HOW DO MATURE UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS SELF-AUTHOR? A NARRATIVE ENQUIRY OF FOUR ACCOUNTING AND FINANCE UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS.

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Contents

ABSTRACT

This study is undertaken in a large post 92 university in which the intake each year for accountancy and finance is over 400. There is a prevailing assumption in the institution that the majority of the intake are classified as typical undergraduates coming straight from previous studies, with little or no sustained experience of the world of work. Little consideration is given to students identified as "mature" using the university definition of aged over 21 (HESA 2015). I became aware of a number of mature students in my roles as lecturer and latterly manager of this programme. Furthermore, the sacrifice of full-time paid employment for three years full-time study intrigued me. This study has three key aims. The first is to explore the processes involved in making a career change decision from full-time paid employment to full-time study for an accounting and finance undergraduate degree. The second is to analyse the ways that students identify and articulate changes to their identity, as they become mature full-time students. The third is to explore how structure and agency affect career choices of the mature undergraduate student. The research involved interviewing four accounting and finance undergraduate students. The choice of students was opportunistic as these were students known to me during the course of their studies. The analysis and discussion chapters delineate between pre and post university registration as two distinct phases. The pre university experience relates mainly to the first aim. The post university phase relates to the second aim and the third aim draws on both. The theoretical framework draws upon Bourdieu's notions of capital, field and habitus and Holland et al's (1998) concept of Figured Worlds with particular focus on notions such as the "standard plot" and "serious play". A key finding from this research is that despite the ability to make the decision to change career themselves, the validation of this decision by others was important. The final chapter includes further findings concluding with impact on future practice and a critical reflection on and the limitations of the study.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION

1.0   Introduction

Watching undergraduate students graduate on graduation day gives me an immense sense of pride and is the highlight of the academic year for me. It is rewarding seeing the pride and happiness in the faces of the parents and families that have supported the student over the three or four years and the realisation that these students are about to start another journey into a career or post-graduate course or professional study.

Many of the students are "young" students from the point of view that they joined university after completing their studies at school or college at the age of eighteen or nineteen. However, there are those who returned to education after undertaking full-time paid employment following school or college. The focus of this study will be on the latter category, who I will term mature students, and the study seeks to hear their voice. I will refer to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) definition of a mature student. HESA provide the following definition:

> "*Age is calculated at 30 September of the academic year in which the student is recorded as commencing their studies:*
> - *YOUNG aged under 21*
> - *MATURE aged over 21*"
>
> (HESA website 2015(1))

The above definition does not include any further details as to what these students had been occupying their time with prior to returning to their studies at the age of 21 or over. This could include further study and /or employment.

1.1   Why is this of Interest?

These students are of particular interest to me because they have made career-changing decisions. In this study, they have sacrificed full-time paid employment to commit to studying for three or four years full-time. The post-92 university, at which I am employed, attracts around four hundred first year accounting and finance undergraduate students each academic year, with around nineteen per cent classed as

mature. With such a large cohort, the challenge of getting to know individual students can be daunting. It is also easy to assume that they are all "young" students joining university from school or college aged eighteen to twenty. Thus, to hear the voice of the mature student in such a large cohort is a challenge and often they have passed through unheard.

This study has taken place during significant changes to the way in which undergraduate study is funded. Since September 2012, the cost of study, to a full-time student, increased significantly with course fees of up to £9,000 per annum plus additional living expenses. Initially the student meets the cost of the fees by means of a loan, which is repayable once the graduate is in full-time employment the rate of which is dependent upon future earnings. As a risk averse qualified accountant myself, I started to wonder why someone having had a number of years full-time paid work experience would want to sacrifice that to become a full-time undergraduate student for three years. Although some previous researchers such as McCune et al (2010) found that, the intrinsic desire for learning is a more powerful motivator than extrinsic financial benefits for the mature undergraduate student.

Another reason that this is of interest to me is that as an academic and educator in Higher Education I question whether as an institution we recognise the needs of the mature student. I consider a student enrolling aged twenty-one or more, having had a break from education for at least one academic year to be considered a mature student. A mature student with a wealth of experience could enrich the student experience for other students and offers a different lens through which they will filter their new learning. However, they could not have practised their study skills recently if they have been out of education for several years. Many universities encourage applications from mature students who lack the traditional formal educational qualifications to apply. However, I wonder how many of these institutions identify their individual needs once they have enrolled. Furthermore, whether the appropriate support systems exist for these students.

To give an example of the focus on the "young" student, at my own institution, we have developed Graduate Learning Outcomes, which are labelled "Early Career Professional"

learning outcomes for the student within the Faculty of Business and Law where I am based. The term "Early Career" suggests that all the undergraduate students, irrespective of age and experience lack the necessary skills employers are looking for.

This term also forms part of the Business School's mission:

> *"To develop socially and environmentally responsible "early career professionals" for successful careers in management and the professions."*
>
> (MMU Business School web site 2015(1))

This leads me to question our existing assumptions, and whether we recognise the value that a mature student can bring to the undergraduate experience in terms of their own previous career progression and development and how they feel when they have had several years work experience.

Furthermore, the accounting and finance undergraduate degree is a victim of the expansion in student numbers with recruitment each year in excess of four hundred first years. On the one hand, this is considered financially beneficial to the university as a generator of revenue, on the other hand it creates an enormous challenge in getting to know each student as an individual. I have decided to focus my research on the mature student so that I hope it can enable me as a professional educator and senior manager to adapt my professional practice to ensure that we meet the needs of our mature undergraduate students at the various stage of their undergraduate journey.

1.2   The Study

The data for this study is from four mature Accounting and Finance undergraduate students, two males and two females. This will enable an exploration of the motivations to study accountancy as a mature student and to see whether there are any important differences between males and females. A study by Connor et al (1999) found that males placed greater emphasis upon economic and career gains when considering their subject to study in higher education. It will be interesting to see whether this finding reveals itself to be the case in this study.

1.3   My Journey and Reflections on the Higher Education Funding System

My undergraduate studies would be considered to fit the traditional or "young" student profile. I am considered to be from a middle-class background. Both my parents worked. My mother was a primary school teacher and my father a telecommunications engineer. I was not aware of the advantages I had in life. During my school years, my parents allowed me to focus on my studies and did not encourage me to undertake part-time work. It was only in the summer, prior to me commencing my final year studies at university that they told me that they expected me to work to gain work experience. Furthermore, it was only when I was considering applying to university in the mid 1980's that a teacher assumed my fellow classmates and myself would be applying for a grant to assist us at university. I realised that my parents had told me that due to their combined level of income I would not be eligible for a maintenance grant. I would have been classed a traditional student in that I studied for my A levels and applied to university, joining university in the September following the successful completion of my A levels. At the school in which I studied A levels, there were no alternative courses of study at level three. I would have had to leave my friends and enrol at a college had I wanted to undertake a BTEC diploma programme or study different A levels to those offered at my school. I was also influenced by my close friends who except one, also pursued A levels with the aim to progress to university. The choice of higher education institute was restricted to some extent by expected O level grades and subject of study. I had set my heart on studying Accountancy and in the 1980's it was mainly restricted to the vocationally focused HEI's (Higher Education Institutions) or Polytechnics as they were known (now post-92 or "new" universities) rather than the Russell Groups or "Red Brick" institutions. In the 1980's the application process differed depending upon the type of HEI to which you were applying. The UCAS (University and College Admissions System) was utilised by the Russell Group or "Red Brick" universities only. It was possible to apply directly to post-92 or "Polytechnics" and Colleges of Higher Education. Due to the relative lower numbers applying to higher education, around twenty per cent of the population, it was common practice to attend interviews for each course applied for. Not all former Polytechnics offered Accountancy. The university at which I chose to study offered me a place on their Business Studies under graduate degree as an

Accounting degree did not exist at that institution and I did not achieve the required grades to study Accountancy at HEI's that did. The alternative course of study was a Foundation course in Accountancy at my local post-92 HEI. This was an alternative route into Accountancy, which could lead to a Professional Accountancy qualification. At the time, I was applying for university grants, which were awarded by Local Education Authorities (LEAs). This programme was not classified as degree level and was subject to a Discretionary Local Education Authority (LEA) grant. I had applied to study this programme at an alternative HEI, and they advised me to check whether my LEA would fund me to study at an alternative HEI to my local one, which I later discovered they would not. Grants for degrees were classified as Mandatory irrespective of where you wished to study so were not subjected to the same restrictions. My own journey into HEI, was strongly influenced by a form of what I discuss later as a "standard plot". I had to make a choice about location and course, but largely I followed a conventional route from A levels to HE study.

1.4   Why is this of Interest?

With my own journey as background, I am interested in exploring why students, who have established careers return to studying. For me, once I had qualified as an accountant, I vowed to never study again. I had spent four years juggling work and studying for professional accountancy examinations. I also had a life changing experience, two months prior to taking my final exams I lost my brother very suddenly. This led me to question who I was and what I was doing with my life. Until that point, I had assumed I would remain an accountant and work my way up the ranks. I started to question my own life. I realised that material things in life mean nothing and I really wanted to do a job that mattered. The thought of another 30 to 40 years stretching ahead of me with accounting deadlines each month, quarter and year made my heart sink. I also, thought that I would lose all the knowledge I had learnt in becoming qualified if I remained as an accountant. I also realised that I had enjoyed elements of the study process such as learning new things and interacting with fellow students. Furthermore, I frequently imagined what it would be like being a professional accountancy tutor and I thought that teaching would ensure that I would remain up to date with my subject

and I would not lose all the knowledge that I had learnt. It was interesting that so many years after my initial idea of being a teacher it was now resurfacing although in perhaps a college. The fact that my bother-in-law was a teacher in a secondary school and at times hearing anecdotes from his school life lead to me to further imagine his world and how exciting it must be.

I secured my first teaching role at a further education college as a full-time lecturer. However, I did wonder whether this was the right move, when an accounting agency told me that this was the worst career decision I could take, as it would be unlikely that I could move back into the accounting profession once I left. This comment alarmed me at the time and on reflection, it made me question my identity as an accountant. I still considered myself an accountant, after all I had spent almost eight years in the role and dedicated four years studying to achieve my full Chartered status. In addition, my father made a comment along the lines of "so you do not want to be a Finance Director"? This may be because he also worked for a large telecommunications organisation and he had a hidden desire to boast about his daughter's accomplishment at some time in the future. Parental influence is a strong factor in many lives and I was surprised that this comment saddened me. It may have been that the title of lecturer did not hold equivalent rank. The distinction between the two professions raises questions about how Accountants are valued in society, in comparison to academics. In this study, I will explore whether parental influence is a strong factor for the mature student in their career-change decision-making process.

1.5   The Accounting Profession

It is possible that the views of the recruitment agency and students are a result of viewing such a move as career limiting from a fiscal point of view. Schon (1983) sees levels of remuneration and the advantages arising as a reason for many occupations seeking professional status. Many writers such as Goodson and Hargreaves (1996) and Eraut (2010) consider the traditional professions as law and medicine. Accountancy is considered a later addition to the professions, however, this often ranks as the third choice of profession after medicine and law. When asking first year undergraduate

students their motivation for pursuing an accounting and finance under graduate degree, most students cite fiscal reasons as they consider the profession will pay high salaries. This may, in part, be a reason for the continued attraction of accounting and finance as a degree choice.

Sangster (2010:374) suggests that accountancy students need to be taught accountancy from a business rather than being purely from an accounting perspective to incorporate the contexts of management, economics and finance. Furthermore, they need to develop the ability to validate and understand reality as they and others see it. It is not clear whether this is aimed at the "young" student and/or assumes that all students lack this perspective. A further focus of this study will be whether the mature student has the opportunity to demonstrate their work experience or whether they conceal this. Concealment may be a contributing factor to the assumption that undergraduate students, irrespective of age, lack these employability skills.

Another related issue arising from my move from Accountant to Academic is that of identity. This will be explored from a theoretical perspective in chapters two and three. Day et al (2005) found that early theorists, such as Mead (1934) considered self as stable and unaffected by context or biography. Relating this to myself, this would mean that whether I am in academia or in industry I am an accountant. It is a limiting view of oneself as I would not be able to view myself as an academic. Theorists, one of whom was Ball (2013:149) suggested that an individual has a variety of selves each reflecting a role at any given time and that the individual has the ability to adapt according to the situation that they are find themselves in, addresses such limitations. When asked about my occupation, I respond by describing myself as a teacher of accountancy.

1.6   University Admissions Process

For many younger students their journey into Higher Education (HE) possibly started one or two years prior to joining the university. Many may have had ideas before this, but actual practical decisions in relation to choice of university and the course have to be made in advance of the application process. Advice might be sought from careers

advisers, teachers, parents, friends and other individuals whom the students came into contact with during this time. There are two aspects to career choice: which career and what are the requisite qualification levels? The choice of university for a young undergraduate student may take into account distance from parental home, social opportunities, accommodation, proximity to established friends and the need to find work to provide additional financial support during their studies. The choice of course may relate to their sixth form study depending how much they enjoyed particular subjects and their perceived proficiency in that subject. However, it will be interesting to explore whether these and/or other factors come into play for the mature student. This is an interesting area to explore, particularly in relation to accounting and finance undergraduate students, as few schools or colleges are able to offer A level accounting. This is possibly due to a combination of the relatively low number of students in a given school or college making it unviable as well as the possible lack of teachers with an accounting background. It is interesting to see that by contrast, A level Business Studies is one of the most popular A level choices for students. The lack of provision of accounting at A level could be a factor for some students, once enrolled on the accounting and finance degree, realising that it is not what they had expected. It will be interesting to see whether the work experience of the mature student influences their choice of study and commitment to their degree choice.

In my own case, accountancy was suggested as a possible future career choice for me since I had always been strong in mathematics and studied it to A level. A level Accounting or Business Studies were not available to study at my school. I recall both my parents and the school careers adviser advising me to consider this as a career choice. There is a perception that a strong ability in mathematics is a prerequisite for an Accountant, despite the professional accountancy bodies requiring their members to have a minimum of grade C in GSCE mathematics. For some students this belief still holds true, as recently a first year accounting and finance undergraduate student had expected more mathematics on the course than there is. The view voiced by this student demonstrates that for some students, there is an expectation that an accounting degree involves a high level of numerical content. I can relate to this latter view in that there are few A level mathematics techniques that are required in accountancy, although, the

transferrable skills it provides are very helpful, such as problem solving. This is particularly the case in relation to management accountancy where one of the main purposes is to "analyse information and using it to make business decisions" (CIMA website 28.4.14). A strong skill required in order to be a successful management accountant is to be able to analyse numerical data is a meaningful way to enable the management of an organisation to make strategic decisions. However, it may be the case that students who join an undergraduate accountancy degree with the minimum GCSE grade C requirement struggle with the more advanced elements of aspects of the programme, such as the complex calculations required in management accounting. On the other hand, I have been surprised that a number of students do not seem to associate accountancy with mathematics and in feedback voice concerns about the level of mathematics required for the programme and have requested additional mathematics support. This feedback may have come from students at the second or final year of the programme where the Corporate Finance elements are studied. Initially the call for mathematics support surprised me as I had assumed that the majority of students would have associated accountancy studies with mathematics, but this may be a reflection of a disconnect between the GCSE mathematics syllabus and the skills required by accountants.

1.7   Political Background to the Study

In terms of the political landscape, this research is being undertaken over a period of significant change in the UK fee regime for undergraduate students. Prior to September 2012 HEI's charged around £3,200 per annum. Since September 2012, the government allowed HEI's to charge from £6,000 to £9,000 per annum for an undergraduate degree. For the non-traditional student returning to education after full-time employment, this must seem a significant financial investment, exacerbated by the loss of income during the three years of study. It will be interesting to explore the impact this has on their decision making process. The ideology for this change was to reduce government spending on higher education. There were fears that this increase in fee levels would deter students progressing to university, however, recruitment in September 2013 in my own HEI reached record levels in the Business School. The result of this in

government spending terms was a forty percent increase in the education budget from £56.26 billion to £86.9 billion from 2011 to 2012. In addition, the government removed the cap on student numbers for full-time undergraduate students in September 2015, which is funded from the sale of student loans to private companies. It was observed that according to Adrian Bailey, the Commons Committee Chairman as reported by the Guardian (Guardian 12.03.14) the plan has failed to achieve the ideology of reducing government spend on higher education due to forty five per cent of the total ten billion pounds of debt remaining unpaid. Adrien Bailey also reports that once the unpaid debt reaches forty eight point six per cent the advantage of charging the extra £6,000 is cancelled out.

1.8   Thesis Structure

The thesis is structured into a further five chapters. Chapter two, is a review of the literature that is relevant to this study. It considers theories surrounding career change decision-making and previous studies relating to mature undergraduate students. Chapter three is the methodology chapter and will consider the conceptual frameworks that have been employed in analysing the data. The data analysis is in chapter four. In this chapter, each participant is presented as an individual case. Chapter five is the discussion of the findings from chapter four. Chapter six is the concluding chapter. Following the chapters are eight appendices. The first four are the individual interview transcripts followed by the thematic approach I have taken to form the bases of the data analysis.

CHAPTER TWO – LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0   Introduction

In the previous chapter, I outlined the rationale for this study. In this chapter, I will review the literature leading to and surrounding the research aims of the thesis. The first aim of this study is to explore the processes involved in making a career change decision. This will be explored, by reviewing the literature surrounding career decision making and the underlying theories. The second aim is looking at the ways in which students identify and articulate changes to their identity, as they become mature full-time students. The literature relating to the identity of the mature student will be considered and how it may relate to my own study. Finally, literature relating to the structure and agency and the extent to which it impacts upon the career choices of the mature undergraduate student will address the third aim.

The chapter will commence with an overview of what impacts on the choice of career for the individual and an overview of the history of careers. Furthermore, I will then review the career change theories surrounding how an individual then chooses a career. Literature involving studies of mature students in relation to identity, structure, agency and risk will be considered in further sections. However, a deeper analysis of identity, agency and structure with particular reference to Holland et al (1998) and Bourdieu (1991) will be considered in chapter three and linked to the way in which I will be interpreting the research data.

2.1   History of Careers

According to Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997:29) there is a lack of literature considering the ways in which students actually make their career decision choices. They refer to studies undertaken by Giddens (1991) and Williams (1995) who focused upon individual choice of lifestyle. They found this to be the case in the field of health where individuals held a strong belief in healthy lifestyles. Career choice seems wider today than in 1970's when Ashton and Field (1976) identified three classifications of employment in the UK. These were: "long-term career jobs" considered to be dominated by the middle classes; "working-class career jobs" which included technical, clerical and skilled manual

occupations and "low-skill" jobs including unskilled manual and shop jobs. They also note that while there have been considerable changes within the education system; these classes defined careers existing today. The origins of the widening participation agenda is difficult to pin point. However, the notions of lifelong learning and particularly widening participation gained recognition under the labour government. In a study undertaken by Maringe and Fuller (2006) their data revealed that despite participation rates in higher education increasing, inequalities existed in students accessing higher education from lower socio-economic backgrounds. The widening participation agenda has provided a wider range of routes for students to progress into higher education other than traditional A levels and level three diplomas. They also offer more options for mature students returning to higher education study. Some examples of these alternative routes are access to higher education courses, which were designed for individuals who had experienced a disruption to their education. Initially aimed at the mature student aged twenty-one plus, these one-year programmes embed literacy, numeracy and I.T. skills as well as level three vocational units. For students wishing to pursue an accounting and finance related undergraduate degree the AAT (Association of Accounting Technicians) offers qualifications from level one to four inclusive. Successful students with the level four can join an accounting and finance undergraduate degree in year two.

