden within the existing research. Clearly, the extent of this phenomenon needs to be established through explicit focus and adequate methodologies, or perhaps by researchers revisiting their original data with a new focus. In doing so, research studies will then be able to further examine the links and understand the relationship between trauma and higher education, and its implications for identity, aspiration and motivation and participation in higher education. And, the ways in which who we are, is inextricably linked to the memory of who we have been and the imagination of what we might become; how lives are haunted by echoes from the past, being played out in the present and future.

In concluding the thesis the next chapter reflects on the methodological approach of the research and the themes and conclusions of each analytic chapter. These are brought together in order to crystalize the research findings and to summarise the empirical, methodological and theoretical contributions of the study, and the implications for policy and practice.

## 8.

### Chapter Eight

#### **Affective Understandings: A Summary of the Methodological, Empirical and Theoretical Implications of the Research**

Louise Morley (1997) posed herself the question of how one might interrogate class without activating one's own class distress or producing work that is self indulgent, or even a 'literary striptease' (Lewis 1992 p.5). Similarly, when writing about social class, Morley has written on the challenges of how not to overwhelm both the self and the reader with the inherent pain and anger stemming from discrimination, injustice and lost opportunities. This challenge became my own in the process of creating the thesis.

The thesis has argued that embarking upon higher education as a mature student is complicated by issues of class and gender. These complications go beyond structural barriers of inequality and are barriers which, existing at the level of the psychosocial are rendered invisible by dominant understandings of aspiration. It has argued for and aimed to provide a nuanced understanding of aspiration, as a complex psychosocial issue. It has aimed also to explore the psychic/affective landscape of class in which aspiration, motivation and participation are formed, regulated, enabled, and constrained; relationally, culturally, historically, geographically and

temporally by conscious and unconscious processes – and the implications for subjectivity.

In order to do so, the research was designed around a qualitative, psychoanalytically informed psychosocial methodology, and used a series of three psychosocial interviews as a means of data collection influenced by existing psychoanalytic social research by Walkerdine et al (2001) and (Stopford 2004). This next section reflects upon what I feel were the methodological strengths and limitations of the research.

### **8.1 Methodological Reflections: Strengths and Limitations**

My decision to adopt a psychoanalytic psychosocial methodology was based around my own experience as a working class mature student: I could not clearly tell the reasons for my embarking upon higher education, neither could I say why, given the psychic and emotional conflicts I faced, I managed to 'keep on keeping on' (West 1996) and I presumed that other women might not be able to either. In order to move beyond rational explanations (Hollway and Jefferson 2013) and access the 'felt' but 'unsaid' aspects of experience (Frosh 2001; Walkerdine et al 2003), understanding that taking into account the 'dynamic unconscious' would be necessary (Layton 2007), I adopted a psychoanalytically inflected methodology for the research. Bringing psychoanalysis to bear on the research process was presumed to offer perspectives in the realm of affect and emotion out of reach to other paradigms, and Chapters Three and Four explained and justified the methodological approach of the research. This next section critically reflects on the design of the Psychosocial Interview method utilised for data collection and the use of a

psychoanalytically informed methodology both within the present thesis and for future research.

### **8.1.2. The Importance of Utilising a Series of Three Interviews**

The decision to use a series of three psychosocial interviews came about through discussion with my supervisor Valerie Walkerdine. We both considered that in order to get the ‘depth’ of accounts required one, and even two interviews would not be enough. This tri series, iterative approach to interviewing was adopted in her own work (Walkerdine and Jimenez 2012). The data gathered from my use of this approach was incredibly rich and provided more than ample research material, not all of which has been able to be utilised in the thesis due to space. Testament to the method were the emotional and very personal accounts of the women. This data and other emerging themes will, however, be used in future publications and presentations as I indicate in other sections of the chapter. Conducting a series of three interviews, with some analysis in between, worked particularly well, providing a sense of understanding unfolding across the process. The space between interviews allowed for critical reflection as a researcher, and meant I could revisit anything that I failed to follow up on initially, in subsequent interviews. Emerging themes, contradictions and puzzles, incoherencies, and any instances of possible projection, transference or counter transference, could be further explored or checked. The method also allowed the women to be involved in the construction of interpretation and this facilitated a better understanding of the women’s meaning frames and affective responses. The final interview, during which I shared my initial interpretations of the data with the women, was particularly useful in guiding