Despite this increase in non-traditional qualifications, Bates and Riseborough (1993) found that career trajectories are largely dependent upon the levels of qualifications gained at aged sixteen plus. Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) suggest that there are three dominating competing theories; trait theory, developmental theory and social learning theory. Each of which will be explored in more detail in the following sections. Many writers, such as Gottfredson and Johnstun (2009) and Hancock (2009) refer to Holland who commenced the development of his theory in the 1950s when the career environment was markedly different from today. The differences relate to culture, gender and technology. In the 1950's many viewed a job as a "job for life" where many expected to stay within the same organisation and/or profession until they retired. Brown's (2015) study explored how mid-career adults successfully transitioned through a career-change. For the purposes of this study, I shall consider the transition from full-

time paid employment to full-time undergraduate as a career-change, thus the need to review the theories surrounding this phenomenon.

2.2   Career Change Theory

2.2.1 Trait Theory

Trait theory enables an assessment of clients' personality, skills and interests. Careers advisors at a school or college may administer such assessments. These tools can be used to inform career's advice based upon an individual's traits. Here the careers advisor influences the individual by determining their traits, which determines a match to particular career choices. Chartrand and Bertok (1993) suggest that the various models that are employed to analyse individual traits consider three domains being assessed as knowledge, decision making and executive processing. Other seemingly commonly used models used to assess personality are: Myers Briggs Type Indicator, California Psychological Inventory and the 16 PF. It is useful at this stage to quote the underlying assumptions with such models as highlighted by Chartrand and Bertok (1993)

> "*The trait factor model assumes that reliable and meaningful individual differences can be assessed, people seek out congruent environments, congruence between person and environment increases the probability of positive career outcomes, person-environment fit is reciprocal and ongoing, and people are capable of rational decision making*"

Chartrand and Bertok (1993) recognise one of the key limitations of such models is the inability of such a model to provide a thorough and objective measurement of the self or occupational knowledge, given the idiosyncrasies of individual client needs. In other words, an element of generalisation exists, when the models assess individual responses and they suggest the use of an in-depth interview to explore the needs of the individual further. It also seems to ignore the voice of the individual and his or her own preferences. It is interesting that the quote refers to congruent environments. This seems to imply that once a suitable career is suggested that all employers provide a homogenous environment. In many professions, including accountancy this will not be the case. For example, the environment of one Big 4 company does not necessarily mean

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another will have the same environment as another one of the Big Four or a small family run practice.

The positivist approach required to assess an individual in relation to their "fit" to a career or specific organisation, conceals the voice of the individual. The career development model in the following section provides an alternative view of the way in which an individual develops their career.

2.2.2 Career Developmental Theory

To some extent this theory focuses on the individual at the centre of the decision making process, rather than a careers advisor, in the case of Trait Theory. The Career Developmental models of Ginsberg et al (1951) and Super (1980, 1990) suggests that a young person cannot make a career decision until they have developed their abilities and personal maturity far enough. It is based upon the premise that an individual's career and life moves through stages with advancement of age. Super's career developmental model identified four career stages; trial, establishment, maintenance and decline. Super associated psychological tasks with each stage. At the trial stage, the individual seeks to identify their interests, capabilities in order to establish a fit between self and work and professional self-image. At the establishment stage, the individual seeks to increase commitment to their career and advancement and growth. The maintenance stage the individual holds on to accomplishments achieved earlier and seeks to maintain self-concept. In the decline stage, the individual seeks to develop a new self-image independent of career success. Super and Knasel (1981:199) and Blustein (1997) considered one shortcoming arising from a reliance on the notion of life stages as they consider these are not biologically determined. They also dispel any belief in the notion of maturity as being abstract and hypothetical. There is an underlying assumption that as an individual matures or grows older they are better placed to make career decisions. It seems to ignore other factors such as the availability of options and the impact of personal issues that can either prohibit or increase career opportunities to an individual. However, Super's model does not necessarily determine at what age each stage is reached. Whereas, Levinson (1986) developed the concept of an age related developmental model. His model was developed from a study of forty males,

which in itself could pose a limitation in terms of the lack of gender balance. However, the stages are interesting:

1. Age 17 – 22 Early Adult Transition – the shift from pre-adulthood to early adulthood
2. Age 22 – 28 Entry Life Structure – building and maintaining an initial mode of adult living
3. Age 28 – 33 Transition – reappraise and modify the entry structure and to create the basis for the next stage
4. Age 33 – 40 Culminating Life Structure for Early Adulthood – the vehicle for completing this era and realizing our youthful aspirations.
5. Age 40 – 45 Midlife Transition – terminates early adulthood and initiate middle adulthood
6. Age 45 – 50 Entry Life Structure for Middle Adulthood – initial basis for a new era
7. Age 50 – 55 Transition – mid era opportunity for modifying and improving entry life structure
8. Age 55 – 60 Culminating Life Structure for Middle Adulthood – the framework in which we conclude this era
9. Age 60 – 65 Late Adult Transition – boundary period between middle and late adulthood, separating and linking the two eras.

There are, however, limitations of such a theory as it assumes that an individual progresses from one stage to the other as they age. However, Super (1980) and Blustein (1997) recognise that individuals can "recycle" through life stages in order to resolve social, psychological and economic challenges. It is not clear where mid-career changes fit as identified by Brown (2015) and as in this study the career-change for the mature student. The social learning theory in the next section does appear, in part, to address such changes.

2.2.3 Social Learning Theory

The third model is "social learning theory". The theory developed by Krumboltz et al (1976) attempts to explore how genetic factors, environmental conditions, learning experiences, cognitive and emotional responses and performance skills interact to explain how educational and occupational preferences and how skills are acquired and how courses and occupations are selected. They acknowledge that varying combinations of these factors interact to produce different decisions for example factors such as the actors participating within certain social contexts. In addition, different cultural settings may produce different outcomes. For example, a student

considering studying accounting and finance will be given a different view of accountancy as a profession by an accountant than a schoolteacher who has no knowledge of the profession. Layers of complexity occur when the parent is in the profession, as the student will have a view of the possible lifestyle such a profession offers. The emphasis is on the individual at the centre of these factors in isolation of any influences from others. Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) view this theory as largely flawed. They point out that it does recognise both the social and cultural aspects, which form an individual's identity, however Krumboltz et al (1976) consider these being external to the decision-making process whereas Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) found that they are integral. They refer to the individual as "the decider" Krumboltz et at (1976:71). This model enhances Holland's 1950's model in that this theory recognises and accommodates changes that arise from future events and recognises evolvement of the individual rather than seeing the individual as a static being. Further developments to this original model are considered by Blustein (1997:262) in so far as he considers a model more suited to the 21st century needs to be more readily adaptable to the rapidly evolving changes in careers. This is, in part, recognition of mid-career change decision making. Super (1990) refers to this as the career rainbow. The need for career exploration and change can occur at any stage of life and does not necessarily adhere to the models such as Levinson (1986) as outlined in the previous section. Blustein (1997:262) suggests that the development of Super's (1980) model arose primarily in response to social and economic changes resulting in unemployment due to an organisation restructuring or downsizing for example. Incidents such as these lead to the individual seeking alternative career paths. He also recognised that work and non-work roles are closely linked. Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) appear keen to view social experiences as an integral part of the decision making process itself as opposed to external influences on a decision.

Social Learning Theory attempts to recognise that careers are not for life and the need of the individual to be prepared to make mid-career changes. The final theory I will be considering is Happenstance Learning Theory, which provides a useful tool for analysing the decision-making process behind some career changes.

2.2.4 Happenstance Learning Theory

The development of this theory is due in part to the perceived limitations of both trait theories and the recognition that an individual is likely to make several career decisions during their working life Mitchell et al (1999) and Krumboltz et al (2013). There are four fundamental propositions embedded in HLT (Krumboltz et al (2013) :

1. The goal of the career counsellor should be to assist their client to learn to take actions in order to achieve increased career and personal life satisfaction and not to make a single career decision.
2. The goal of any assessment should be to stimulate learning rather than match personal with occupational characteristics.
3. The focus is on action, to enable the clients to engage in exploratory actions as a way of generating beneficial unplanned events rather than merely talking about feelings and desires.
4. There should be an ongoing relationship with clients to track their accomplishments in the real world, which goes beyond the "mere pen-and-paper instrument".

Mitchell et al (1999:117) explain that this is a conceptual framework that enables career counselling to include the creation and transformation of unplanned events into opportunities for learning. Ideally, the career counsellor would advise clients to generate, recognize and incorporate chance events into opportunities into their career development. They explain that such events cannot be planned. However, it is the ability to recognize them that is important. The role of chance in career decision-making has been identified in many studies since the sixties and more recently by Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) and Hancock (2009). The notion of chance suggests a lack of planning and rational career decision-making. Happenstance is the term referred to by Miller (1983) and Mitchell et al (1999) rather than chance. Miller (1983) suggests that the following three elements need to exist: the first being, that it involves a chance event or circumstance, the second is that it lacks a plan or intention and finally the event alters the individual's behaviour significantly. There is no mention of the individual's attitude

to risk and it would be interesting to see whether this is evident in my own study. Scott and Hatella (1990) and Mitchell et al (1999:116) found that females related to the notion of chance and contingency factors in their research more than males. Furthermore, studies undertaken by Betsworth and Hansen (1996) and Bright et al (2005) found given the frequency with which unplanned events were cited as the reason for pursuing a career-change, it makes a significant contribution to career-change decision making.

2.2.5   Further Aspects of Career Change Decision-Making

The role of others in influencing career change decisions requires some consideration. Mitchell et al (1999) include where another individual has identified qualities in the subject and made suggestions as to their next course of action. In these cases, the other individual(s) have provided the advice without the subject seeking it. In such circumstances, an element of luck exists in that the individual voiced their advice rather than keeping quiet. It will be interesting to explore whether an element of trust is required between the individuals in order for such an exchange of advice to take place.

A further issue identified by Scott and Hatalla (1990) relating to gender predisposition to chance may have arisen where the male subjects consider themselves the main breadwinner and possibly feel they cannot take risks when it involved their career; it may also depend upon how established their career is. Another aspect both Blustein (1997) and Mitchell et al (1999) refer to is that open-mindedness does not mean indecision. He acknowledges that in western culture, particularly America, to appear indecisive can appear weak; however, time to reflect is important before making a major career changing decision. He also acknowledges that an alternative opportunity can enable an individual to get to where they wish to be even if it involves an initial change of direction. In this study an individual's decision to leave full-time employment in order to take up the opportunity to study full-time appears to be a life changing career move and may appear to be a high risk to other individuals.

One aspect that needs to be considered, when exploring all the above theoretical models is equality of opportunity. By this, I mean, it is easy to assume that every human being has the same opportunity to explore different career options as everyone else. However, as Blustein (1997:270) suggests individual without access to education, for

example, have few choices if any. Other considerations include the individual's socio-economic background, their gender, race and culture; there is no scope in this study to review these in more detail.

Furthermore, Hancock (2009) explores the effects of chance, turning points and periods of routine. He analysed the data collected from ten in-depth interviews with male students on an access course and found that career choice is not a "one-off event" and an individual's career is evolutionary, as far as an individual's priorities change as their life changes. This study differs from the study for this thesis in that the students Hancock selected had underachieved at school, whereas my study has a mix of students who had achieved but chose not to progress into Higher Education as well as two who did underachieve at school. Hancock refers to these as different roles and different "theatres" and changing priorities at different stages of one's life. The role could be the shift from student to employee to husband or wife. The "theatre" can include work or home. This relates to identity, which will be explored in a further section of the literature review. Here it is important, however, to recognise the external demands these can create for an individual when considering career change. Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) link routine with turning points in the following way. They consider a turning point when an individual experiences a "significant transformation of identity" (1997:39). From their data in their study of ten males, they identified three types of turning point: structural (determined by external structures of the institution involved e.g. end of compulsory schooling); Self-initiated (the individual is responsible for the transformation) and Forced (by some external force e.g. redundancy). A consequence of any one of these results in the evolution of an individual's habitus. The concept of habitus will be explored further in the following chapter through some interpretation and application of Bourdieu's work.

Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) introduce the notion of "careership" from a sociological rather than purely an individualistic perspective given the role of external influences. They used the term "careership" as a shorthand title to encompass what they view as an inter-related, rather than separate, theoretical framework of: rational decision making, choices as interactions within a field and choices involving inter-linked routines and turning points.

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The review of the career change theory literature shows the variety of ways in which the individual can make a career decision. These include trait theory with its positivist underpinnings, to seek a "fit" of the individual to either a career or an organisation type. Career development theory considers the career trajectory over the working life of an individual. Social learning theory recognises the socio-cultural influences on an individual's career choice and finally the impact of chance events through the happenstance learning theory. Furthermore, there are other factors that affect career change decisions such as "turning points" identified by Hancock (2009) and Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997). The following section reviews some of the literature surrounding studies focusing on identity in relation to the mature undergraduate student.

2.3   Identity in Relation to the Mature Undergraduate Student.

This structure of this section has been guided by findings from previous studies surrounding the mature student. These include how existing identities impact the new student identity: furthermore, ways in which the mature student positions themselves alongside "young" students also. The significance of interactions with academics as well as how they perceive themselves "fitting" with their notions of successful students.

2.3.1   Existing Identities with "New" Student Identity.

Although the government agenda is to widen participation and this includes attracting mature students, they face particular challenges of juggling additional responsibilities and pressures outside university as well as having being out of education for a number of years which O'Donnell and Tobbell (2007) and Mallman and Lee (2016) found to be the case in their studies. According to Kasworm (2010), there is a lack of research in relation to mature undergraduate students and their student identity. She suggests that research has focused on student academic performance abilities and related motivations and the self-identity construct of academic competence, which has shown comparable results for mature with the young student and in some cases higher.

Furthermore, O'Boyle's (2015) study involved interviewing 15 mature students in their final year of study in Ireland, aged 28 to 54. He considered language to be a vital part of one's identity and explores changes in identity alongside the acquisition of new

academic language. He also considered that such changes in identity could pose risks to existing identities and relationships: furthermore, he referred to the concept of capital and the acquisition of which can be enhanced by engaging in academic study.

Additionally, Britton and Baxter's (1999) study focused the role of gender difference in the construction of the mature student's experience of returning to education. They argued that education for the mature student is key in their construction of identity. However, they found that the meaning and significance of education varied in its significance for self-identity. They developed their theoretical standpoint from contemporary sociological debates around the self and identity, which draw upon the reflexive self in becoming a mature student. They criticise earlier studies such as that undertaken by Pascall and Cox (1993) where they had found male mature students displaying an "instrumental" orientation to education and females one of "self-fulfilment", are oversimplified and in some cases, these are reversed and are not gender specific. According to Britton and Baxter (1999) many previous studies focused on the female mature student, assumed that many have caring responsibilities and have returned after establishing a family, which is also oversimplified. They undertook semi-structured interviews with 14 female and 7 male mature students in their first year of study. Their narrative analysis involved approaching each narrative from four perspectives: struggling against the odds, unfulfilled potential, credentialism and self-transformation. Their significant find was that men and women narrate their stories differently. The differences stem from their different life experiences and different understandings of self. An interesting find was that men focus on the isolated individual self and women in relation to others in their discourses.

Furthermore, a study undertaken by Mallman and Lee (2016) focused on exploring the "emotional dynamics of inhabiting a new learner identity" for mature students experiencing the transition into Higher Education. Data was gathered from 344 first year student reflexions on the university culture and their place within it at an Australian university. From their findings, they discovered that a sense of belonging was a major concern for mature students.

2.3.2 Positioning with "Young" Students.

Three key aspects have emerged from a review of literature in relation to how the mature student positions themselves to the "young" student. The first relates to age, the second to the tacit behaviours that arise from mature student interactions within the classroom and the third to mature students views of "young" student social activities.

In relation to age, a study undertaken by Kasworm (2010) in relation to the mature student, found that their interactions with young students gave rise to anxieties in relation to their ability to perform academically. In another study undertaken by Johnson and Watson (2010), they found that the mature student in their study initially forms an identity through assessing their age in relation to the younger student and considers a lack of fit due to their relative maturity.

In relation to tacit behaviours as study undertaken by Mallman and Lee (2016) included data from young students and their reflexions towards mature students, where some referred to norms surrounding tacit levels of behaviour such as asking questions and this in turn often leads to young students being subdued in class when they lack the courage to ask questions themselves. This view from the "young" student does offer an alternative perspective showing how the mature student may shape the identity of other students. However, it is not further addressed in this study. A further finding from this study was that for the mature student the social life is not necessarily a prime concern, as it is with the young student. Furthermore, this study found the mature student equally critical of the young student for their interest in the social aspects of Higher Education.

2.3.3 Care from Academics

The study undertaken by Kasworm (2010:146) found that in some cases the mature student had limited power, privilege and advocacy, which resulted in institutional invisibility and consequently the students feeling, marginalised and alienated.

However, a study undertaken by Rich and Schachter's (2012) considered the following three characteristics nurture the development of student identity: care from teachers,

teachers are role models and school cultivates the whole student. The third aspect involves developing the student beyond those in their chosen topic of study such as developing confidence and research skills. Furthermore, Mallman and Lee's (2016) study found that a sense of belonging was important for the mature student and it will be useful to explore the data in my own study to see whether the mature student articulates the value of interactions with tutors as creating a sense of care by their tutors.

2.3.4 "Fit" with the Notion of a "Successful" Student

In a study undertaken by Johnson and Watson (2010) found that the fit between the students' production of their own identity and their perception of the successful student in their institution or programme a key determinant of student achievement.

Furthermore, Kasworm's (2010) study involved interviewing 23 mature students in USA, at a research-focused university, aged 30 years or over. Kasworm (2010) found that these students were academically competitive and that their positions within the classroom were important to them. However, a study undertaken by Howard and Davies (2013) involved administering a questionnaire to fifteen students studying on a higher education course designed to attract mature student learners to progress into higher education. The results from their study suggested that being positioned as a "non-learner" can prevent engagement in further or higher education and with the student community, although they found that mature students who developed a sense of social identity with other mature students were more likely to enrol on an undergraduate programme.

Furthermore, the White Paper (2016:53) refers to research undertaken by the Sutton Trust, which indicated that students falling within the "widening participation" agenda attend higher education institutions for which they are over-qualified due to a lack of self-efficacy. This was found, to be the case, particularly where they are the first in the family to attend university. This study is undertaken within a post-92 university and it will be useful to explore whether the participants had the opportunity to register at a traditional research-led university.

In a study undertaken by O'Boyle (2015), he utilised relational dialectics theory (RDT) in order to examine tensions experienced by mature students. This theory extends beyond viewing tensions as negative. It suggests that these are a necessary element of evolving relationships. His focus is on the "off-campus" aspects of being a mature student.

The key findings from the review of literature focusing on mature student identity include their own identity and that of what they consider the "successful" student. A further find was how they see they "fit" with the "young" student and yet they can appear critical of the "young" students' interest in social activities. A further finding was the tacit behaviour in class where the "young" student in subdued by what is considered "unacceptable" behaviour by the mature student. In addition, the impact of existing identities on the change of identity through becoming a mature student. In following section will consider studies that have focused on structure and agency for the mature student. Furthermore, the use of narrative identity explored by McAdams and McLean (2013) suggested that it enables the individual to

"*Reconstruct the autobiographical past and imagine the future in such a way as to provide a person's life with some degree of unity, purpose, and meaning. Thus, a person's life story synthesises episodic memories with envisioned goals, creating a coherent account of identity in time. Through narrative identity, people convey to themselves and to others who they are now, how they came to be, and where they think their lives may be going in the future*". McAdams and McLean (2013: 233)

A discourse analysis will provide a deeper exploration of mature student identity, which I will return to in the methodology chapter, chapter three.

2.4 Structure and Agency

An essential aim in this study is to explore the influences of structure and agency on the mature student experience and identity. The ways, in which the different structures such as past acts, parental educational experience and "hidden" practices in relation to career progression shape their being and becoming a mature student will be explored in the literature. In addition, the ways in which the literature reveals issues related to agency seems to be of significance in this study.

I find McAdams and McLean's (2013:234) definition of agency, which they utilised for coding narrative identity, useful:

> "*The degree to which protagonists are able to affect change in their own lives… often through demonstrations of self-mastery, empowerment, achievement, or status. Highly agentic stories privilege accomplishment and the ability to control one's fate.*"

Whilst at the same time, Lee (2013) concludes that many studies related to non-traditional mature students fail to consider structural factors. Tholen's (2015) study explored how Dutch and British final-year undergraduate students approached the labour market prior to graduation and how they act within the labour market. They considered this from two perspectives: the mainstream view and the alternative view.

With regard to the mainstream view, Tholen (2015:769) considers the past acts of independent individuals (agents) collectively coming together give rise to structure. It also suggests that individuals are able to act independently. Once these acts have come together regularities and structures form and the individual has autonomy and agency to work within "the new institutional order of education and work". They suggest that individuals take an economic stance before taking any actions by employing a cost-benefit analysis. For the mature student this would suggest that before embarking upon a full-time undergraduate degree the individual would take into account the opportunity cost of studying i.e. the loss of potential earnings for the three years whilst offsetting these against the perceived increase in potential earnings with the degree. In contrast, the alternative view suggests that inequalities exist within the labour market. Employability success not only depends upon the individual skills, experience and abilities, but also how other graduates act. It also recognises the arbitrary nature related to the employer's view of the "right" candidate. In terms of this study, it will be interesting to explore whether mature students consider themselves eligible for "graduate" trainee positions. In addition, whether employers have recognised them as viable employees for their organisation as alternative employees to the young graduate. Another aspect from the mature student point of view is whether employers recognise "alternative" qualifications. In the field of Accounting and Finance, a student can be

admitted onto the undergraduate degree with an AAT (Association of Accounting Technicians) qualification at either level 3 or 4 as a viable alternative to traditional A levels. Similarly with BTEC qualifications. As Tholen (2015), points out some employers, including Accountancy firms, remain wedded to A level entrants only, which has implications for the mature student with alternative qualifications. Another implication for the higher education institution are the discourses surrounding employability. In the university rankings within the UK, employability is measured on the percentage of graduates attaining graduate level jobs. There are clearly implications of the recruitment practices of employers, which I will explore in later chapters.

Laughlin (1987) advocates the adoption of a critical realist methodology to accounting related research. He acknowledges that accountancy as a discipline can appear highly technical and often the social activities that are associated with it are in danger of being overlooked. Laughlin (1987) adopts Habermas's philosophy to the discipline of accountancy and suggests that in maintaining the view that it is a highly technical activity can contribute to maintaining it as a selective profession. This suggests that individuals conversant with its language succeed where others who are less so are excluded. This may to some extent explain the desire of students to seek an undergraduate degree in accounting and finance.

Studies undertaken by Heath et al (2008) and Fuller et al (2008) found the concept of ambivalence helpful in providing a framework, which bridges social structure and individual agency in career decision-making. The large-scale study that these papers were based upon involved students who had chosen not to participate in higher education despite achieving the necessary qualifications in order to progress. This aspect is particularly of interest in my own study as one of my participants had made the same decision at eighteen years of age. Furthermore, Heath et al (2008) and Fuller et al (2008) suggested that the concept of ambivalence could be used as a mechanism by which existing social relations are either reinforced or challenged through individual actions in the realm of education. They also drew upon what Heath terms, "networks of intimacy" which includes family members, friends and peers. For me the influence is an aspect I am keen to explore in my own data.

Previous studies undertaken by researchers such as Pearson and Dellman-Jenkins (1997), Dandy and Nettelbeck (2002) and Jacking and Calero (2006) found that parental educational background was a significant factor in relation to students' choice of study. Although they found that of more significance was parental encouragement and various family structure variables such as presence of the father and working status of the mother.

Walters (2000) developed the three R framework as a means to investigate the mature students' experience of higher education. The three R's refer to: redundancy, recognition and regeneration. Redundancy may relate to a change in individual status. This may arise from career or other roles also referred to as the "self-concept". Although it may result in a negative experience initially, it can lead to a positive change. Recognition refers to the state of accepting the change. Regeneration is the outcome of the developmental process. Here the individual can focus positively on their new direction or change. Walters (2000:277) concludes that education can be a "great agent of change" but also a high level of emotional impact on the mature learner.

The key finding from this review of studies relating to structure and agency in relation to the mature student concludes that the agency of the mature student can be compromised by structures such as inability to secure graduate level positions following graduation, which arises from what employers view as the candidate that "fits" their organisation. Furthermore, family structures affect an individual's agency in registering at university, including parental encouragement and whether they attended university. The following section will review the studies that analysed risk in relation to the mature student.

2.5 Risk and Identity

Baxter and Britton's (2001) study was based upon fourteen students who were enrolled on a social science programme at a "new" or post-1992 university. There were five males and nine females. The students narrated their perceptions of what they considered the risks of becoming a mature student. The risks were posited from two perspectives, the first being the challenges to established gender roles and relationships. The second related to class mobility and its effects on self-identity. This study suggested that for

females there is a higher risk to established gender roles and relationships than for males. In terms of identity Baxter and Britton (2001) found that becoming a mature student enabled, them to become more assertive and confident and also that they learnt the language of academia. They viewed this through a Bourdieu lens as the students acquiring cultural capital, which had a significant impact upon the sense of self and enables them to develop a new habitus. Baxter and Britton (2001) also found that the students from a working-class background were anxious about being perceived as superior to their old friends with whom they had shared the working-class habitus as they were negotiating a middle-class habitus. This aspect was more apparent for working-class than middle-class mature students. The aspect of financial risk was explored by Davies and Williams (2001). They found that official discourse promoted the notion that participation in higher education would result in a high return in relation to economic benefits through increased earning potential. However, this was based upon several assumptions including the young age of an undergraduate student, the nature of graduate jobs and the length of their future engagement in the labour market. Davies and Williams (2001) found that the majority of mature students are more likely to have graduated from a post-1992 university where the potential earnings are lower than for those graduating from a research-led university. This results in a potentially higher economic risk for the mature student. It is interesting that this continues to be the case reported in the White Paper (2016:53) following research undertaken by the Sutton Trust.

A key finding in this section is that key risks were identified in relation to established gender roles and those posed to economic capital. The final section of this chapter will clarify the research aim and supporting questions for this study.

2.6 Research Questions from the Literature

Having explored a range of the literature, the aims and research questions are specifically stated. The overall aim of the study is framed within the overarching question:

"How do mature undergraduate students self-author? A narrative enquiry of four accounting and finance undergraduate students".

There are three further research questions that form sub-aims in this study:

1. What are the distinctions about the processes involved in making a career change decision from full-time paid employment to full-time study for an Accounting and Finance undergraduate degree?
2. In what ways do students identify and articulate changes to their identity, as they become mature full-time students?
3. How do structure and agency affect the career choices of the mature undergraduate student?

Whilst the three aims outlined above are presented as separate aims, it is important to realise that they overlap and interweave. They will assist me in trying to answer my overall research aim.

The first aim developed from the literature surrounding career change decision-making. A student who has given up full-time paid employment to pursue a full-time three-year undergraduate degree is effectively changing career.

The second aim is to explore the ways in which a student's identity changes when they become a mature student. The literature suggests that the change of identity can present itself in many forms. These include changes with family relationships, friends outside of university and how the student reflects upon the experiences through their narrative discourse.

The third aim is my attempt to explore the extent to which the mature student acts independently (agency) and the extent to which they are constrained or limited in the choices and opportunities due to socially constructed boundaries (structure).

In the following chapter, I will be outlining methodology, methods and my data plan.

CHAPTER THREE – METHODOLOGY

3.0   Introduction

This chapter will start with an overview of two contrasting paradigms: positivism and interpretivism where I position myself within them. I will then explore the theories of Holland et al's (1998) Figured Worlds and Bourdieu's (1991) notion of habitus before finally moving on to explore the methods I will employ to analyse my data. My first research question explores the processes involved in making a career decision-making change. I will draw on Holland et al's (1998) notions of positional identities and Bourdieu's notions of field and habitus in order to interpret the data. Holland et al's (1998) Figured World's and their theory surrounding self and identity will be a useful tool to explore my second research question, which will delve into the ways in which students identify and articulate changes to their identity as they become students. I will also draw on Holquist's (2002) notion of dialogism, which enables the individuals to author themselves against and alongside others. My third question on the role structure and agency affect career choices with draw upon aspects from Holland et al (1998), Bourdieu (1991) and Holquist (2002).

I will start by exploring the positivist paradigm and provide an explanation of how this underpins many educational policies and practices. I will then explore the interpretivist and critical realist paradigms, which offer alternatives to positivism. There will be a greater focus on the critical realist paradigm. The subsequent sections will then focus on the methodology, and the theoretical influence for interpretation drawing upon Holland et al (1998) Figured Worlds and Bourdieu's notions of habitus. Following this, I will then outline my methods and data analysis plan.

3.1   Overview of Paradigms

Smith (2004:4) defines a paradigm as a view of the world and Crotty (2010:34) argues that scientists work with a background of theory, which is a package of beliefs about

science and scientific knowledge, which is referred to as a paradigm. Crotty (2010) suggests that there are a range of epistemologies, which can be grouped into three main areas objectivism (positivism and post-positivism), constructionist (interpretivist) and subjectivism (structuralism, post-structuralism and postmodernist). I will expand upon these further in the following sections, in order to more specifically locate this study. Smith (2004) points out that the three groups are not "watertight compartments" however, he considers that the justification of a philosophy delves into our assumptions about reality we bring to our work and this depends upon our theoretical perspective. The theoretical perspective leads us to explore our understanding of human knowledge and the knowledge we can attain from our research. For me, the exploration of my own paradigm was a challenge. I will attempt to illustrate this by revisiting the two paradigms I explored in Phase A of the EdD. When I was struggling to see where I was in Phase A one of our tutors pointed out that the world of education in the UK is typically structured within a positivist paradigm. This led me to look at this as a starting point. I will revisit this in the next section.

3.1.1   The Positivist Paradigm

As mentioned above the practices and processes in the Higher Education sector within the UK, have been developed within the positivist ideology in that measures have been designed, which quantify "successes" and "failures". For example, the number of students who progress from year one to two on the undergraduate degree or the number of final year graduates achieving a "good honours". Each year targets are revised and set, with the aim to increase these achievements.

Delanty and Strydom (2003) provide a useful overview of the positivist paradigm. The term positivism was established with Comte, Mill and Mach in France, Britain and Germany respectively, whose aim was to introduce the practices of the natural sciences to social sciences. Comte (1798 – 1857) was a French philosopher acclaimed as being the founder of positivism. Crotty (2010:22) points out that Comte did not value the necessity for numerical precision over the search for certainty in science. In addition, Comte's view of science included the social sciences. Followed by Mill (1806 – 1873) who

was English then Mach (1838 – 1916) who was born in Austria and developed logical positivism. A positivist views social facts as things or externally constraining realities that require a subject to be viewed objectively from an independent perspective. Scott and Usher (2011) view positivism as a paradigm that views facts as the only possible route to true statements and explain that this is the rationale lying behind the view that positivism is a scientific method as it reveals facts about the world. Relating this to me as a researcher, this raised challenges in relation to the discovery of my preferred choice of methodology in that I needed to try to find one that would fit with my view of the world. I also would have to convince my readers that I had generated truth. I will explore aspects of truth within the section on interpretivism.

Scott and Usher (2011:13) point out three underlying assumptions within the positivist paradigm:

> 1. The world is objective i.e. it exists independently of those who seek to know it.
>
> 2. Assertions about the world and validity of knowledge are about observable and measurable phenomena
>
> 3. The social world is not essentially different from the natural world as there are order and reason, and cause and effect in both.

As mentioned previously, within my own role as an academic, I have to conform to the positivist paradigm in the policies, systems and processes within my own university. For example, through target setting for student retention, progression and achievement rates. The assumptions stem from a belief that students succeed in a good teaching and learning environment. Whether or not students themselves are aware of this paradigm, they appear to be co-conspirators, as they seem to want to know what they need to do to pass their exams or to achieve the highest degree classification possible in their coursework. I believe that this has become entrenched in their view of education from the pressure of their previous education establishment. That is their previous school or college who are pressurised to ensure that their students achieve as this in turn is reflected in league tables. This has led some teachers feeling that they have to help students achieve more than in the pre-inspection era. However, other teachers feel that the pressure on examination success leaves little or no room in the curriculum for

creativity and sporting activities resulting in a narrowed impoverished educational experience. Some take the positivist view and believe that a quantitative study is superior to a qualitative one probably as numbers appear more objective than words. However, as Crotty, (2010) points out Comte viewed positivism as an attitude of mind towards science and the explanation of man, nature and society and not some predilection for mathematical precision. In many quantitative studies, researchers employ the use of statistical software to produce correlations and regressions to prove hypotheses. There is no doubt that such links or relationships between items is useful, for me it does not delve any deeper in terms of finding the underlying reasons. I am interested in the cases that do not fit these criteria and the reasons as to why there may be a link. Post-positivism recognises that many claimed "facts" are not directly observed and many findings have been contrived. An example was a news report on television and radio relating to the initial setting of university fees. A few weeks before universities had to declare their fees it was declared that fifty per cent of universities were going to set fees at £9,000. In fact at this stage, only about half of the universities had responded so in fact this at best was twenty-five per cent.

Myers (2011:37) suggests that positivist researchers tend to project the research subject in terms of independent and dependant variables and relationships between them. This can be "measured" statistically by the calculation of correlations by the use of sophisticated software packages such as SPSS. However, this presupposes an underlying assumption that causal links can be discovered and understood. The use of statistics and controlled tests within the sciences such as medicine does have an important role and this cannot be denied. However, when transferring positivist practices to education (a social science) can be questioned. Cohen et al (2010:30) draw upon questions posed by Tyler (1949) in reflecting on the rationale for the curriculum,

1. What educational purposes should the school seek to attain?
2. What educational experiences can be provided that are likely to attain these purposes?
3. How can these educational experiences be effectively organised?
4. How can we determine whether these purposes are being attained?

The questions posed appear to seek a positivist answer, frequently, the conformist answer is how we can measure this. Underpinning this view of education, is the assumption that the curriculum is controlled, ordered, predetermined, uniform, predictable and largely behaviourist in outcome. The behaviours of both teacher and student change as they focus on achieving these measures. One example of this is in relation to student success rates, where academics teach to the curriculum to ensure that students have the requisite knowledge to pass an assessment, at the same time students become assessment focused. There is a risk that academics restrict their teaching and do not encourage students to research areas outside the curriculum. It could be argued from a pure positivist practitioner point of view that the way to maximise achievement and increase student satisfaction is to focus teaching on the end assessments and provide "model answers" to written parts of questions.

Somekh and Lewin (2011:327) and Cohen et al (2010:9) explain that positivism is used to describe an approach to research, which is based upon the assumption that knowledge can be discovered by collecting data through observation, measurement and experimentation to establish truth. An example of this in my own practice would be to measure the average time spent by a group of students accessing the VLE (Virtual Learning Environment) for my own unit which incorporates podcasts, and another unit for the same group of students which does not employ podcasts and could suggest that the increase in average time was due to the viewing of podcasts. However, I cannot know this and could only make a suggestion as to the possible reason. The reason for the increased length of use could be due to the subject topic and perceived complexity. Another example could be establishing whether there is a positive correlation between attendance and achievement. If I took a pure positivist stance, I would record attendance, match this with a student's achievement, and undertake some statistical analysis via SPSS and this would show me the correlation coefficient and the significance of the outcome. However, it does not necessarily explain a regular attending student's poor performance, as can sometimes be the case. This leads me to question my own preconceived ideas about attendance and success as to what other unseen or less obvious factors contribute to a student's success. I believe that in order to gain a deeper

understanding is through the employment of interviews as these can identify some potentially unquantifiable factors.

As Somekh and Lewin (2011), point out the traditional view of positivism takes a very narrow view of science and ignores the meaning of human activity and the role of the subjective self in the discovery of new knowledge. However, it cannot be denied that positivism has a purpose is scientific research. In medical research, controlled experiments have to be undertaken across large samples of the population to ensure that new drugs are safe. In addition Somekh and Lewin (2011) point out that a limitation of positivism is that for the social science researcher, human behaviour and social interactions are not constant and are often unpredictable and are not easily susceptible to control and measurement. It is also difficult to ignore the power relations at play with taking a positive stance and the use of statistics and the messages they convey. It is my belief that some of this often stems from the use of the word "scientific" frequently used as a precursor to the statistics, which claim to prove links between sets of data. However, they often fail to answer "why?" there is a link and at the same time ignore the outliers for those individuals who do not fit the norm, which when explored deeper can provide some useful insights that were unexpected. I acknowledge the usefulness of positivism as a paradigm and the value of analysing data statistically to find linkages between data. In my own study, I could study the mature undergraduate student from the perspective of identifying likely factors that lead a student to seek full-time employment before undertaking a full-time undergraduate programme. I could show which factors were more likely to suggest an individual would take that route, however, I am more interested in the individual as a case and understand why this is the route that they have taken. This now leads me to explore alternative paradigms.

3.1.2   The Interpretivist Paradigm.

The interpretivist paradigm rejects the positivist's stance which considers that meaning only materialises with our engagement with the realities in our world and that meaning can only exist within a mind. Delanty and Strydom (2003) posit that the focus of the interpretative tradition is on understanding rather than explanation as is the case with

positivism. They point out that there is a fundamental difference between nature and society and between "things" or "objects" and the "psychological processes [and] process of interaction constituting "sociation" and that sociology requires a different methodology to natural sciences. Crotty (2010:67) suggests interpretivism seeks the understanding in human sciences. This contrasts with the explaining and associated causality, which is sought in the natural sciences. These two contrasting aims give rise to either the qualitative or the quantitative methods respectively. According to Crotty (2010:112) interpretivist is an uncritical form of study and this now leads to explore a critical paradigm.