analysis later on. In this respect the data and interpretation were dialogic and of mutual creation and I felt both the participants and I managed to learn something about, and indeed recognise ourselves through the other. This was in concert with the feminist ethical principles underlying the project. In respect of creating the rich data and depth of understanding required for the research, the interview method and design were very successful.

### **8.1.3. The Importance of Utilising a Psychoanalytically Informed Methodology**

The schizo-analysis adopted in Chapter Five, utilised the psychoanalytic conceptual apparatus of Guattari (1986) and methodological approach of Walkerdine (2011, 2013, 2014). The schizo-analysis was able to place the concept of aspiration outside as well as inside the self, unfolding across time and space in relation to others and space and place. Unlike other approaches, it has been able to suggest unconscious process involved in aspiration, motivation and participation, and how, on a psychic level change might become possible. It has shown also the ways in which aspiration and motivation may work at the level of the family and community. Chapter Seven also suggested some of the unconscious processes involved in the women's decisions to embark upon higher education, making links between trauma, higher education and identity. These included the generating of a mental space of safety and comfort (Quinn 2003) or imagining higher education as 'a place of safety', processes of splitting off difficult realities as a defense mechanism, and "rescue phantasies" (Srinath 1999) or projections onto others of difficult emotions. The psychoanalytically informed methodology has been pivotal to the

understandings and findings of the thesis. It has enabled difficult questions around autonomy, agency, desire, fantasy, motivation, aspiration and risk to be asked and mined with depth and irrational contradictions and conflicts highlighted and explored. This has been reflected across the analytic chapters and in addressing the research questions has enabled some understanding of; the reasons for embarking upon higher education as working class mature students, how motherhood might affect aspiration and why family relationships may be against this endeavour. Methodologically, theoretically, and empirically, the thesis has made a contribution to existing psychosocial work around class and gender and more specifically to the study of mature students.

#### **8.1.4. Ethics and Representation**

Ethics in social research refers to the conduct, choices, accountability and moral deliberation of the researcher, throughout the entire research process (Edwards and Mauthner 2012). The welfare of the 13 working class mature student mothers interviewed has been a priority throughout the research process. The research was conducted based on feminist principles of care and responsibility and this was reflected in my decision to use the dialogic approach to interviewing developed by Stopford (2004). This was reflected also in my conduct during data creation in trying to provide a containing and supportive space for the women, and the decisions I have made regarding representation of the women in the research and beyond. The writing of Chapter Seven and the presentation of the very sensitive material around the women's experiences of trauma, meant that additional measures of anonymity were needed in order to protect the women from deductive disclosure

(Kaiser 2009). A composite case method of analysis was adopted and the pseudonyms changed in the second part of that analysis. Any data which might directly connect them to other chapters was removed. This situation came about when, having agonised over this dilemma, I decided that in order for the analysis to work, I needed to disclose particular details about the participants. I am still of the opinion that having considered the academic audience of the research, the protective measures I took were adequate and ethical. Had I anticipated the level of disclosure at the outset of the research, I would have been able to have addressed this with the women and explored and negotiated with them the specificities of confidentiality and consent more closely.