3.1.3   The Critical Realist Paradigm

At the time of writing my methodology paper I felt that this paradigm resonated with my view of the world in that, it overcomes the assumption in the positivist paradigm that everything is measurable. Syed et al (2009) consider that critical realism aids the closure of the research-practice gap. They acknowledge Bhaskar was motivated to overcome limitations of existing philosophical paradigms as these distinguish between events that actually occur and the underlying structures or mechanisms which give rise to them. They also consider that many researchers design research around the paradigms; the paradigm being the starting point for the research in particular in relation to the hard sciences. The rationale for many research questions is based upon the paradigm, which has given rise to the criticism around the research-practice gap. It also recognises that social structures are intrinsically different to physical structures and that social structure does exist independently of social activity; it cannot be empirically identified except through such activities as it is dependent upon actors' conceptions of their activities and it is relative to particular times and cultures Syed et al (2009:74). Scott's (2005:635) opinion of critical realism is that it accepts neither the view that there are fixed philosophical first principles that guarantee epistemic certainty, nor the ideas that first-order activities are self-justifying. Phenix (1964:128) and Crotty (2010:69) suggest that the human science of sociology is a science, which aims at the interpretive understanding of social behaviour in order to gain an explanation of its causes, its course and effect. I see the key words here as "interpretive" and throughout time

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interpretations will change. It also recognises the role of politics and ideologies. Badiou (2011:2) considers that the coalition government at the time were prepared to sacrifice a whole generation of young people through the cuts on expenditure and their determination to cut the national debt. Syed et al (2009:75) consider that critical realism provides a unified and consistent philosophical foundation for combining research methods and theories. Furthermore, they consider that it can provide a different notion of causality that allows the researcher to capture the "why" to questions being posed. Hammersley (1993) further advocated a "multi layered" approach to dampen the quality versus quantity debate. This refers to the positivist approach and the utilisation of methods such as surveys and experimentation where a minimum numbers are required to be deemed valid. A useful point Layder (1993:127) makes is that some methods, employed to gather quantitative data such as a survey, could be analysed qualitatively. I employed this approach to my masters study. I used the college where I was employed as a case study and in addition surveyed over 70 other colleges within the FE (Further Education) sector to establish their costing methodologies and how they classified costs and then I followed up with some interviews at a few of these participating colleges. This gave a particular type of data, which lacked the detail that I hope to tease out in this research.

Laughlin (1987) advocates the adoption of a critical realist methodology to accounting related research. He acknowledges that accountancy as a discipline can appear highly technical and often the social activities that are associated with it are in danger of being overlooked. Laughlin (1987:480) suggests that many previous research studies have favoured an objective "scientific" approach but in order to study the social activities requires a more subjective methodological approach to seek understanding. Laughlin (1987) draws heavily on Habermas who focuses on the role of language to seek an understanding of how accounting systems and processes develop; this viewpoint enables me to move on to the theoretical framework for this study.

Rather than positioning myself firmly within a discreet paradigm, I will now outline the theoretical framework with which I will frame this study. I consider that the nature of this study lends itself to a conceptual framework that utilises theories which are

underpinned by socio-cultural principles such as Holland et al's (1998) theories surrounding self-authoring and self-positioning; Gee's Building Tasks model (2014); and Bourdieu's (1991) notions of habitus, field and capital. I will be undertaking a discourse analysis and am aware that the words and ways in which individuals articulate themselves, is influenced by "others" and their voices. The language we speak cannot be attributed to the individual alone; it is culturally constructed to enable "others" to communicate meaning and understanding hence the socio-cultural nature of this study. Thus, in this study I am not seeking to generalise meanings but to reveal the lives of my participants. Hence, my sample is small. I will now explore these in the following sections commencing with Holland et al's (1998) notions surrounding figured worlds.

3.2   Holland et al's (1998) Figured Worlds

In this study, I chose to use an unstructured interview style by inviting my participants to tell me their story will enable me to analyse the data using Holland et al's (1998) theories on Identity and Figured Worlds. I will also draw upon Bakhtin's vision of self-fashioning which Holland et al (1998:169) refer to as the "space of authoring". In the following sections, I will highlight aspects of Holland et al's (1998) theory that I find useful and have drawn on in this study. These are the concepts of agency and identity, serious play, heteroglossia and the standard plot.

3.2.1   Agency and Identity

Holland (1998:41) makes four interesting points about the heuristic development of identity and agency. The first point is that a "figured world" contains historical phenomena into which individuals enter and these develop through the work of the participants. Here Holland is acknowledging the part that processes or traditions play and envelop us in our lives. The second important aspect of figured worlds is the social encounters in which the participants' position themselves is important. Holland explains that some figured worlds are never available to us because of social position or rank. Also at times, we may deny access to others into our figured worlds, yet some we are able to fully access and some we miss. The third aspect of figured worlds is that they are

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socially organised and reproduced. In an institutional sense, this can be due to position or rank which separate and divide participants. These are recreated by work with others and survive the passage of time. The fourth aspect is that figured worlds have the power to distribute us. We can be distributed across many fields of activity, however, Holland (1998:41) progresses earlier work by Leontiev and Bakhtin by suggesting that cultural worlds are populated by familiar social types.

Holland et al (1998:42) provide a thought provoking summary, which brings together the notions of agency and identity:

> "*The conundrum is the seeming contradiction between humans as social producers and as social products. Inden continues: "People do not act only as agents. They also have the capacity to act as "instruments" of other agents, and to be "patients", to be the recipients of the acts of others.*"

Here Holland et al (1998) recognise the fact that individuals perform acts that are a reflection of their social status and background and also produce and reproduce acts, which reinforce these social divisions. Holland et al (1998) introduce the notion of figured worlds drawing upon the concepts of Caughey's imaginary worlds, Anderson's human fantasy and Vygotsky's fascination with the human ability to employ symbols to "manipulate their worlds and themselves". Imaginary worlds enable the individual to enter into a process of modelling possibilities, which either inspire action or inaction. Holland et al (1998:49) illustrate the notion of human fantasy with the use of nationalism, which can generate an "imagined community". Holland et al (1998:50) illustrate Vygotsky's use of symbols through child play. For example, a sweet used to represent a sacred jewel, which cannot be eaten, and children accept this and will treat the sweet as such and demonstrate a high level of willpower by refraining from eating it. Together the two concepts of imaginary worlds and human fantasy enable the individual to enter into "as if" worlds. Developing these concepts, Holland et al (1998:52) clarifies their notion of figured worlds as follows,

> "*By "figured world," then, we mean a socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognised, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over*

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others. Each is a simplified world populated by a set of agents who engage in a limited range of meaningful acts or changes of state as moved by a specific set of forces."

Holland et al (1998:127) provide a useful distinction between positional and figurative identity. The notion of figurative identity relates to the individual's positionality within a figured world and as such is only recognised within that figured world. This will provide a helpful tool for this study in relation to the students prior to joining and registering at university when analysing the influences on their identity. Furthermore, Holland et al (1998) explore the theories surrounding the notion of self and the extent to which this changes or remains stable throughout time. They explore earlier theories, which tended to provide contrasting viewpoints in terms of stability. The culturalist version of what is described as the essential self is posited as stable and enduring throughout time irrespective of changes in social and material conditions. This contrasts with the socially constructed self, which changes according to ones positioning which is determined by the powerful discourses one encounters. An example she refers to are the educational discourses which designate a pupil or student as "at risk" of educational failure. Holland et al (1998) discuss three ways in which the theory of self has moved on from these polarised views in the last twenty years and appear to be suggesting that the self encompasses elements from both the cultural and socially constructed viewpoints. The first of these three strands is that differentiation arises from the individual's relationship with the power relations and associated institutional infrastructures that in themselves are considered as living tools of the self, which offer more scope for the self. The second element is that the self that is intertwined with social practice. The third aspect is that the loci of the self is plural, that there are more than one self.

I also find the way in which Holland et al (1998:40) consider the connectedness between the notions of agency and identity useful:

"Significant to our concept is the situated-ness of identity in collectively formed activities. The "identities" that concern us are ones that trace our participation, especially our agency, in socially produced, culturally constructed activities – what we call figured worlds… figured worlds are historical phenomena.. Are socially organised and reproduced … and they distribute us … cultural worlds are

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> *populated by familiar social types and even identifiable persons, not simply differentiated by some abstract division of labour". Holland et al (1998:41)*

Rainio (2008:359) explains that the concept of figured worlds, was developed to

> *"Illustrate processes through which people in different circumstances try to develop and transform their ways of acting within the constraints of the activities of which they participate".*

The concept requires the individuals to share a "collective visioning". This in itself enables the individuals to imagine other worlds and possibilities. It is interesting that Rainio (2008) introduces the notion of constraints. This seems to imply that it is the lack of something available which enables the individual to start the process of imagining alternative realms of being. Gee (2014:81), in the context of discourse analysis, explains the notion of figured worlds as relating to "the theories and stories we humans use to understand and deal with the world", which is frequently unconscious.

3.2.2 Serious Play

In order to become something else, the individual needs to have the ability to imagine a different world. This requires the ability to think "what if" as posited by Holland et al (1998:49). This aspect may be useful to explore in this study at the point at which the student considers embarking upon a full-time undergraduate degree in accounting and finance. In order to do so, the student needs to imagine themselves becoming a student and becoming an accountant. Holland et al (1998:272) introduce the notion of "serious play" as a means to explore the propensity of the individual to imagine becoming part of this different world. This notion is influenced by Vygotsky's understandings of children's play, which he suggests:

> *"Develops new social competencies in newly imagined communities"*
>
> *Holland et al (1998:272)*

It will be interesting to explore either whether the students in my study talk about imagining in their journeys. In this study, it will be interesting to analyse the interview transcripts to see if and how students imagine their future worlds and their role in these

worlds. It will also be interesting to look for clues as to how the students see their past and current world and where they fit within it. Brown's (2015) study also found that mid-career changes involved the ability to "vision" new careers. Furthermore, Holland et al (1998) draw upon Holquist's (2002) principle of Dialogism, in which they consider a central organising principle for authoring selves.

> "*Dialogism begins by visualising existence as an event, the event being responsible for (and to) the particular situation existence assumes as it unfolds in the unique (and constantly changing) place I occupy in it. Existence is addressed to me as a riot of inchoate potential messages, which at this level of abstraction may be said to come to individual persons much as stimuli from the natural environment come to individual organisms. Some of the potential messages come to me in the form of primitive physiological stimuli, some in the form of natural language and some in codes, or ideologies. So long as I am in existence, I am in a particular place, and must respond to all these stimuli by either ignoring them or in a response that takes the form of making sense, of producing – for it is a form of work – meaning out of such utterances*" (Holquist 2002:47)

I am aware that by inviting each participant to narrate their story to me at a particular moment in time I have to accept their stories and their view of events through the words they choose. Holland et al (1998:169) suggest that 'authoring' enables the individual to articulate an

> "*Alternative vision, organised around the conflictual, continuing dialogic of an inner speech where identities are ever forming*".

I would like to consider this alongside the earlier quote that draws the notions of agency and identity together. It would appear to imply that identity is constructed and formed on an individual basis and agency depends upon the social situation in which the individual is situated. A degree of freedom and opportunity is afforded to an individual through the ability to form identities, however, the individual is restricted by their economic, social and cultural capital which in turn affects whether they are allowed or denied access to particular figured worlds.

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This implies that if I interviewed, each participant at a different stage in his or her life, the story would change and be redefined, as their identities reform. I will not have had the opportunity to follow each individual to see their story, which would have afforded me to view their story from alternative perspectives. Holquist (2002) illustrates this employing a train spotter metaphor. He explains that two individuals viewing a train will not share the same view and if they were facing each other each one individual can see what is behind the other but they themselves are not able to see this. As an interviewer, I will be unable to be impartial to each interviewee's narrative and will find myself drawn to aspects of some of the stories. I will be able to relate to one individual more than I to another, which will in turn affect my responses and body language; this is why I reject the positivist paradigm. I am also aware that should a different individual to me undertaking the same narrative enquiry with my interviewee's would not necessarily generate the same responses. From the interviewee perspective this narration will result in their unique way of authoring themselves as they form their own dialogue and attempt to put into words their own vision of their lives as Bakhtin's view of "self-visioning" unfolds Holland (1998:169).

This study will not afford me the opportunity to interview key individuals that have helped shape the participants' stories, the other characters in their story and I will analyse their stories through the words they choose. Holland (1998:19) suggests that the way in which individuals narrates themselves is a reflexive process and this is turn is the way in which they objectify, monitor and evaluate the stance they take towards their own behaviour. Holland et al (1998) have found there to be a variety of ways in which individuals across the globe use these discourses to narrate their story.

For three of the interviewees, I was afforded the opportunity of meeting their families at the graduation ceremony in July 2015. It is interesting that in the quote above, Holquist (2002) refers to "a riot of inchoate potential messages". The use of the word riot at first appears a strong word and conjures up images of a major disturbance involving police and activists however; coupled with "inchoate" suggests that the discourse of the participant may not be fully developed as they attempt to relate

events. Additionally, their educational, cultural and socio-economic backgrounds may influence their choice of words and language.

3.2.3   Agency

In the study I refer to the term agency in relation to the mature student's power to make the career changing decision to become a full-time undergraduate student. The degree to which they are autonomous and the significance of "others" in that decision making process is of particular interest. Holland et al (1998) also draw on the aspect of agency from the perspective of the position of "I", they suggest that the use of "I" does not equate to the freedom of the individual. The individual's narrative is formed with influences of languages, dialects and the words of others to whom they have been exposed. This aspect draws upon work undertaken by both Bakhtin and Holquist. Both consider the "I" as central to an individual's view in authoring their world, however, the words used derive from collective experience. The choice of words can be influenced by the situation e.g. a profession, a genre, a particular work, a generation. It is also interesting to note that words change and evolve with time.

Ecclestone et al (2010:11) are helpful in bringing together socio-cultural and individual aspects of agency:

> "*The importance of the contribution from sociology to questions of agency is to highlight the effects of structural factors such as class, race and gender, and economic and occupational conditions in understanding and explaining individual and social action.*"   Ecclestone et al (2010:11)

A mature student studying accounting and finance is entering into a professional world with its own language. This language is also evolving and developing. In the accounting profession, this is evident with the introduction of international accounting standards and international terminology, with a strong influence from the USA. It will be also interesting to explore how the additional influences gained through life and work experiences impact on the mature student's interactions with younger, less experienced students. Holland et al (1998:172) suggest that the speaker or author relies on a shared understanding with the listener. Holland et al (1998) refer to Holquist's (2002) term

"utterances" as being constructed socially as they manifest themselves between individuals, however, they seem to suggest that the individuals are "positioned". In my own study, I cannot avoid my own position and how that may affect the participant in the words, they use and what they choose to tell me. They are students and I their tutor and someone in a position of power over them as a participant in their programme of study. It will be interesting to analyse the data to see if and how they seek out shared understandings with me as the interviewer.

3.2.4   Heteroglossia and Figured Worlds

Holland et al (1998:20) explore the debates surrounding the significance of culture relating to, what she terms, specific self. Within this debate is whether culture is of secondary importance to universal characteristics of human psychology. Where this is the case, the theorists refer to the "natural self". Within this view of the debate, discourses may be culturally determined, however, the underlying "natural self" bares many similarities irrespective of where the individual is geographically located. Holland et al (1998:21) suggest that the Western concept of the self is unhelpful for the study of Indian or South Asian cultures, which value the collective rather than the individual. The point being made here is that a researcher needs to be aware that discourses and concepts of the self vary dependent upon cultural background. Holland et al (1998) point out that there is no hierarchy between the two and utilises the analogy of a map, by suggesting that each provides a map depicting a difference in the territory. Holland et al (1998) also explores the further debate surrounding cultural studies and causes the researcher to question for whom and for what purpose were these studies undertaken. Which voices have been ignored? If these have been constructed from a position of power and privilege then the voices of those lacking such position have been ignored. Holland et al (1998:26) discuss the notion of the socially constructed self as the way in which we relate ourselves to one another, it enables us to make claims about who we are in relation to each other. In the next section, I will draw upon work by Bourdieu in relation to field, habitus and capital.

3.2.5 The Standard Plot

Holland et al's (1998:53) notion of a "standard plot" is a useful tool in exploring whether the mature student sees the more "typical" younger student pathway. Central to this notion is that there are "taken-for-granted sequence of events". In this study, the usual sequence of events leading to graduation is school and/or college education, followed by a gap year, enrolment at university, then full-time employment. In the field of accounting, a graduate will join a professional body, complete their examinations and gain relevant work experience in order to become chartered accountant. It will be interesting to see whether the students in this study who gained full-time employment prior to registering at university narrate their journey in relation to a more "standard plot". This has additional links to understanding positioning.

In the following section, I will outline the concepts from Bourdieu that I consider useful in analysing the data in this study.

3.3   Bourdieu's Notions of Habitus, Field and Capital

There are aspects of Bourdieu that I consider useful in this study. In particular, his notions of the forms of capital which he considers necessary for individuals to access new "fields". These aspects will enable me to analyse the change of each student's journey prior and after joining university as a mature undergraduate student.

Bourdieu suggests that the power of language and knowledge of how to conduct oneself can assist the individual to either gain access to, or be excluded from accessing "worlds". Bourdieu (1991:14) developed the notion that an individual possesses three different forms of capital. The first one is probably the most tangible, which is "economic" capital, this arises from material wealth. For a "young" student this is more notable from family background and this includes assets such as property, cars and investments. The second is "cultural" capital. This is, acquired from education and qualifications such as knowledge, skills and cultural acquisitions. Cultural acquisitions is an interesting dimension as these are less tangible, however, a prospective employer is looking for

these. For example, as part of a graduate assessment day having to join a formal dinner with the Senior Management Team is an excellent test of the social skills required which can include an awareness of the correct set of cutlery to use or the acceptable colour of suit to wear, as well as the ability to participate in conversations. The third form of capital identified by Bourdieu is "symbolic capital". This takes the form of honours or prestige. For a student this may be an academic award for a top student or being a peer mentor. The inclusion of "symbolic" and "cultural" capital enables Bourdieu (1991:14) to expands the notion of "capital" beyond the confines of the economist's view i.e. wealth in terms of money and assets. It is also important to note that he considered how one form of capital could be converted into another. For example, how educational qualifications can provide an individual access to wider career prospects

Furthermore, Bourdieu introduces the notion of "field" which he considers is a space where all three forms of capital enable the individual to position himself or herself and enable one form of capital to be converted into another. This recognises that individuals can move into new "worlds". For example, a lack of economic capital does not mean a lack of cultural capital. If an individual succeeds educationally it is likely to gain them access to lucrative jobs. He also introduces the notion of a game within the field and that the individuals within a field are players and that all the players have to buy into the notion of the game and recognise that there will be winners and losers. I will use this notion to seek out clues from each interview to see where each student sees themselves in this game in relation to other players and whether they see themselves as having made changes in terms of the three aspects of capital.

The change of career for the mature student from being a full-time employee to a student affords the opportunity in this study to explore the impact on them of their shift from the field of employment to the field of Higher Education. This in itself will lead to a restructuring of social position for the student as they leave the security of a life into a previously unknown world, which they will share with many other individuals, many of whom have progressed from one educational establishment to another.

Additionally, there are the personal aspects of their lives, which are additional fields they occupy. Bourdieu (2010: xxi) illuminates the notion of field with the use of a sporting metaphor:

> "*a social space of lifestyles where different classes of individuals compete with one another in a game whose outcomes are determined by the different volumes of economic, social and cultural capital they are able to accumulate as well as by the relative weighting of these different capitals in the overall capital holdings of different classes*".

Bourdieu's notions of field and capital are related to class goods and serve to act as both exclusion and conserving resources; these follow the Marxist position within the neo-capitalist theories. These notions will be used as a fundamental strand in interpreting the data within this study. Many writers such as Dyke et al (2012) refer to Bourdieu's notion of habitus in relation to career changing decision-making. Bourdieu (1991:12) defines habitus as

> "*A set of dispositions which incline agents to act and react in certain ways. The dispositions generate practices, perceptions and attitudes, which are "regular" without being consciously co-ordinated, or governed by any "rule".*

He explains that an individual acquires these through a gradual process of inculcation from early childhood and that they are structured as far as they are a reflection of the social conditions within which they are acquired. Referring to Blustein's (1997) thoughts on this, individuals from an economically deprived background may face more difficulties in acquiring the necessary skills to consider alternative careers. In the case of an individual who could be the first in their family to consider a university, education may need support from outside the family to explore possible fields of study for their preferred career choice. Such individuals may not have even considered university as an option open to them.

Another interesting and additional dimension provided by Zembylas (2007) to Bourdieu's views on habitus, field and capital is the role of emotions in education and change as part of the notion of capital. There are two ways in which Zembylas (2007:444)

values the consideration of emotional capital. Firstly, he suggests that emotional capital or resources can be accumulated and exchanged for other forms of capital. This is an interesting concept as it suggests that someone lacking economic, symbolic or cultural capital can compensate for this with emotional capital. He explains that this form of capital can enable the individual to reflect on the ways in which emotions are regulated within an educational context based on accepted norms that may change but are also reproduced. The second way, in which Zembylas (2007) considers emotional capital, is in the way in which it can assist educational researchers to understand the importance of teachers and students' emotion practices as forms of resistance to prevalent norms. Ecclestone et al's (2010:9) notion of identity formation is useful in bringing together these aspects:

> *"(identity) is constructed through complex interactions between different forms of capital (cultural, social, economic and emotional), broader social and economic conditions, interactions and relationships in various contexts, and cognitive and psychological strategies"*

It is noteworthy that Ecclestone et al (2010) are referring to Bourdieu's notions of capital. Although the addition of emotional capital provides an essential dimension to Bourdieu's notions of capital. The recognition of the individual expressed as psychological strategies, which in turn becomes part of identity formation. The oversight of which Bourdieu has been criticised by writers such as Albright and Luke (2008). Ecclestone et al (2010) also consider that transitions between life phases can become problematic where an individual's identity does not easily transfer to another phase. Examples of such phases can involve from school to home, school to university and school to employment; these transitions are relevant to this study. In this section, I am considering the prior-to-university phase so will focus on the transitions during this phase for my participants.

I have now outlined the two key theorists who provide a conceptual framework for this study. Before moving on to methods I will outline Gee's (2014) discourse analysis model on which I draw.

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3.4   Gee's Discourse Analysis

According to Gee (2014:2), language enables the individual to connect what they are saying (informing), doing (action) and being (identity). He suggests that the individual(s) are not able to fully comprehend a message if one of the three elements is missing. Gee (2014:19) explains that one view of discourse is that it is a sequence of sentences. The way is which sentences are formed can portray different meanings. Syntax is the rules or conventions that an individual follows when constructing a sentence. The way in which a sentence is structured can relay information as either background or foreground. He illustrates this with the following example:

1. *Though money often determines the outcome of elections in the U.S., we still call the U.S. a democracy.*

2. *Though we still call the U.S. a democracy, money often determines the outcome of elections.*

(Gee 2014:19)

In the first sentence, the speaker is asserting that "money" is the background and the U.S. being a democracy is foreground; whereas, in the second sentence the speaker is foregrounding "money" and backgrounding U.S. democracy. Another view of discourse (Gee 2014:20) is language in use. This takes account of the context in which a sentence is used. An example is "Clean it up". If this relates to a room full of toys strewn over the floor, the command is aimed at the perpetrator(s) to pick them up and tidy them away. However, if it were aimed at someone who has spilt some milk on the floor then a mop and bucket would be required.

Gee (2014) suggests that there are nine areas to consider in relation to discourse analysis. The first two arise from what he considers to be the job of the speaker: recipient design and position design. The recipient design involves ensuring that the message conveyed is appropriate for the recipient. The position design relates to the way in which the speaker wishes to persuade, motivate, change or win over the listener. The third and fourth areas arise from, what Gee (2014) considers, two jobs for listeners and readers: situating meaning and response design. Situating meaning involves recognising the context within which something is said or written, the previous section

where I drew on the "clean it up" is an example of this. Response design involves the listener or reader constructing their response, which may be agreement or putting across a different perspective to change or influence the speaker's way of thinking. The fifth and sixth aspect are associated with identities: social distance and socially significant kinds of people. Social distance enables us to categorise individuals as intimates, associates or strangers; these relationships can alter and they can differ by social groups. Associates are not as close as intimates. Individuals can be more polite to associates than to intimates and strangers. By defining socially significant kinds of people is a recognition of identities being enacted in different social groups and social and cultural formations in society. These may include established professionals such as a doctor, lawyer and in some cases have labels such as radical feminist. The seventh and eight dimension are the two classes of social language: non-vernacular or specialist language and vernacular or social language. The first is that used by professional bodies such as lawyers or doctors, scientists for example. The second is the style of language used in everyday situations, which does not require speaking as a professional or a specialist.

Gee (2014:25) uses the ninth term

> Big "D" Discourse to define *the interactive identity-based communication using both language and everything else at human disposal".*

This will help me form the practices through which I can access the language narrated by my participants and draw on the theoretical perspectives that I have chosen to interpret possible meanings in this study.

3.5   Methods

I reflected for a few months on how to collect meaningful data for this study. I had already decided this would be a small-scale study in which I would explore in-depth meanings. Initially, I attempted to find students who had not progressed from their initial programme of study and had structured some interviews around the literature I had read which had not allowed a conversation to take place. In addition, several colleagues offered to be interviewed who were interested in that initial study of poor

progress. However, they led me to identifying the mature student as an area for study and my desire to offer interviews that are more open-ended; I sought to identify suitable students to interview. I have taken an opportunistic approach to the students that I have chosen in my sample in that each student was known to me, mainly through my teaching.

As I reflected, the first student, Paul, in particular came to mind. I knew him as he was a very able student and had sacrificed a successfully established career in the police. I had been curious as to why someone would make such a major change to give that up in order to study full-time for an undergraduate degree in accounting and finance. I had encountered the second student, Hillary, when she joined the second year of the programme having studied her level four qualification at a local college of further education. I had taught the third student, Susan, on her first year and a colleague suggested her as a potential participant. I had encountered Andrew during an Open Day event where he was working as a Student Ambassador and I had the chance to chat to him informally about his background and realised that he was a mature student. In addition, during this time, I also attended several research events and one in particular was a workshop where colleagues researching education shared their experiences of collecting data. The idea of inviting my selected students to tell me their story in their own way excited me.

I undertook semi-structured interviews with four mature undergraduate students (see table 1). These were only loosely structured as I started by inviting each student to narrate their story of how they have got to where they are today. I hoped that they would relate to me what they consider important to them. I am not trying to make generalisations as the data is not quantifiably significant, but the stories reveal their individual truths. I was keen to hear their words and their priorities. I had planned to start with a very open question to avoid influencing their responses. I explained that I was not looking for any particular responses. I realised that this approach involved an element of risk in that they may relate aspects, which were not relevant to my study. However, they revealed aspects that I had not previously considered prior to the interviews. I was aware that I might need to conduct follow-up interviews to explore

aspects of the interview that either were covered only briefly or not made clear during the interview. I was also aware that each student would react differently in the interview situation. I was part of their academic life during their studies, having taught three of them in their first year. In addition, my role in holding a management position may inhibit their response if they viewed me as having a position of power. Another risk this posed was the length of each interview. As can be seen from the transcripts the varying degrees of length of each interview varied greatly. Paul and Hillary's were longer. With Susan and Andrew less productive.

Table 1 Participants

	Paul	Hillary	Andrew	Susan
Age	34	42	22	26
Gender	Male	Female	Male	Female
Previous Jobs	Police (see table 2 - p 67)	Finance (see table 3 – p 82)	Shop work (see table 4 – p 90)	Fast food and Finance (see table 5 – p 95)
Year of Study	2012 - 2015	2013 - 2015	2014 - present	2012 - 2015
Number of interviews	2	1	1	1

I aimed to present each individual student as a case study. According to Cohen et al (2010:253):

> "*A case study can enable readers to understand how ideas and abstract principles can fit together (Nisbet and Watt 1984: 72-3). Case studies can penetrate situations in ways that are not always susceptible to numerical analysis. As Robson (2002:183) remarks, case studies opt for analytical rather than statistical generalization, that is they develop a theory which can help researchers to understand similar cases, phenomena or situations*".

I realised that there are limitations of this method. It is important that as a researcher I acknowledge these. As I mentioned above the structure of the interview, or lack of,

opens an element of risk in that my approach, which would result in a lack of control. In addition, I needed to be aware of my own biases in the responses I received. When relating their own stories I was relying on their memory to recall events. There may have been events that they did not wish to reveal to me which could be interesting. I am also aware that I was getting only one perspective of events, their own. For example, if I were trying to establish family support and involvement they may not wish to declare aspects of this. If it had been possible for me to interview their family members, I may have benefitted from interesting insights from those perspectives.

However, I believed that adopting this approach would reveal more positive results than negative ones. I did not reach the decision to undertake this type of interview lightly. Reflecting on the study that did not progress, during the initial interviews in the pilot phase of my data collection, I had found that the questions I asked were formed from previous research findings. Whilst the data proved, useful it seemed to reiterate these previous findings and I began to question whether they were bringing in any new ideas. Each interview felt stilted and I felt that each participant was waiting for the next question. Following a period of reflection over the summer of 2014, which included presenting my ideas to academic audiences at a conference and to fellow research colleagues at my own HEI, I considered ways in which I could get student interviewees to open up more and tell me their own journey to how they got to where they are today. The idea of the journey had remained in my consciousness and was a result of combining my own reflections on my own journey outlined in chapter one.

Cohen et al (2010:349) consider the interview a vehicle for humans to generate knowledge through an exchange on a topic of mutual interest. I acknowledge here that rapport between the interviewer and interviewee played a part in the success of the interview; as the process involves humans, this is always going to be the case. I found it difficult for me to not enter into the conversation of the interview where I felt that I could relate to their story; likewise, it was difficult to join in when I feel that I cannot relate to their story.

3.6 Sample and Ethical Considerations

The sample chosen was opportunistic and it was designed to focus on students who had previously had employment in some capacity and had broken from full time education. It was not intended to be representative of any particular conception of a mature student cohort at the university. No predetermined number of students had been identified as the sample; students were recruited as opportunities arose and as the time constraints of the thesis allowed. This was deliberate and in keeping with the focus of the study on qualitative narrative inquiry. I knew each participant through either my teaching or management role; I had taught two in their first year and I had encountered the other two at visit days. There were two males and two females, three of whom were in their final year of study and the fourth in their first year. Due to the small-scale nature of the study, I cannot claim that the findings apply to the general population of mature undergraduate students. This method of sampling reflected the intention to present, explore and interpret accountancy student narratives using a particular theoretical lens rather than to achieve a particular level of quantitative rigour.

The study was undertaken with full adherence to the ethical requirements of Manchester Metropolitan University in 2012. Initial contact was made with each participant by e-mail seeking his or her written agreement to be interviewed. At this stage, it was made clear that their participation was voluntary and should they wish to withdraw at any stage they were able to do so. It was also made clear that the data would be anonymised by replacing their name with a pseudonym. Each interview was conducted in my office which is located in the Business School as the participants were familiar with the location. Prior to the start of each interview, I sought their verbal agreement to proceed.

3.7 Data Analysis Plan

My chosen method of data analysis is a narrative enquiry. Hinchman and Hinchman's (2001: xvi) definition is useful as it defines the narrative as

"Discourses with a clear sequential order that connects events in a meaningful way for a definite audience, and these offer insights about the world and or people's experiences of it".

Gergen (1994:254) extends this further suggesting,

"It needs to be a carefully selected series of events which display causal linkages…. The events in the narrative all lead to a "valued endpoint".

McAdams and McLean (2013) employed a useful method of coding life stories. They found that in many instances individuals construct life stories employing "redemption sequences" (McAdams and McLean (2013:233)). A redemption sequence involves an emotionally negative event, which the individual manages to transform into a positive outcome. Such incidents can enable the individual to develop resilience to commit to challenges throughout their life.

I plan to start analysing each transcript using Gee's (2014) building tasks model, which is based upon seven themes. However, I find four of these particularly useful for the purpose of this study.

The first is "significance". This is where the researcher looks at the significance they place on an event and how they portray themselves in relation to others. These are termed acts and may be treated as significant or insignificant in the story. The second is "practices or activities". This can involve social practices for example, are they relating an incident that took place in a formal or informal setting. In addition, whether the story is related in terms of a hierarchy existing between the actors in the story and how someone may be lower down the hierarchy but by portraying themselves as more proactive or responsible than someone above them in the hierarchy can enable them to project themselves in a stronger light. The third theme is "identities". This is where the researcher identifies the identity that the narrator is trying to enact in their story. The fourth them is "relationships". This can be determined by the way, in which the narrator describes their counterparts in the story that they are relating.

3.8   Conclusion

In concluding this chapter, I am going to explain how I intend to use the methods and methodology already set out in this chapter to specifically answer my research questions. The research questions as set out in chapter two are:

1. What are the distinctions about the processes involved in making a career change decision from full-time paid employment to full-time study for an Accounting and Finance undergraduate degree?
2. In what ways do students identify and articulate changes to their identity, as they become mature full-time students?
3. How do structure and agency affect the career choices of the mature undergraduate student?

In an attempt to answer question one I will utilise four out of seven themes outlined by Gee (2014:33-34) above to undertake a discourse analysis. Significance, what is the significance of the event they are enacting? Practices, what practice (activity) or practices (activities) is this piece of language being used to enact? Identities, what identity or identities is this piece of language being used to enact and how does it help the speaker or writer enact his or her identity? Relationships; what sort of relationship or relationships is this piece of language seeking to enact with others? I will also utilise Holland et al's (1998) figured worlds. For question two I will utilise Holland et al's (1998) theories of self-authoring and self-positioning as well as Gee's (2014) significance and identity building task. Holland et al's (1998) Figured Worlds theory is particularly useful is examining the day-to-day detail of negotiating the world compared to Bourdieu's (1991) notions of field and habitus, which enable the researcher to view life from a more distant perspective. Finally, for the third question concerning structure and agency I will utilise Bourdieu's (1991) notions of habitus and field. In this study I will be utilising these notions to establish what makes the mature student feel that they belong and this will be examined in both phases of their journey (before joining university and being a student). Furthermore, I find Bourdieu's notions of economic, cultural and symbolic capital and the interplay between them a valuable lens for exploring the world of the

mature student. For example, in sacrificing full-time paid employment (economic capital) for the mature student the extent to which this impacts upon their cultural (knowledge, skills and other cultural acquisitions) and symbolic (prestige or status) capital.

In the following chapter, I will start by utilising Gee's (2014) building tasks model to undertake a discourse analysis. This will enable me to investigate how each participant articulates and positions themselves in relation to others. I will then draw on Holland et al's (1998) theory of figured worlds. One aspect of this theory is that "position is not fate" Holland et al (1998:45) and that culture has a large part of play in the destination of the individual. Another aspect of the figured world theory is as Holland et al (1998:42) puts it:

> "*The conundrum is seeming contradiction between humans as social producers and as social products*"

This is useful to enable me to explore the extent to which the individual is acting as a free agent or as an "instrument" to other agents. It will provide a model to seek out to what extent the student has agency or autonomy and where they are being bound by social constraints.

Gee (2014:63) introduces the idea of heteroglossia. This can be used to describe the way in which a message can be "double-voiced". He explains this through the medium of a warning on an aspirin bottle, it is the way in which a message can interweave two different "who's-doing-what" together. He further explains that "social languages" can replace the "who's-doing-what". Gee views social languages different to discourses, in that discourses encompasses more than the mere language that is used and includes non-linguistic symbols for example. However, the use of social languages is interesting as this looks at the ways in which an individual can convey the same message using different forms of language to suit their audience.

In this chapter, I have outlined some of the paradigms I consider important in to demonstrate where I position myself within these. Furthermore, I have made it clear that I am aligning this study within a socio-culturist theoretical framework underpinned

by Holland et al's (1998) notions of figured worlds and Bourdieu's (1991) notions of habitus, field and capital. I am also employing Gee's (2014) discourse analysis model. The following chapter will provide an insight into the way in which I have analysed my data for each participant in this study.

CHAPTER FOUR – DATA ANALYSIS

4.0   Introduction

In the previous chapter, I outlined my methodology and theoretical framework. In this chapter, I am going to analyse the data from all four participants. I will outline how I am going to do this by relating this to my research questions and the theoretical framework.

1. What are the distinctions about the processes involved in making a career change decision from full-time paid employment to full-time study for an Accounting and Finance undergraduate degree?

2. In what ways do students identify and articulate changes to their identity, as they become mature full-time students?

3. How do structure and agency affect the career choices of the mature undergraduate student?

In all four cases, there are two distinct phases in their stories; the first involves their story prior to joining university as a full-time undergraduate student and the second being their story as a mature full-time undergraduate student.

In an attempt to analyse what is distinctive about the processes that are involved in making a career change decision from full-time employment to full-time study for an undergraduate degree I will utilise the four themes from Gee's Building Tasks model (2014) as outlined at the end of the previous chapter: significance, practices; identities and relationships. In terms of each of these the questions Gee (2014:32-34) poses is particularly helpful:

Significance: "*how is this piece of language being used to make certain things significant or not and in what ways?*"

Practices: "*what practice (activity) or practices (activities) is this piece of language being used to enact (i.e. get others to recognize as going on)?*"

Identities: "*What identity or identities is this piece of language being used to enact (i.e. get others to recognize as operative)? What identity or identities is this piece of language attributing to others, and how does it help the speaker or writer enact his or her identity?*"

Relationships; "*What sort of relationship or relationships is this piece of language seeking to enact with others (present or not)?* "

In order to analyse the ways in which students identify and articulate changes to their identity, as they become mature full-time students, I will utilise Holland et al's (1998) theories of self-authoring and self-positioning as well as Gee's (2014) significance and identity building task. Finally, for the third question concerning structure and agency I will utilise Bourdieu's (1984) notions of habitus and field. In this study, I will be utilising these notions to establish what makes the mature student feel that they belong and this will be examined in both phases of their journey. Furthermore, I find Bourdieu's notions of economic, cultural and symbolic capital and the interplay between them a valuable lens for exploring the world of the mature student. For example, in sacrificing full-time paid employment (economic capital) for the mature student the extent to which this affects upon their cultural (knowledge, skills and other cultural acquisitions) and symbolic (prestige or status) capital.