#### **8.1.5. Issues of Working with Emotions and Psychoanalytic Approaches**

Chapter Four brought attention to some of the issues encountered in adopting a psychoanalytically informed methodology for the research. Within this approach there is an imperative that the researcher utilise her own subjectivity as research tool. This demand I felt to be simultaneously ‘burdensome and beneficial’ as a novice researcher (Beedell 2009, p. 103). The issues identified in Chapter Four brought into focus a number contingencies which I feel are essential to the well-being of the inexperienced psychosocial researcher, and also advantageous to the research findings. Firstly, Team working; which would allow a space of support and the sharing of experience, knowledge and interpretations. Secondly, training in psychoanalysis, or access to a trained psychoanalyst for supervision would be particularly beneficial. Thirdly, the level of support required by this approach, I feel goes beyond the supervisor/supervisee relationship. While I felt emotionally

contained during supervision sessions I still felt a need beyond this space. There were times when the interaction of the data with issues in my private life, my own unconscious processes, and pains around issues of class, brought to the fore some very difficult emotions and feelings which were difficult to negotiate and bear. Beedell (2009) also questions whether supervision is an adequate enough space to consider the researcher's "emotional work" and has advocated commissioning psychotherapists to psychosocial research teams to appraise processes such as counter-transference, identification and defences and as a space of 'decontamination' or offloading (Beedell 2009, p117). There is then a need for provision of a space in which the researcher's "emotional work" can be undertaken and the difficult emotions and burdens which researchers might be left with, addressed, worked through and made sense of.

#### **8.1.6. The Vital Importance of the Research Journal in Working with Emotions and Implications For Future Research**

Part of the methodological tool kit was my own subjectivity as a researcher. As such I made reflective field notes, and recorded my thoughts, feelings and emotional and embodied responses to the women and the data, as well as any dreams I experienced throughout the research process. The research diary as a source of data was far more pivotal to the research than I had originally anticipated, and throughout, the thesis, has drawn upon the research diary for insights, explanations and analysis. This process further emphasised feelings I had about my class experience, which were not only beyond language but were the 'unthought known' (Bollas 1987). For much of the data, particularly around the often difficult relationships the women had with their mothers, I was faced with my own silence; a

nothingness, a blank dark space where feelings came, but words couldn't enter. I couldn't think of the words I wanted to use but I had bodily sensation – I felt – uncomfortable – anxious – angry? I don't know. What does it mean when words won't come but the body speaks? This question has been asked by other academics, for example Walkerdine (2000, 2015); Helen Lucey (2010) and Valerie Walkerdine, Aina Olsvold and Monica Rudberg (2013) who have written about such silence and sensation, in relation to their own psychosocial work. The women's experiences, particularly in Chapter Seven, have demonstrated that finding ways to convey the pains and injustices of class experience, which are beyond words needs to be an ongoing concern for psychosocial research. This very important work has already commenced in psychoanalytic work which takes an historical and cultural perspective towards intergenerational transmission of classed and cultural traumas (Walkerdine, Osvold and Rudberg, 2013, Walkerdine, 2015). Such methodological approaches within academia aim to explore new research methods for engaging with how the body may speak and communicate to share the past experience of other generations. Such engagement with the present research topic would acknowledge and make allowances for the ways in which working class subjectivity in the present has been moulded by historical, cultural, and economic forces from the past. This would enable us to move further beyond deficit understandings and discourses of lack of working class aspiration by understanding how it works in families and across generations. The wealth of unused data in the research is able to bear such an analysis and I have tentatively presented this work around intergenerational transmission of class trauma elsewhere, and plan to develop this further in the future.

The next section is concerned with the substantive findings and empirical contribution of the thesis and suggests implications for future research, policy and practice.

## **8.2. Working Class Mature Student Mothers in Higher Education**

The thesis has sought to explore the complex psychosocial dimensions of aspiration, motivation and participation in higher education as a working class mature student and mother. It has provided an empirical view of the psychosocial and affective landscape of class in which aspiration, motivation and participation are formed, regulated, enabled, and constrained; relationally, culturally, historically, geographically and temporally by conscious and unconscious processes; and the implications for the women's subjectivity. The next section draws together the insights and findings of the three analytic chapters and considers them as a whole in order to crystalise the research findings.