4.1 Case Study 1: Paul
4.1.1 Paul's Background

The first student I interviewed was Paul. Paul's interview was the longest of the four interviews. A full copy of the transcript can be found in appendix one. Paul enrolled on our Accounting and Finance undergraduate degree in September 2012. He has a partner and a young daughter. I had taught him during his first year and became aware of him as he proved a very able student. Prior to the interview, my knowledge of Paul was limited to being aware that he had sacrificed a successful career with a police force in the UK. By the time, he left full-time, paid employment he had been responsible for a sizable division and managed a budget of £250,000. I was unaware of his full story, which he revealed during an interview that lasted over an hour. Table 2 maps Paul's story from aged fourteen.

What the analysis below offers is a way of making sense of his story by identifying key themes and exploring each. An overlay of Holland's notions of identity and positioning

and the significance of others is drawn into this analysis as a particular lens for interpreting and gleaning meaning from the narrative. P's narrative includes his story before starting university as well as his experience once he enrolled as a mature student.

4.1.2 Paul's Life Prior to University

4.1.2.1 Paul's School Years

As can be seen from table one, Paul has experienced a number of changes prior to becoming a full-time student. The first occurred in his mid to late teenage years when he had set about pursuing a career in music. He relates how he had set about advancing his music skills by applying and being offered a place at the Guitar Institute in London. I will also refer to Gee's (2014) second theme from his building tasks model, which relates to practices (activities). Paul starts by discussing his love of music through the guitar. It is interesting to see that Paul relates how he was required to perform a concert at the end of his GCSE music course, which seems to explain why he was so keen to form the band. Here Paul is demonstrating compliance and how he considers himself a good music student. Without this information, it could seem as though the band is a hobby for Paul. I will also be drawing upon Holland et al's (1998) notions of self-authoring and self-positioning and some of Gee's (2014) building tasks elements in order to analyse how Paul articulates his identity and changes to his identity through his career changes. There are many instances where Paul seems keen to position himself favourably compared to friends (at school) and previous colleagues. This use of favourable self-positioning correlates with previous research studies such as those undertaken by Kasworm (2010). She interviewed twenty-three mature students in the USA, these were aged thirty and over and found that these students were academically competitive. I will also draw on Gee's (2014) first theme of significance, which enables me to see how Paul portrays himself in relation to others. There are various instances of this. Paul does not restrict this to the academic settings.

Table 2 – Case Paul

Age 14 - 18	• Guitar lessons • Started a band • GCSEs - applied to Gutar Institute • A levels
Age 18	• Bought first home - flat • First job: Admin Assistant £8,000.
Age 19/20	• Bought second home - house • Second job: UCL: Assistant Credit Controller £14,000. • Promoted: UCL: Credit Controller £18,000. • Overlooked for further promotion prompted new job search
2002	• Chance event: Observed student demo and police involvement: Excitement • Successfully secured position wiht London Met. Police as P.C. • Partner did not: split up: sold house.
Age 22	• Encouraged to consider promotion to Detective role • Secured promotion for four years. £40,000.
2007	• Career break. Travelled to Asia and Australia for a year. Age 26. • Studied for promotion. • Context: being with students (aged 20/21) who had no money? He realised that he ws well off financially.
2008	• Returned to Police. Entered for Sergeant examinations.
2009	• Promoted . Acting Detective Sergeant. • Took a job he did not enjoy in order to gain further promotion. • Acting DI. Failed to secure promotion.
2012	• Partner wanted to move back to Warrington, near parents. • P applied for Senior level jobs in Universities. Feedback was positive, however, not shortlisted due to lack of degree. • Bought third home: house in Warrington. • MMU because the New Building sold it.
2015	• Graduated. Top student . Enrolled September 2015 for MSc Accounting and Finance.

The first example of this in Paul's narrative in his narration of the band splitting up, which led him to change the direction of his further education from studying for the Guitar to A levels:

> *"It's a bit sad we split up … the drummer's brother actually killed himself and then we had all these important gigs coming up with different people coming to watch us but the DRUMMER didn't turn up so we just couldn't play … HE didn't turn up for about three gigs".*

Looking at the way he conveys this information, it seems that Paul had little empathy for his fellow band member who had lost his brother in tragic circumstances. As Gee, (2014:19) points out the way in which sentences are formed can portray different meanings. To demonstrate empathy Paul could have phrased the sentence by starting with "the drummer's brother killed himself" to place the emphasis on this as the key reason for the drummer's inability to perform. Paul is demonstrating his position in terms of strong commitment to the band here by implying the drummer was not as committed and Paul repeats, "HE didn't turn up for about three gigs". Paul is portraying himself as someone who took the band and his commitment to it very seriously and implies that the drummer did not.

The notion of a good student is an important aspect in Paul's life when he discloses that he was offered a place at the Guitar Institute in London but decided to study A levels instead. In the follow-up interview, Paul explains how he arrived at this decision using the words "I suddenly felt really sensible". This implies that following music, as a career is risky. He also acknowledges the influence of his peers in terms of that was also, what his friends were doing. Paul views A levels as a more mature option than music. Although he also discloses that he only managed to achieve a grade D in music, but again the way in which he discloses this is interesting:

> *"I got one D in music and I was very good, not at the side of music they were teaching, this is the thing."*

Again, this is another example of the way in which Paul portrays something quite negative into a positive. If he has structured the sentence as "I was not very good at this side of music they were teaching, I got a D". By positioning "I was very good" before the negative comment about the teaching places, more emphasis on his strengths.

Once again, the notion of a good student is an important aspect in Paul's life when he discloses that he was offered a place at the Guitar Institute in London but decided to study A levels instead. In the follow-up interview, Paul explains how he arrived at this decision using the words

> *"I suddenly felt really sensible and thought this probably is not the right thing for me to do and my friends were all doing A levels… it wasn't just about friendships, that was a big part of it because it was safe and secure and my school was a very good school."*

This implies that Paul considered following music, as a less sensible career and possibly risky. Paul views A levels as a more mature option than music and he also acknowledges the influence of his peers in terms of what his friends were doing. I will also draw upon Bourdieu's notions of economic, cultural and symbolic capital here. Paul may have been considering the economic benefits of studying A levels in terms of access to higher skilled and therefore higher paid employment than having pursued a music career. On the other hand, Paul related he attended a desirable school; one of the benefits of a school being desirable can be access to a wider range of extra curricula activities such as cultural pursuits. The fact that Paul had the opportunity to study GCSE music and that the school had an expectation that students on this course would perform a concert suggests that Paul gained cultural capital from attending this school. Paul relates the concert expectation:

> *"I was doing GCSE Music at the time and so part of it was that we had to do a concert at the end of the GCSE"*

Paul's desire or recognition that A levels seemed the sensible decision enables me to view this with Bourdieu's notion of symbolic capital in terms of the acquisition of knowledge and skills. I would suggest that his choice of following A levels emphasises gaining knowledge in a way that had currency; Paul possibly considered that following an A level course would better enable him to acquire a wider breadth of knowledge that gave him more opportunities than a course at the guitar institute.

4.1.2.2 Paul's Sixth Form Experience

In the next stage of Paul's career, it is interesting to see that he had applied to a variety of higher education establishments outside of his home city of London. Paul relates this in the following way:

> "*I applied for about… six universities, but not accountancy… it was all performing arts… I did get in to a couple actually, I can't remember whether I tried to get in here… then, to be honest, I think I got a bit scared of moving away from London*"

This ambition appears to have changed when he met someone with whom he purchased a property and the need to secure a full-time job became paramount in order to pay the mortgage. Viewing the through the lens of Bourdieu, owning a home seems important to Paul. This act appears to enable Paul to increase his economic capital by becoming a homeowner maybe at the expense of increasing his symbolic capital as he has foregone a place at university where he could have acquired further knowledge and skills. This increase in economic capital continues, as his third career choice enables him to move up the property ladder.

4.1.2.3 Paul's Employment

In the third career, change Paul emphasises how he secured his first finance related role in a higher education establishment, so that he could move up the housing ladder. However, even though his motivation seemed financial he was making sense of this move in other ways. The notion of figured worlds seems to have relevance when examining the way in which Paul is describing his world of work as a Credit Controller in a University and the apparent difference between the two worlds of Student finance and the Finance Office (see appendix 1:2).

> "W*e were in Student Finance, but then there was the actual Finance Office. The Finance Office was really looked up to by the Student Finance… so if you were going for a meeting with the Finance Office you would straighten yourself up you know, you're going to get all the posh coffee.*"

Figured Worlds can encompass practices and symbols or artefacts and Paul acknowledges that the type of coffee, in this case, "posh coffee" delineates the two worlds, as does the practice of having to "straighten yourself up".

There is also evidence, which relates to Holland et al's (1998:28) theories of the self, which suggests that relations of power and associated institutional infrastructure are living tools of the self, at play when Paul refers to the wearing of a necktie and his action of adjusting it before attending a meeting. These artefacts and dress code provide and insight into how implicit practices can assist in providing a hierarchy between the two departments.

> "*You are not going to get this job we have already given it to Sam. She was basically telling me that the way to get promoted higher than I was, because I was still quite low down and I was only on about the second rung, and yet it was the way you sort of get in with the bosses."*

This provides a light to the world within the finance function of the university where he worked. Paul mentions that one had to "get in with the bosses" and there seemed to be an expectation that you had to serve an unspecified amount of time before you could be eligible for a promotion. Utilising the game metaphor outlined in the previous chapter, the implication of this, is that symbolic capital is required in that a knowledge of the system was required into how players (employees) in this field (Finance Function) could win. However, there may have also been practices that are more implicit and artefacts that enable one to gain a promotion that Paul was not aware of here. It is clear that at the time Paul had not been aware of the social practices required to join the figured world of management in the Student Finance office. Paul had incorrectly assumed that there were clear processes to follow and yet seemed shocked to find that there were hidden social practices that either denied or enabled access to the figured world of management. From a Bourdieu (1991) perspective Paul seems to have decided that this was both a game and a field in which he no longer wanted to continue and this seemed to be the prompt to spark his desire to pursue alternative employment.

Paul is clearly implying here that Sam had only achieved a promotion through getting in with the senior managers and that ability to do a job was overlooked and Paul obviously felt that he had stronger capabilities than Sam did. I am aware that this is Paul's

viewpoint and I refer back to Holquist (2002) (see chapter three) where I drew upon his use of the train spotter metaphor. This enables me to see that if I had been able to interview Paul's boss this would have afforded me a different perspective to this.

Prior to describing the event, where he was overlooked for promotion, Paul does not mention any plan to join the police and he was focused on progressing his career within the finance function of his, then, current employer. The next change for Paul came about when he joined the police force; there are two key factors that prompted this change. The first was the apparent lack of career progression opportunities within his current role at that time and him not wishing to "play the game". Looking at this through a Bourdieu lens, economic capital is at stake here. The lack of career progression denies Paul the opportunity to increase his economic capital both in terms of higher earnings and in terms of a possible further move up the property ladder. There is also symbolic capital at stake here, through a lack of improved status within his work environment. The second factor for change in career direction appears to have been a chance event, which he witnessed during his lunch break; this was the student demonstration where police officers were involved. This fits with Miller's (1983) criteria related to Happenstance Theory, where three conditions are present: the first is that it involves an unplanned event; the second it lacks a plan and the third it alters the behaviour of the individual significantly. The following extract is interesting as Paul describes the event that seemed to offer an alternative career path:

> "*There was one lunchtime… all these students protesting at the gate of the university and they were on one side and there were all these police on the other side and I was sitting there and I was thinking, as probably loads of people do, oh that looks exciting, I wish I was there doing it, fighting these students*".

Analysing this from a Miller's (1983) Happenstance Theory lens, this event appears to fit in that witnessing the protest seemed to be a chance or unplanned event. Prior to this event Paul had not mentioned any desire to pursue a career within the police, following this event Paul explored this career opportunity.

4.1.2.4 Paul Establishing a Career

Paul describes the processes he underwent leading up to him securing a job with the police. There appear to be several stages, at which Paul had to succeed. The first he describes:

> "*You go to like a central London office and you do loads of tests... they are like these graduate tests, but with some other ones. Like you watch a video of a crime and then you have to answer all these questions about what happened from what colour was his coat and all that sort of thing. Then you do a maths and an English test, a written test and then they put you all in a room and you sit there. Its lunch now and then, he comes out and calls your name and if he calls your name you have failed and you go home... I got to the second half of the day. It was some other sort of test but then you went in and there were about three high up police officers and they interviewed you and they asked you what you would do in this situation*".

The process appears well considered and transparent. Paul continues to relate the subsequent processes:

> "*They sent me back to this room again... this time they call everyone out one by one because if they tell you, you haven't got it people don't know... luckily they told me I had passed the first day... about a month's time you do like a physical test...* "

After his success in securing a position within the police he had to undergo a further eighteen weeks training where had he not succeeded each week, he could have lost his job. Following that Paul progressed his career.

The use of Bourdieu's notions of economic and symbolic capital seem be have relevance when considering Paul's advancement through the hierarchy. Each advancement would have resulted in increased economic capital for Paul in terms of increased salary. It is interesting, however, that he did not progress further up the property ladder. Paul would have increased his symbolic capital as he mentions several times that he had to study in order to achieve promotion, which would have increased his knowledge and skills. Nevertheless, the decision factors for leaving each position within the police prior

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to gaining advancement, seem to have been motivated by a desire to escape, what Paul considered, undesirable managers. I will illustrate this with extracts from the transcript. One event motivating Paul to seek a career progression is illustrated here:

"*So I left street duties and went into the real team and **HE** just bullied me for about a year it was horrible… I was actually quite popular on the team but **HE** was such a big mouth he really made my life a nightmare for a year and I was so desperate right I started studying, studying, studying so I could get off **his** team.*"

Paul's motivation to seek a final promotion, prior to leaving the police seems to have been motivated by a desire to escape another line manager:

"*I won't go into it too much but a new boss came along and **he** was, he had done a lot of wrong things **HE** was never in work but **he** was a real sort of, **he** was a bully to everyone. He was a real bully to the point where he was burping in my face.*"

In the first instance, Paul is not discrediting his manager's capability to undertake the role, whereas this idea is suggested in the second example when he states, "he had done a lot of wrong things". Although it is not entirely clear what Paul means by this. It could relate to the work place or easily refer to his private life. Using the lens of Bourdieu, Paul does not acknowledge whether he felt that he stagnated in terms of increasing his symbolic capital. The study he undertakes in both instances enables Paul to increase his symbolic capital in order to prepare him for the next level within the police hierarchy. Another important change for Paul came about when he took a year out of the police to travel overseas for a year. Viewing this through the lens of Bourdieu appears to have impacts upon Paul's economic, symbolic and cultural capital. Paul seems to have sacrificed economic capital as he had used his savings to fund this and relates that he had paid to volunteer; however, Paul seems to have increased his cultural capital from the experiences he encountered. For example, diving on the Great Barrier Reef and protecting turtle eggs. He also relates how he managed to study in preparation for his return to work, which would have increased his symbolic capital.

4.1.2.5 Paul Seeking Alternatives

The notion that a story of unusual events can be analysed with the use of a standard plot is interesting when analysing the Paul's story as a mature student. This draws upon Holland et al (1998:53) who explain this notion as a taken for granted sequence of events. It is not clear whether Paul himself, consciously recognises that his own story is unusual in that it does not necessarily follow a taken for granted sequence of events in relation to joining university. However, he does refer to this in the following quote:

"*I had a really good job and I had done the travelling and the last thing was the university bit*".

This quote can be analysed from several perspectives. The first are the three elements that Paul considers are part of an individual's life. These are securing a good job, taking time out to travel and undertaking undergraduate studies. Viewing this from Holland et al's (1998:58) figured world perspective, whereby an individual's figured world emerges from the formation and reformation of events that occur within it, suggests that Paul is not familiar with the mature student and the ways in which they digress from the these three aspects. It is entirely feasible that digressions either occur in the order of the sequence of these three elements or may not involve all three. An alternative view of this quote, from a Holland et al (1998:58) perspective, is that the three elements mentioned above would not occur in this order for the young undergraduate student. Paul may assume that a young undergraduate student, like those he had encountered on his travels, had studied at university first prior to travelling with the expectation they would secure a good job following their travels. There is also an alternative sequence whereby the young student may undertake travelling immediately prior to joining university.

Viewing the career changes Paul has experienced prior to university, through the Bourdieu lens shows that at times Paul has increased his economic capital (increased salary, purchasing property) and at other times sacrificed it (sacrificed a year salary and used savings to travel the world). To some this would appear risky; however, Paul did relate that he was secure in that his job would be open for him to return. In terms of symbolic capital, Paul has studied to progress within the police, which will have

increased his knowledge and skills, however, these studies appear to hold currency within the habitus and field of the police. Holland et al's (1998) figured world lens also affords me the opportunity to explore the artefacts and practices within a university finance function, to which he initially affiliated, with the notion of "posh coffee" and how male colleagues felt the need to straighten up their ties before a meeting.

In the next section, I am going to explore the ways in which Paul identifies and articulates changes to his identity when relating his experiences prior to joining university. I will be drawing largely upon Holland et al's (1998) notions of self-authoring and self-positioning, as well as aspects from Gee (2014).

In each of these examples from the police, Paul is portraying himself as better than he is portraying his line managers in terms of behaviour towards colleagues. In the first instance, Paul is not discrediting his manager's capability to undertake the role, whereas this idea is suggested in the second example when he states, "he had done a lot of wrong things". Although it is not entirely clear what Paul means by this. It could relate to the work place or easily refer to his private life.

It is useful at this point to consider the decision factors that led to Paul leaving at each of these points. I am using some conjecture here, but it is likely that the finance sections of the higher education institution where Paul was employed, prior to joining the police was small in terms of employees and, therefore, limited job opportunities. This is likely to be in part because finance is not the main business function of a university. At that, time it is likely that Paul felt his only option to gain further increases in salary was to join an alternative organisation. Joining a large police force as a police officer seemed to have enabled Paul progress quite easily; he also had the opportunity to move away from bosses that he did not work well with. In addition, the promotion process seems open and clear to employees in that there were exams and a series of interviews to pass; it also seems as though if you felt ready then you could put yourself forward unlike, the university where it seems as though you had to get "in with the bosses". It does seem as though Paul does not have a clear career plan. I will use Bourdieu's notions of field and habitus to articulate Paul's career changes. Paul seems to decide to change career

paths when he finds access to a new field has been denied to him. The change from accounts assistant to police was due to being denied access to the field of management. In the police once he realises that he is not accepted in the field of line manager he seeks entry into alternative fields through either further study or undertaking less attractive roles, which he feels will enhance his chance of accessing the field of senior management. In addition, these roles will enable him to enhance his symbolic capital through further promotion and afford him status. In the next section, I will examine the ways in which Paul makes the change from full-time employment to full-time undergraduate student.