### **8.2.1. Issues of Affect rather than Simple Aspiration**

What becomes apparent across the three analytic chapters is that despite the lack of agency which surrounds the women's marginalised position as working class mothers, the women in the research engaged with higher education very much on their own terms. These terms could be understood as being consciously and unconsciously affectively driven and the psychosocial approach of the thesis has flagged up the centrality of affect and emotion to understandings of aspiration,

motivation and participation in higher education. The three analytic chapters have shown that affect is complex and dynamic and defines our capacity to act and be acted upon in various ways (Wetherell 2012). This was illustrated in Chapter Five by the way in which Tanya's participation in higher education was enabled and constrained by her individual and social history, which were affectively contained in space and place and the inter-subjective networks of affect which held those relationships together. Supporting other work (Walkerdine and Jimenez 2012) it highlighted the way in which vulnerable cultures might manage vulnerability in modern times – by drawing on existing ways of being as a defence against insecurity and uncertainty. Such defences may cause “affective ruts” (Wetherell 2012, p. 14). In this way communities are bound together in both their joy and their pain, for better or worse (Butler 2004; Layton 2007). It has shown also that movement, change, the construction of new, and re-negotiation of existing identities is possible, so long as there is an ability to act in that environment which is facilitated by the right emotional support, a sense of belonging and vitally a sense of ontological security.

In Chapter Six the ‘affective economy’ (Ahmed 2004) of the women's aspiration, motivation and participation in higher education was further revealed. The affect laden identities of ‘Chav Mum’ and ‘Yummy Mummy’ can be perceived as being deployed in a manner which facilitated change and growth (Layton 2007). The social inequalities and shameful vulnerabilities surrounding the lone mothers in Chapter Six through emotional rhetoric, could be understood as motivating the women, who, through their psychic wounds, tried to re-negotiate their identity and

claim a sense of respectability for themselves and their families through the vehicle of higher education (Layton 2007). Further highlighting issues of inequality, the chapter has drawn attention to the way in which working class mothers as well as being economically and socially disadvantaged in relation to ‘Yummy Mummies’, could also be perceived to be emotionally disadvantaged. Chapter Six has offered a sense of the shape of this emotional disadvantage, and how it might be experienced and felt (Wetherell 2012).

A central tenet of the research was that not all embodied meaning making is done consciously, and Chapter Five demonstrated the historical and culturally contingent aspects of the ‘dynamic unconscious’ (Layton 2004). Again pointing to the way in which individual and social histories are affectively contained, Chapter Seven suggested that relational repertoires and defence mechanisms, formed in childhood as a means of safety or self containment may influence the affective meanings of education in the women’s past and present lives. The affective need for containment, and what it might mean to need to escape was illustrated very graphically in this chapter which described some of the psychosocial tensions and struggles of growing up, managing and surviving within marginalised families in 1980’s/ 1990’s Britain and their consequences for subjectivity across the life course. Imagined as a place of safety, higher education was understood as a space of survival, escape, containment, protection, psychic organisation and relational belonging. We might understand these meanings as being constructed from the women’s own affective desires, based on a traumatic set of family experiences and events. Imagination, fantasy and ontological safety were once again central

elements of aspiration, motivation and participation in higher education for the working class mature student mothers. The productive space of university could be understood as “sustaining self object ambience” or a sense of self coherence at a time of feeling fragmented in other milieus (West 1996). Supporting other limited work in the area of mature students (West 1996), and broader psychoanalytic works around class transitions and change (Walkerdine and Jimenez 2012) the experiences of the women have highlighted how learning and experimentation, for adults and children alike is based upon a primitive belief that one will not disintegrate in the process (West 1996). Feeling safe, secure, a sense of value and belonging are vital to a sense of self; and the ability to change that self. Through the women’s learned resilience the University became one site in which the struggles for selfhood could be played out. The ways in which aspiration, motivation and participation were affectively driven reveals some of the ways in which, as relational beings we are implicated in the suffering and pleasures of others (Layton 2007).

#### **8.2.1.1. Space, Place and Imagination and Future Research**

The analysis of Chapter Five specifically focussed on the importance of space, place and imagination in relation to affect and possibilities for change. However, these can be traced as of central importance across the other analytic chapters, drawing attention to the way in which individual and social histories are also affectively contained in space and place. In Chapter Six, Jade described how change would not be possible for her while she remained in her home town because of the history and affective networks she had there. Jayne, described how walking down the street in her old town was still able to evoke difficult emotions and feelings of shame,

affectively drawing her back to a past identity. Also in this chapter Jade's meticulous planning to embark upon higher education, years in advance of her doing so, illustrated the vital role of the imagination in new possibilities for change. Space, place and the imagination were once again brought into focus in Chapter Seven which suggested that imagining higher education as a space of safety allowed the women to feel affectively contained and safe in that place, and acted as an unconscious source of motivation. There was not the time or space within the research to analyse each of the women's journey's using a schizo-analysis. However, the way in which the affect of space, place and imagination have been implicated throughout the analytic chapters renders such analysis vitally important if we are to further understand aspiration, motivation and social mobility as psychosocial issues. My future work with the data will involve these analyses.

### **8.2.2. Moving Beyond Deficit Discourses**

The three analytic chapters have provided empirical evidence which allows us to move beyond negative attitudes and opinions and socio-political discourses of working class lack, to the heart of the real dilemmas, fears, anxieties and ambivalences occasioned by the shifts required of the working class mature student mothers in higher education. What also emerged from the three analytic chapters is the importance of a felt and imagined sense of ontological safety, and belonging during times of change and transition. For the women, the space of higher education, and the relationships re-created there, were imagined as embodying these. What was perceived to be real, was real in its consequences for the women

(Thomas 1928; Burgess 1998) and in this sense, the women created their own reality, but with historical and cultural limits (Quinn 2003).

The chapters have made apparent that the working class mothers in the study do not lack aspiration for themselves or their children. In fact, their children were a source of aspiration, motivation and helped, through imagination to aid participation in higher education. This was illustrated across all the chapters, but perhaps most poignantly in Chapter Six by Jade who very simply but very powerfully told me “I just didn’t want them to be me”. The thesis has been able to both reveal and disrupt ideas of intergenerational transmission by acknowledging and making allowances for the ways in which working class subjectivity in the present has been moulded by historical, cultural, and economic forces from the past. Such a view enables us to move beyond deficit understandings and discourses of lack.

In exploring the psychosocial nature of aspiration, the research has been able to locate aspiration outside as well as inside the minds and bodies of the women. The three chapters have been able to show issues of aspiration working at the level of the family, the community and society; within media and political discourse. The chapters have illustrated that the affect involved in aspiration makes the prediction of outcomes in higher education uncertain. The women here managed to achieve something many commentators would say was beyond them. The application of an affective lens was central to understanding the women’s successful transition into and through education and has imbued psychosocial texture into the concepts of aspiration, motivation and participation in higher education (Wetherell 2012). As indicated above, future research then needs to look towards ways of understanding

affect and its role in aspiration, motivation and participation at all levels of learning, if social justice is to be taken seriously at the level of Government. For social justice to occur, educational policies and practices need to be based on an understanding that the population cannot be educated in a simple blanket way. The women were involved in their own aspirations but also involved were the affective cultural meanings and histories which came before them. There needs then to be an understanding of the ‘cultural politics’ of aspiration in future research.