Paul relates his decision to become a full-time undergraduate student in the following extract:

> "*I applied for directorships at universities and I was getting letters back saying that your application form is really good but we can't shortlist you because you do not have a degree.*"

Paul related this following an unsuccessful final attempt at promotion:

> "*The government was on the news saying that from next year you don't do thirty years anymore you do forty. I had done ten years at that point and I was thinking you have just written me off after ten years*".

4.1.3   Joining University for Paul

4.1.3.1 Paul's Application Process to University

It is not clear regarding the length of time it took Paul to decide to apply to university, he mentions that he had been considering leaving the police over a period of two years from when his daughter was born. However, he acknowledges that he applied too late for one university in the following extract:

> "*I applied for University of Manchester… applying May is way too late… I got into MMU, Chester and Liverpool.*"

Viewing this through the lens of Bourdieu it may be because Paul was outside of the field of education and was not familiar with the application process. Many young

undergraduate students, within the school or further education system apply towards the end of their first term, in the academic year prior to joining university and have access to tutors familiar with the university admissions process. It also is not clear whether Paul engaged in an undergraduate open or visit day. These are planned events where prospective students are invited to the university to listen to talks about their chosen field of study and take a tour of the facilities. Paul does describe his three visits to Manchester in general terms:

> "*Every time I came to Manchester, something good seemed to happen… new computers and the building is so lovely and I went to the lecture theatres and then I did look at the other two. But to be honest I had already decided as soon as I came here I thought I am going to come here.*"

Paul's enthusiasm for a city outside of London contrasts to his thoughts when he was eighteen and had applied for universities to study performing arts. On the first page of his transcript, he explains why he did not pursue university at that age in the following extract:

> "*I think I got a bit scared of moving away from London*"

The transition from when he was eighteen to when he visited Manchester demonstrates an element of maturity and a willingness to look at new opportunities. Paul relates his transition from being a full-time employed professional to becoming a full-time undergraduate student in the following way:

> "*One thing I am looking forward to is actually having the status back… no one called me by my first name that was very disrespectful. I was either, called "Sarge" or "Sargeant" and when I was inspector for the last year, everyone called me "Sir". I had gone from having this real status to when I came here I was like a child again and that is what I found the hardest*".

This reflection from Paul provides a useful insight into how easy it is to forget the individual in a large cohort of students. It is interesting that Hillary also voiced concerns relating to fitting in:

> "*It's quite intimidating when you first come especially because everyone's younger and you're like "what if no-one speaks to me and I am sat in the corner by myself for two years*"?

At the same time, it is also helpful to recognise the importance of the support of their family for the mature student as Paul relates in the following extract:

> "*My mum said, "Well why don't you go to university?"… my mum is probably the biggest influence in my life… it is funny even when you are thirty and when your mum and dad say that is all right you can do it. You know you can do it*".

I will use Holland et al's (1998) notion of Figured World's theory to view the way in which Paul relates information relating his admission to university. Paul describes the process in the following extract:

> "*I was sitting in MacDonald's in the Arndale Centre. It's only the third time I've been to Manchester and someone from here sent me an e-mail saying can I send them my A level certificates and I thought, Oh, they are going to offer me a place now*"

Paul does not expand on the admissions process any further at this point and progresses the narrative of his journey through academia. Paul probably knows or makes the assumption that in my role, I am familiar with the application process and that a student who is not awaiting their results can receive an unconditional offer. Viewing this through a Bourdieu lens, we both have a shared understanding or have the shared symbolic capital to understand the field of university admissions.

4.1.3.2 Being a Student for Paul

During the interview with Paul, he seems keen to convey that he is a good student. He is comparing himself to his peers in a favourable light. He mentions that in his early student days:

> "*Soon as I came here I mean I hit the ground running but I knew I was going to… I have got a strong confidence in myself*."
>
> "*Someone put on Facebook the other day that final year is taking over my whole life and I said to my other half "final year is your life". It is not taking over your life it should be just part of your life. At 9.00 p.m.in the evening, I sit there and read you know an article or a journal for my own interest and enjoy it*."

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Being a student seems to be all encompassing of his student identity. He makes a clear distinction alongside other students who see the burden of the final year impinging on their life. For Paul, he seems to have chosen to position himself differently and to narrate his life in more absolute terms as being a student and studying. Some further insights from Paul's case are revisited in chapter five in which I seek to discern some common themes from all the case studies. I will now move on to my second case, Hillary.

4.2   Case Study 2: Hillary
4.2.1   Hillary's Background

Hillary is the eldest of my interviewees and female. Her narrative contains a very different journey to that of Paul, in that her secondary and to some extent her primary education was disrupted. Table two highlights the changes and turning points in Hillary's narrative. Hillary's journey with us at the university is shorter than the other three cases as she joined in the second year of the programme as the AAT qualification she had achieved enabled her to do so.

4.2.2   Hillary's Life Prior to University
4.2.2.1 Hillary's School and Sixth Form Years

I have a high level of admiration for Hillary in the way she was so frank about her early life, which she revealed in the opening paragraph of her interview:

> "*My father was an alcoholic so I ended up leaving college, because originally I did join college and started doing teaching when I first left school but because of the way he was I had to leave home. So what I did was I ended up dropping out of college because I needed a job to pay the rent and so it kind of got left*".

Viewing the second opening sentence with Gee's (2014) "significance" theme, Hillary places emphasis on her father being an alcoholic by placing this phrase at the start of the sentence. This is clearly an important event in Hillary's life. She could have phrased the sentence: "I ended up leaving college because my father was an alcoholic", which would have changed the focus. It is interesting that Hillary's opening narrative provide a focus on her disrupted education. The first sentence that preceded this was

"*I did not really have a fantastic education*"

4.2.2.2 Hillary's Employment Years

Hillary demonstrates a strong work ethic and emphasises her unwillingness to seek financial support from social services throughout the difficult stages of her journey prior to studying for her accountancy qualification at college. There are several examples of this:

"*I needed a job to pay the rent*"
"*I had to get a job because I had to pay bills*"
"*I wasn't really focusing; it was more about paying the bills*"
"*I had to work a 24 hour shift at the weekend to pay the bills*"

Viewing these extracts from Gee's (2014) significance lens Hillary is portraying herself as a responsible adult and parent who is keen to avoid debt. Hillary alludes to her family being hard workers:

"*My mum was struggling working 14 hour days*"

"*I wasn't from a family that was like university educated anyway. More like labouring type things so it wasn't expected of you, it really wasn't*"

This aspect of labour can be analysed from Bourdieu's (1984) notion of economic capital, where Hillary prioritises acquiring cash over the desire to accumulate cultural and symbolic capital. Although Hillary does return briefly to education in order to gain her hairdressing qualifications. Again, from a Bourdieu perspective this enabled Hillary to increase her symbolic capital in the form of skills. It is interesting that in order to acquire both economic and symbolic capital Hillary has to sacrifice time with her own family. Bourdieu does not acknowledge this as a form of capital and yet it does seem as an important aspect to Hillary as she describes this as being "*really hard*".

The aspect of being around for her children features several times in Hillary's narrative and seems to be a key driver for her decision to qualify as a hairdresser. The following extract is interesting:

"My aunty is a hairdresser and my uncle and I used to work in the hairdressers…

so I thought it was a really good way to earn money and work around the kids,

get some money and you can always work for yourself".

Table 3 – Case Hillary

Childhood	• Father alcoholic • Took herself to school • Betting shop
Age 17	• Enrolled on a teaching course for primary teaching. • Work experience school in Altringham • Dropped out: needed to work to earn money to pay rent • "Dead end" type jobs: office work.
Age 21	• Pregnant with first child. • Worked in Credit Control.
Age 23/24	• Pregnant with second child • Partner had affair: had to move to hostel with two children • Working then made redundant: needed "something else" • Studied hairdressing for 7 months: worked for 8/9 years. Aunt and uncle in hairdressing. • Managed 2 shops.
Age 33	• Operation: could no longer undertake hairdressing • Change of job to credit controller • New partner
Age 38	• Pregnant. • Company restructured. Could have moved to Scotland, took voluntary redundancy. • Started AAT (Association of Accounting Technicians)
Age 40	• Tutor advised university. Hillary was accepted everywhere. • Chose MMU because "son coming and it was more me"
Sept 2013	• Enrolled on BA (Hons) Accounting and Finance • 2014/15 - in final year

I will use Gee's (2014) notion of practices to analyse this. Hillary is relating her familiarity with the practice of a hairdresser as she had experienced her aunt's business. Hillary could see this profession could enable her to flex her work around her own family. Hillary narrates a strong need to be around for her children and this could in some part, stem from the following extract:

> "*My mum was "do the best you can"… my mum was quite supportive but it was hard… other people would go to their house and their mum was cooking their tea. I cooked the tea, because she would not get in until eight o'clock at night and sometimes she would get up at four in the morning to go to market to get fruit and veg and things*".

Again, Gee's notion of practices is a useful tool to analyse what is happening here. Hillary did not consider having to prepare the tea as the usual practice of a school-age child. Hillary obviously felt different from her friends. It is not clear, however, whether her friends mothers worked. It is interesting that in this narration Hillary has not restricted the duty of cooking tea as a chore for her, but has also related how she considered this as a burden by relating the practices of her friends and how their mothers did this for them. Hillary is clearly positioning herself with her peers, who may have had mothers that did not work or worked shorter hours and were able to be at home when their children came home from school. This is interesting; as many mothers who work have to rely on childcare or once the children are old enough they have to undertake chores such as preparing the evening meal when they arrive home from school. Holland et al's (1998) notion of the standard plot could be useful to provide a deeper analysis here. It could be that Hillary does not consider her childhood as following a normal pattern, in that children go to school then come home to mother cooking the tea and playing with them then putting them to bed. However, it may be the case that Hillary's plot was similar to other children with working mothers. Furthermore, in the transcript Hillary recognises the struggle that her mother had to face in the following extract:

> "*I have had it quite easy compared to my mum. I have not had to work three jobs*"

Hillary clearly reflects on her own situation compared to that of her mother. Yet Hillary's own struggles of having to work two jobs and twenty four hour shifts in a weekend to pay her bills and sacrificing time spent with her children, demonstrates to me that Hillary has had to overcome her own struggles, which many other students would not have had

experience of. Again, Hillary is positioning herself here against her own mother rather than other mothers. If Hillary was positioning herself against a mother with a job that enabled them to work week days only and sociable hours she would see that she had a harder time than many other mothers. It is interesting that Hillary could have made her life easier as can be seen from the following extract:

> "*When I had to sign on the dole… it was probably the most prosperous time in my life, because I did not have to pay rent or anything like that… you get about £170 per week, you haven't got to pay your rent or your council tax. You haven't got to pay water rates… they get uniform grants*".

Analysing this from a Bourdieu perspective, Hillary's experience of the field of receiving benefits enables her to see which of her two stepdaughters is better off financially as she narrates in the following extract:

> "*He says, "why do you give everything to Connie?" and I say, "because Connie works and it will be harder for Connie because Connie is not getting the assistance. She has to pay the rent and everything with it… whereas Fiona always has disposable income. She's got a little car, she can afford a car*".

From a Bourdieu perspective of economic capital, Hillary views Fiona who is in receipt of social benefits as the winner over Connie who is working. It may be the case that Connie's gross annual income is higher than Fiona's is, but after outgoings, this is not the case. However, this situation is relatively short-term, as Connie, being someone who is employed will have the ability to acquire further economic capital through gaining work experience and climbing the career ladder in the future. The other benefits of this is that Connie may have the opportunity to acquire symbolic capital through further training and study.

I will now explore the significance of Hillary starting her own family. Hillary manages to relate her experiences of the welfare system when narrating the debate in a tax class about welfare benefits and single mothers. Holland et al's (1998) notion of figured worlds is useful to analyse what is happening here. Hillary is using an everyday event in her life which she has experienced first-hand and this has been reproduced with her stepchildren, in terms of the hardship experience of the single mother. She has brought

these distilled experiences to university to enable her to contribute to a debate. Using Holland et al's (1998) notion of a standard plot, Hillary and Connie's lives seem to have a similar plot and this enables us to understand the empathy that Hillary feels for Connie.

Hillary mentions her first two pregnancies in the following way:

> "*I met my ex-partner and I got pregnant, and I was only 21. So I was a bit like, that's not good, but you know I cracked on… then I got pregnant with my second child two to three years later*".

Hillary then experienced her third pregnancy when she was thirty-eight:

> "*Then at thirty-eight years old, I found out I was pregnant. So it was a bit of a shock*."

Viewing these through the lens of Gee (2014), Hillary seems to see the age as significant in both her first and third pregnancy. This is particularly clear in the second extract where she starts with "*at thirty-eight*". It is not entirely clear why Hillary felt that falling pregnant at twenty-one was not good. Maybe she had not planned a pregnancy so early and in her relationship with her partner. Hillary did mention that the third pregnancy was with her new partner with whom she had been together for several years and that they had tried unsuccessfully for a baby previously and had given up hope. Therefore, although she describes this as a shock, the baby was wanted. In fact, she does refer to him being supportive and that prompted her to resume her education.

It is clear that Hillary valued education and had ambitions to become a teacher. After leaving home, Hillary's focus was to earn enough to pay her bills. It is interesting that she describes the office work she did at that time as:

> "*Dead end jobs*"

> "*But where I was before I kind of got to the top of where I could go because there really was not anywhere else without some qualifications*".

Hillary recognised that she had limited opportunities for promotion because her lack of qualifications. Viewing this from a Bourdieu (2014) perspective although Hillary was acquiring economic capital her lack of symbolic capital in terms of educational qualifications, was limiting her chance of acquiring further economic capital through pay rises and further promotion. The lack of symbolic capital could have been a barrier from

entering the field of management. It is also not clear what Hillary could have done next in terms of a career change, because she then met her partner and at twenty-one years of age found herself expecting her first child and within a further three years having had two children. Hillary's story is unclear at this point whether she continued to work or not.

It is also interesting that Hillary recognises her journey in terms of returning to office and accounts related work when she narrates the following, after she had to give up hairdressing:

> "*I could do little bits, so I went back into accountancy, office work again. So I was like, kept doing these little circles*".

Hillary's use of the term "*circles*" is an interesting metaphor. Analysing this from Holland et al's (1998) standard plot would suggest that Hillary's career journey does not follow a standard plot in her mind. She implies that moving onto something different often led her to returning to a previous role, in this case returning to office and accounting related roles following her hairdressing career. It is interesting that Hillary relates in her last role:

> "*They would come in and have a full-blown row and there were doors slamming and I would just carry on and one of the big bosses, because in Scotland they were quite posh. They came down and I just sat there working*".

Later Hillary explains that the firm she worked for had a head office in Scotland, with all other branches being located in Scotland. Viewing this through Holland et al's (1998) figured worlds and the role of artefacts and rituals used to position individuals can used to provide a way of understanding what is going on here. It is not clear how Hillary considers the "big bosses" to be posh, whether it is the way in which they are dressed or the way in which they address Hillary. Hillary mentions that the usual behaviour from her immediate bosses involved shouting and slamming doors so to have another boss speaking calmly could make them appear posh in Hillary's eyes. Hillary does refer to the fact that the office is located in a porta-cabin and that she refers to it as a "scruffy office". Hillary also considers that the computer systems were outdated. Artefacts are an interesting notion to explore in the work of accountancy. When Hillary refers to her first role:

"Yes we had ledgers when I first started working and we had the manual ledger for cheques because we had to write all the cheques out in the office, because it was like a proper job".

Viewing this through the lens of Holland et al (1998) and the importance of artefacts, Hillary's reference to the physical documentation made her feel that it was what she expected in an accounts office. Hillary does explain the nature of work which involved supplying magazines to newsagents so it maybe the physical nature of the product that clarified the role for Hillary.

4.2.2.3 Hillary Seeking Alternatives

The catalyst for Hillary to resume her education was a combination of redundancy and a supportive partner who encouraged her to study for her AAT (Association of Accounting Technicians) qualification. Hillary had two significant male role models who convinced her to pursue a university education.

"It was Mike my tutor there that said, "Go because you can do it… just fill in the form then, it is £12.00""

"My mum had remarried… he has encouraged me… I have a stepsister as well and she went to university… he was saying, "You can do it, it's not what you think".

Hillary does mention her father a few times after her initial description of him as an alcoholic. Hillary refers again to him in the following extract:

"I just had to take myself to school because I couldn't be bothered to wait for him to wake up. At six or seven, I was taking myself to school. My mum went mad when she found out. I said, "Mum you don't know the half of it"… I think the first time round with Joe and Clare's dad he was kind of a mini copy."

Viewing the first part of this extract through Holland et al's (1998) standard plot. Hillary does not think that a child of six or seven should be unaccompanied going to school. The second part of this aspect Hillary is reflecting upon the similar nature of her first partner and her father. Using the lens of Holland et al's (1998) Figured Worlds, Hillary recognises that she was drawn, to him because of a sense of familiarity even

though there was an element of unreliability. It is informative that she describes her second partner as the opposite of both these characters.

4.2.3 Hillary Joining University

It is clear to see how Hillary positions herself with her friend Eleanor (also an undergraduate studying with Hillary who also completed her AAT with Hillary), which enables Hillary to project herself as a good student. In the following extract, Hillary is narrating how she has adapted her previous study practices into the university environment:

> "*When we were at college our tutor used to let us go into the classroom at seven o'clock and it was open to be of use to us… We would start doing our work… We usually go in and meet up in the library or if we've a nine o'clock start we usually meet in the café and get a coffee or something and it's usually the same kind of people so you can work and do stuff*".

It is also useful to see how Hillary is keen for her own children to take full advantage of the education system as she reveals in the following extract:

> "*It's really made me very conscious with my children about the education side. I have literally forced them to come to university.*"

It is useful to see that Hillary has managed to contribute to a student debate on the welfare system and tax relating her own experience of being a single mum. Hillary positions herself directly with a younger student who has also contributed to the debate with opposing views to hers in following way:

> "*There was a young lad he had obviously not struggled in his life*".

Viewing this from Gee's (2014) notion of identities Hillary is attributing the student view as coming from someone who has not struggled and yet Hillary does not know this for sure. It is a good demonstration of how Hillary has made an assumption based upon a viewpoint someone is trying to make. This male student may have had struggles and is trying to put an alternative viewpoint across. Hillary's contribution is coming from her own personal experiences and she is enacting someone who has suffered and struggled as a single mum.

Some of the issues from Hilary's case will be continued and developed in relation to the other three cases in the following discussion chapter.

4.3 Case Study 3: Andrew

4.3.1 Andrew's Background

Andrew is male and the youngest of the four interviewees. Andrew was different in many ways to the cases of Paul and Susan, in that Andrew did not have the required entry qualifications for university prior to starting full-time pad employment. Also in terms of the stage of his undergraduate studies, he was at when I interviewed him, which was towards the end of his first year as an undergraduate student. I found the idea of interviewing a first year interesting as it could provide a slightly different perspective than from that of a final year student. Table 3 outlines the stages of Andrew's journey until he enrolled at the university as an accounting and finance undergraduate student.