### **8.2.3. (Re) constructing and (Re) negotiating Identities**

Higher education has been a space through which the women were able to (re)-construct and (re)-negotiate their classed identities. Such changes were neither painless nor without risk and there were losses as well as gains for the women, and their families. Such painful (re)- constructions and (re)- negotiations were evident in Chapter Five, and the way in which Tanya’s education to become a nurse altered her subjectivity as mother and carer in the domestic realm; and the family’s reaction to this. Chapter Six, showed the way in which Jordan, Jade and Jayne renegotiated their subjectivities as mothers, claiming a more moral and ‘respectable’ identity, distancing themselves from the identity of the ‘Chav Mum’ they refused. Very positive shifts in identity were evident in Chapter Seven, which made links between trauma, higher education and identity. While not a panacea for their traumatic experiences, the space of higher education has to some extent enabled the women in this chapter, to move beyond their difficult experiences. Through their participation in higher education, the women were able to form new personal narratives through new re-negotiated understandings and embodied identities and career trajectories.

Discovering new abilities and new selves, through higher education offered a means of reclaiming or claiming for the first time, positive self aspects such as raised self esteem, confidence (Mercer 2000; Pritchard and Roberts 2006) and self efficacy, and power and control over their own lives against the power and control of other relational influences past and present.

#### **8.2.4. Trauma, Higher Education and Identity**

In researching women's lives as mature students much deeper aspects were revealed than I originally expected. As I highlighted in the conclusion of Chapter Seven, these 'accidental' stories often only come to light or are hinted at in the pursuit of asking other research questions. Clearly, the extent of this phenomenon needs to be established through explicit focus and adequate methodologies, or perhaps by researchers revisiting their original data with a new focus. In doing so, research studies will then be able to further examine and understand the relationship between trauma and higher education, and its implications for identity, aspiration and motivation and participation in higher education.

### **8.3. Implications for Policy and Practice**

#### **8.3.1. Coffee Clubs and Peer Buddy Pairings**

“Intervention should always be preceded by understanding, and individual narratives can offer more insight into the psychological difficulties faced by non-traditional students. Access to complex and differentiated representations of academic journeys can potentially open up new discourses, from which changes can be implemented in

order to increase retention and completion rates among disadvantaged students, so that they can successfully ‘Aimhigher’ and escape intergenerational anatomies of inequality” (Mannay and Morgan 2013 p. 71). In terms of institutional policy, informal networks of support such as ‘coffee clubs’ where mature students can share their experiences and any concerns with other students and suitable members of academic staff would be a useful source of support to such students. It would also allow staff to have greater understanding of the kinds of support required to address the complex issues faced by working class mature student mothers. It might be useful also, for institutions to set up peer buddy systems for non traditional students entering higher education (Mannay and Morgan 2013).

### **8.3.2. Higher Education as a Place of Safety**

The way in which higher education has been used as a means of ‘transformation’ for the women in the study is more complex than either institutions or Government agendas of aspiration/social mobility/economic and global market competition currently take account of. To draw a line between vocational and personal motives, the public and the private, is artificial and reductionist in terms of understanding the way in which working class mature students engage with higher education (West 1996). The research has suggested a need to expand the way in which we conceptualise higher education as a space, beyond academic knowledge and economic prosperity and consider its place in the global context of working class women’s lives, and lives generally. This requires moving beyond universal understandings of higher education as a rational and material space towards one

which considers it as an emotional and imagined space of empowerment, containment, belonging and safety.

Further consideration should be given to its less transparent function as a healing space:

because if it is not a healing space, it will be yet another piece of oppression and damage.

(Walsh, 1996 p. 206).

Some commentators such as Ecclestone and Hayes (2009) are concerned about “the dangerous rise of therapeutic education” (p. 87). However, if the working classes are to respond to calls within neo-liberalism to ‘become somebody’ (Leathwood and Hey 2009; Evans 2010) it makes sense to support them in order to do so. Such support could also further acknowledge both the price of the past in the present and the “price of the ticket” (Friedman 2014) of change. The provision of student support services is then key.

#### **8.4. Coming Full Circle**

The thesis ends where it began. With me. The findings of the thesis can be traced across my own academic journey. I didn’t set out to be a social scientist and, like the women I engaged with higher education on my own terms. It was the affect surrounding motherhood and my interest in my children’s development which was the starting point, my line of flight. I gathered aspiration along the way. My classed, cultural and gendered experience of higher education was one also laden with affect.

This was to such an extent that my smouldering indignation of felt judgements, from both the domestic and institutional realms, and the present and historical injustices heaped upon working class mothers in particular, sparked and gathered momentum to the point of action.

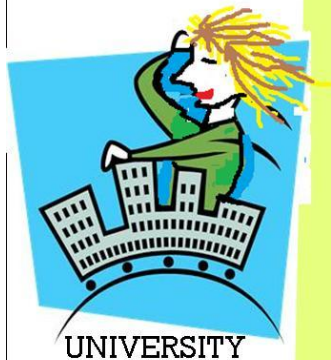
The need for a sense of safety and containment was brought to the fore, when my life started to unravel during the research. In discussion with a friend, I described how I felt raw, skinned and exposed. I realised afterwards that I too was describing a sense of lack of containment and safety at this time. The importance of the skin as a boundary to ontological security is emphasised in Esther Bick's (1968) psychoanalytic work. 'Being held', or feeling held emotionally as the thesis has argued, is central to being. This embodied, relational and unconscious holding is central also to being able to think, and this was aided through excellent counselling support provided by the university's Student Support Service.

That was such an unproductive time for me in both thinking and writing. I am sure that many supervisors would have given up on me, and written me off as 'lacking aspiration' or 'not having the right qualities' to complete a PhD – there certainly wasn't much evidence to suggest otherwise. Mercifully Valerie was my supervisor, and it is because of her extensive understanding of class, gender and aspiration, motivation and participation as inherently psychosocial issues, that there is a thesis to read. Like the women in the research, imagination was once again central to this achievement. There were many occasions when I could not imagine getting to the

point of submission. Valerie imagined it for me, never doubting I would achieve it, pointing subtly in our conversations to a time beyond the thesis. I believed her, and in doing so, made it my reality. The debt owed is immeasurable and may never be paid in full. The first instalment starts with my work in the community, engaging adults from deprived areas in learning at its most basic and important level, of expanding world views and thinking critically. Here I shall take a leaf from the book of the women in the research, and 'pay forward' Valerie's psychosocial understandings in order to support other working class women and mothers to gather and realise aspirations of their own.

## **Appendix A**

## CLASS, MOTHERHOOD & MATURE STUDENTSHIP: a psychosocial exploration of Identity



Going to university as a mature student can be an exciting journey of self discovery as we acquire new knowledge and skills. But, juggling university and family life can be difficult, complicated and at times very stressful!

Why do we do it?

Does it change us, if so in what way?

How does it feel?

What does it mean in terms of our identity?

How do we construct, negotiate and manage these identities?

To explore these issues I am inviting women with children, who come from a working class background, and are in full-time study at university, to share their experiences with me as part of a PhD research project.

If you are willing to share your thoughts, feelings and experiences around university and family life then I would love to hear from you. Interviews can be at a time and venue of your

My name is Melanie Morgan and I am a PhD student at Cardiff University.

If you would be interested in taking part or have any questions regarding my research, please e-mail me at:

[Morganml1@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:Morganml1@cardiff.ac.uk).



## **Appendix B**

### **Participant Information Sheet for Research Interviews** **Class, Motherhood and Mature Studentship: A Psychosocial** **Exploration of Identity.**

**As a working class mature student and mother myself, I understand that juggling university and family life can be difficult, complicated and very stressful!**

I would like to invite you to participate in my research project on class, motherhood and mature studentship. The following will give you a short overview of what this means for you and the information you decide to share with me. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

#### **Why am I doing this research?**

The PhD project I am undertaking explores how mature, student mothers from a working class background, construct, negotiate and manage identity within University. I am therefore interested in the experiences of other women, who like me, belong to this group. In academic terms, I want to better understand the psychosocial mechanisms and strategies women use to deal with their everyday lives. What this means is that I want to look at how, becoming a mature student might perhaps change us and our relationships and how it might feel being both “mother” and “student”. These are, of course just examples, since each of us has our own experience of what class, motherhood and studentship means for us. I am interested also, in the motivation for pursuing academic success, despite the emotional and practical conflicts of doing so - given that it can be so challenging - why do we carry on?

### **Who will be invited to take part?**

I am inviting women with children, who hail from a working class background, and are studying at university to share their experiences with me. I hope to recruit about 21 women.

### **What will this involve?**

I would like to interview you at a time and venue of your choice and convenience to discuss your own experiences and feelings around university/family life. In order to understand your personal experience as best I can, I anticipate that we may need to meet on more than one occasion. Each interview should last approximately one hour and will be audio taped.

### **What will I do with the information?**

The information from our interviews will be the basis of my PhD thesis. The transcripts might also be used to write and publish articles in academic journals. You are welcome to see the final thesis and/ or a copy of the articles before they are published.

### **Confidentiality**

I will transcribe our discussions and if you are interested I will give you a copy of the transcript. All material collected will be confidential and no other persons apart from myself and my two supervisors will have access. Names and other identifiable features will be changed making the data completely anonymous. All transcripts will be kept in a secure location.

### **Your Participation**

Your participation is of course entirely voluntary and you will not be obliged to answer any questions you are uncomfortable with. At any time, you are free to ask

questions and should you feel the need, you may withdraw without reason at any time before the data are analysed. Whilst it is not envisaged that any harm will come to you as a result of this research, sometimes talking about personal experiences may elicit emotional discomfort. The University's Counselling Service would be able to give expert advice and support if required and a leaflet regarding this service will be provided should you wish to participate.

### **Who am I?**

My name is Melanie Morgan and I am a PhD student at Cardiff University. I am supervised by two senior members of faculty who are expert in the field Social Science Research at Cardiff School of Social Sciences. The

Research, has been approved by the School Research Ethics Committee and is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council. If you would be interested in taking part or have any questions regarding my research, please feel free to e-mail me at: [Morganml1@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:Morganml1@cardiff.ac.uk).

## Appendix C

### Participant Consent Sheet for Research Interviews

**Project: Class, Motherhood and Mature Studentship: A Psychosocial Exploration of Identity.**

**Researcher: Melanie Morgan, (PhD Candidate) School of Social Science, Cardiff University.**

- I have been provided with and have understood an explanation of this research project.
- I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary.
- I understand that I am participating in approximately 2-4 psychosocial interviews which will be audio recorded and transcribed. Information I provide will be kept confidential to the researcher and her supervisors.
- If for any reason I experience discomfort during participation of this project, I am free to withdraw before or during data collection and analysis without penalty, and may discuss concerns with the researcher, Melanie Morgan. I confirm that I have been given information regarding the University's Counselling Service.
- I understand that the information I provide will only be used as follows:
  - As part of a PhD Thesis
  - Within scholarly articles, and presentations.
- The published results will, neither use my name nor any identifiable information and will not be used for any other purpose without my consent.
- I therefore consent to participate in the above research project conducted by Melanie Morgan, a PhD Candidate, School of Social Sciences, Cardiff University.

**Name of Participant:**

**Signature of Participant:**

**Name of Researcher: Melanie Morgan**

**Signature of Researcher:**

**Date:**

## **Appendix D**

### Demographic details sheet

Name	
Age	
Marital status	
Number of and ages of children	
Programme of study and duration	
Year of study	
Social class background	
Parent's occupations	
Who else in your family has gone to University	

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