4.3.2 Andrew Prior to University

With Andrew being the youngest of the four cases, he has experienced the least number of changes prior to joining university.
It seems as though Andrew lacked careers advice. The following extracts demonstrates this:

> "*There was not a lot of career guidance about what I wanted to do… I did not have much guidance I did not know what I wanted to do*".
> "*My friend's mother she helped, because my mam isn't too, she's a bit older she is not aware of further education, but my friend's mam did a course a few years ago*".

4.3.2.1 Andrew's School and Sixth Form Years

It is evident here that Andrew relied on a friend's mother, as his perception was that she was more aware having experienced a course herself. This can be analysed from a

Bourdieu perspective in terms of his friend's mother possessing the symbolic capital to guide Andrew to enter a field with which he was unfamiliar. However, this occurred after a disrupted education. Andrew explains that he enrolled to study A levels at a college, which appears to be a different institution to the school he studied for his GCSEs. Andrew explains the main drive for this in the following extract:

"*I went to A level college anyway because all my friends were*".

Andrew explains that he failed his A levels and believes that this was

"*Because, I did not have a goal to aim for and then I went to a different college and I did engineering*".

Analysing this from a Bourdieu perspective, Andrew was sacrificing economic capital for symbolic capital. He does also mention that at that stage he had planned to go to university at nineteen.

Andrew did not specify which subject he had planned to study at this stage, but he then decided to take paid employment.

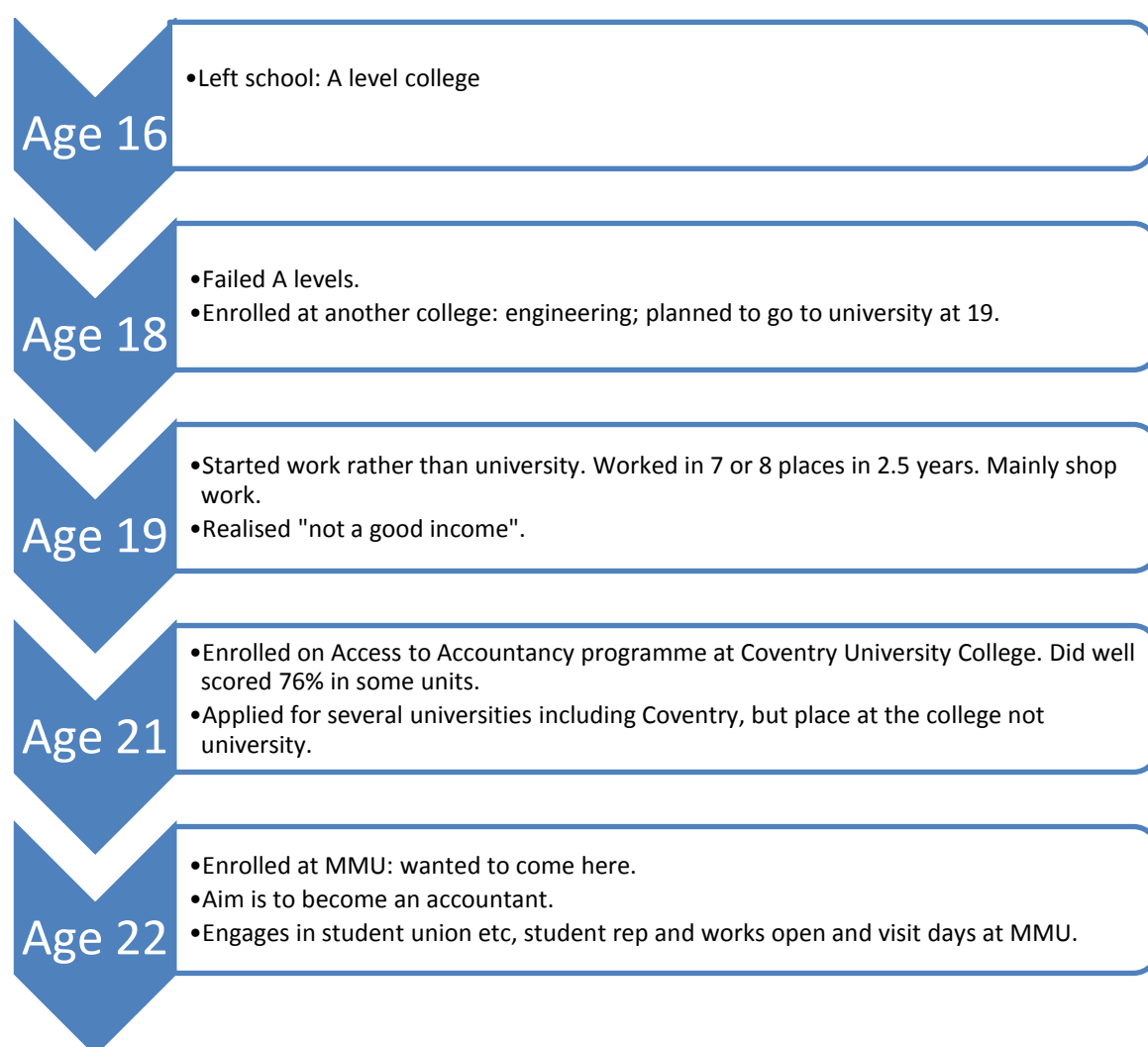The way in which Andrew narrates this is interesting:

"*I worked in about seven or eight different places over a two and a half year period… just normal jobs, in shops*".

4.3.2.2 Andrew's Employment

There are two important aspects to this extract. From a Holland et al (1998) standard plot perspective, Andrew mentions the actual number of jobs he held over a relatively short period of time seems to imply that Andrew did not think that this was the usual employment pattern for a secure future. Also using Gee's (2014) notion of significance had Andrew not mentioned the number of jobs within that period this aspect would not be drawn to my attention. Andrew could have simply stated

"*I worked for about two and a half year period in shops*".

Table 4 – Case Andrew

Age 16
- Left school: A level college

Age 18
- Failed A levels.
- Enrolled at another college: engineering; planned to go to university at 19.

Age 19
- Started work rather than university. Worked in 7 or 8 places in 2.5 years. Mainly shop work.
- Realised "not a good income".

Age 21
- Enrolled on Access to Accountancy programme at Coventry University College. Did well scored 76% in some units.
- Applied for several universities including Coventry, but place at the college not university.

Age 22
- Enrolled at MMU: wanted to come here.
- Aim is to become an accountant.
- Engages in student union etc, student rep and works open and visit days at MMU.

The second aspect is the way in which Andrew describes these as "normal jobs". This can be analysed from Gee's (2014) practices theme. Andrew considers shop work as a regular or normal type of work. This could be because Andrew knew many friends or acquaintances as working in shops. It is interesting that he does not look down on that type of work, although the use of the word normal indicates that Andrew does not see it as a long-term proposition in terms of economic capital.

4.3.2.3 Andrew Seeking Alternatives

Andrew does in fact indicate this:

"These jobs are not a good income so then I applied to do an access course".

Using Bourdieu (1991) notions of capital Andrew is sacrificing economic capital to accumulate symbolic capital, which he can see, can increase his economic capital in the longer term. It is also interesting that he had chosen Accountancy as an access programme, as this is a profession, which is often associated with high levels of remuneration and a provider of high levels of economic capital.

It is interesting to see that Andrew is influenced by his peers in the following extract:

"A lot of my friends have already graduated now and I see like that they're going on career paths and stuff".

4.3.3 Joining University for Andrew

Andrew's apparent shift in the frequency with which he sees his friends is interesting and at the same time appears contradictory:

"Because I am a bit older I have my friends circle already… I have not seen my friends for a couple of months. But I go back to see my girlfriend every other week."

I was trying to explore whether Andrew had made many new friends at university and it seems as though he has quite a small circle of friends, which appear to be those from home.

Andrew reveals how he views his opportunity to study at university as a mature student:

"I was a bit silly at A level college and I didn't know what I wanted to do… I have made quite a few mistakes in the past at A levels and stuff I feel I have wasted a few years. Just playing catch up. I just want to sort it all out".

Viewing this through the lens of Bourdieu although Andrew had the opportunity to enhance his symbolic capital, he considers that he failed to apply himself to his studies at the time, which he thought was best. He sees the years before studying at university more in terms of being "wasted" and himself as being "silly". However, his subsequent comments reveal that despite these "mistakes" he sees himself differently from the traditional student he encounters at university.

4.3.3.1 Being a Student for Andrew

It is insightful how Andrew positions himself in relation to his current peers. In the following, extract Andrew positions himself as mature:

> "*I don't want to be stereotypical but some are really immature and they come for the social aspects… they just come for the drinking… some in my class who don't even show and they say they have more important things to do. I am like; shouldn't uni be your number one priority?*"

Furthermore, Andrew commences the narrative from a social perspective and shifts the focus into the classroom situation, which enables Andrew to portray himself as a good student. Andrew is keen to continue this portrayal, in the subsequent narrative, by shifting the focus further towards his future career plans:

> "*I have a paid job at the moment, but I am leaving next month… to try and get some work experience unpaid or whatever, maybe in accountancy internship… then because I have got a placement year at the end of the second year, so the internship will give me experience when I apply for it then (placement)*".

The following extract reveals Andrew's ability to focus on his career:

> "*I am a student rep as well. I missed the last meeting because I had to work… I am just trying to do stuff that goes on my C.V. as well as looks good*".

Analysing this from a Bourdieu perspective shows that Andrew is undertaking a student representative role that does not increase his economic capital, as it is a voluntary role. However, could increase his symbolic capital and this in turn may lead, in the long term, to an increase in his economic capital through the enhancement of his C.V. and enable him entry into the field of a graduate career.

Andrew refers to his paid employment later when describing his typical paid employment schedule:

> "*I work on Monday, Wednesday afternoon and Thursday… obviously I needed the money*".

Analysing this from a Bourdieu perspective Andrew is managing to juggle the acquisition of both economic and symbolic capital. This is interesting as there is not a sense of

Andrew having sacrificed economic capital in order to acquire symbolic capital by becoming a full-time student. Andrew is the only student in my four cases who has moved away from home and this could, in part, explain the need to support himself financially. Andrew is the one case that aligns most closely to a traditional student. The view of the traditional student is that they are aged eighteen to nineteen, have moved away from home and resides on campus. Andrew suggests that he is residing in university halls in the following extract:

> "*The people that I live with are there are two masters' students and two third years*".

Some of the issues from Andrew's case will be continued and developed in relation to the other three cases in the following discussion chapter.

4.4 Case Study 4: Susan

4.4.1 Susan's Background

Susan was the second youngest of the four cases. At the time of the interview, Susan was in her final year along with Paul and Hillary. All three students graduated at the same time. Susan joined the Accounting and Finance undergraduate degree at the age of twenty-six.

Prior to the interview my knowledge of Susan was limited to knowing that she joined as a mature student who enrolled on the first year of our Accounting and Finance undergraduate degree in September 2012. I had taught Susan in her first year and she proved to be a high achieving student, but appeared to lack confidence.

Susan had dropped out of two Russell Group universities prior to joining my university. This in itself is interesting, as Susan has made a switch from Russell Group to a "new" university.

Table 5 – Case Susan

School Education	•Private grammar school via bursary: teacher at primary school suggested to her mum. •Sixth form: worked to pay fees because mum had remarried. •A levels
Age 18	•Enrolled at Edinburgh University for Modern Languages. •Dropped out: "Too young in the head". Homesick.
Age 19	•Enrolled at Manchester University: left after 2 months. •Worked full-time since then.
Age 20	•Had worked in MacDonalds since 16 years old. Reached manager level. •Moved into Debt Collection. (9 years).
Future	•Aiming for a graduate scheme to have ACCA funded. •Preference was MMU as new building.

4.4.1.1   Susan's School Years

I will start to analyse Susan's interview from her school education. It is interesting that Susan started to narrate her education from her sixth form experience rather than prior to that, although she did refer back to that later in the interview.

"*So I stayed on at school, at sixth form. I did my A levels there and then started university*".

Analysing this from Gee's (2014) notion of significance it is interesting that Susan has started with the emphasis of staying on followed by sixth form before mentioning that she studied for her A levels. If Susan had chosen to focus on the A level aspect she would have worded this:

"*I did A levels in sixth form at the same school…*"

With Susan, placing the emphasis on the aspect of staying on at school suggests that Susan considered this as an achievement. It may be the case that some pupils not eligible

to stay on, due to poor academic performance. If Susan had narrated this in the alternative way above, then the act of being allowed to stay on would not appear as significant. It is also interesting that Susan does not mention at this stage that she gained an assisted place at a private school. Susan narrated this in the following extract:

> "*In relation to my family sort of background, education wise I am the first to go to university. When I was in primary school my teacher told me mum to apply for an assisted place at private school and then I got a bursary and I got a place at S Grammar*".

Susan revealed that this was because she was an able student. This extract can be analysed from several perspectives. From a Bourdieu perspective, Susan's mum lacked the symbolic capital to consider applying for an assisted school place for Susan and it was a teacher who possessed the symbolic capital to advise Susan's mother as to how she could access the field of private education. The teacher recognised Susan's potential as an able student and she recognised that enabling Susan to access private education could enable Susan to access the field of higher education. However, Susan also reveals that she lacked something else in the following extract:

> "*I had personal issues anxiety and confidence when I was younger so I found it difficult to blend in at university and I was bullied at High School… my mum remarried just before I finished my GCSE's and so to stay on for sixth form she had to pay a percentage of the fees and that's why I got a job*".

4.4.1.2 Susan's Previous University Experience as a Young Student

Susan does not reveal the reasons for the bullying at high school or the reasons that she felt that she did not blend in at university. From a Bourdieu perspective, it could be that Susan lacked the cultural capital to enter the field of private education. A private school offers many additional cultural activities to broaden pupils' cultural capital, which require further private funding from families such as residential trips overseas, which may have been out financial reach for Susan's family. It may be that fellow pupils at school became aware that Susan had an assisted place rather than having family with the financial means to support her. It may have also been the case that Edinburgh University attracted many privately educated students and again Susan may have lacked

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the cultural capital to access the field of many of the students. Susan provides a reflection on the reason for her leaving Edinburgh in the following extract:

"*I think I was a bit too young in the head at the time… I was not liking the course and got really homesick. I came back home*".

Susan then managed to secure a place at Manchester University the following year but left after two months. Susan reveals the reasons for this:

"*I think I got into a serious relationship a bit too young and because I had been working full-time for about a one year, I started to miss the regular income and I needed to move on as you do*".

Viewing this from a Bourdieu lens Susan had sacrificed symbolic capital by leaving Edinburgh University and managed to increase economic capital through securing full-time paid employment. However, by securing the place at Manchester University led to a sacrifice in economic capital in order to achieve symbolic capital. Bourdieu's notions of capital do not seem to have space for any other forms of gains outside of the three aspects of capital. In Susan's case she had also managed to achieve a relationship, which may have provided access to cultural capital opportunities, however, Susan did not reveal anything further during the interview about this.

4.4.1.3 Susan's Employment

It is interesting that despite Susan being the second youngest interviewee she had developed a career as she reveals in the following extract:

"*I was working at MacDonald's. I started working there when I was sixteen as soon as I could work and I stayed there for four years. I ended up being a manager there, but still was not very well paid so I worked in debt collection for nine years. Obviously I want to progress further I do not think I can do without qualifications*".

As Susan had revealed she had to start work at sixteen, as her mum had to meet a percentage of the cost of her school fees. This contrasts to the point at which Susan made the decision to return to university in the following extract:

"*I had been looking at different degrees over the years but it's just the financial aspect looked a bit, you know being able to afford to go part-time (work), but me*

and my partner are in a good place financially so we thought it's the right time to do it and look for a career".

Analysing this from a Bourdieu perspective by Susan making the shift from full-time to part-time paid employment in order to undertake her degree demonstrates a sacrifice in economic capital, in order to increase her symbolic capital. However, Susan focusing on what she considers are the longer-term benefits of obtaining a degree will provide her with access to the field of a graduate career, which in turn will increase her economic capital in the future.

4.4.2 Susan Joining University

4.4.2.1 Applying for University for Susan

I asked Susan why she had chosen this university and she responded in the following extract:

"It was my preference. I do not know why. The new building as well".

Susan also revealed the admissions process in the following way:

"*Yes they just asked for proof. I had to dig them out of my mum's loft, dust them off. It think it was ten years since I had done my A levels*".

In terms of fears about joining as a mature student:

"*I was definitely **worried** about it when I started university. Before, it was one of my biggest **worries**. Coming in and being sat in a class with a load of eighteen year olds that had just come fresh from college, it did **concern** me but I just seem to blend in… I was **worried** again about my ability you know, a bit older and I had been in such, what's the word for it, repetitive job, you know and you just sort of go into robot mode*".

Analysing this from a Bourdieu perspective it is interesting that Susan describes herself as blending in where she did not at Edinburgh, it may be because she had acquired the necessary cultural and symbolic capital without the realisation that this had happened. From a Gee (2014) perspective of significance, it is interesting that Susan provides a focus on her worries, rather than the sitting with eighteen year olds. She could have phrased this:

"*Being sat in a class with eighteen year olds was a worry*".

By repeating the notion of worry shows that this caused Susan a level of anxiety prior to joining the university.

In the following discussion chapter, I will be identifying and discussing the themes that have arisen from this data analysis chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE – DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I will discuss the data analysis that I have undertaken in the previous chapter. I aim to identify and synthesise the themes that have arisen from this data analysis.

Some of the themes will be distinctive to an individual case whereas other themes will be applicable to two or more of the cases and some to all four cases. They will be discussed drawing on the research data and linked to some of the theoretical foundations from chapter two. This chapter seeks to merge themes and insights in order to more specially answer the research questions and to bring in some of the literature from chapter two, helping to position this study more specially in the field.

A refocus on the research questions is useful at this point, as it will frame the focus of the discussion in this chapter:

- What are the distinctions about the processes that are involved in making a career change decision from full-time paid employment to full-time undergraduate study?
- In what ways do students identify and articulate changes to their identity, as they become full-time students?
- How do structure and agency affect career choices of the mature undergraduate student?

In addition to using the research questions as a framework to guide this chapter, some of the structure from the findings in chapter four is used. In chapter four, I analysed each case under two distinct elements. The first analysed each case in relation to life prior to joining university. The second focused on each student journey from the point of joining the university. This chapter is framed using the three research questions but still delineating pre and post university registration as distinct phases. Pre university

experience relates mainly to research question one. Research question two is mainly the phase from joining university and research question three draws on both.

5.1 What are the Distinctions about the Processes that are Involved in Making a Career Change Decision from Full-time Paid Employment to Full-time Undergraduate Study?

The key themes that are emerging from this study will shape this section. It will commence with the point at which participants narrated their journey. A further theme involves the support systems available to each student prior to them registering at university. I will then explore their motivations for becoming a "mature" undergraduate student; a further theme following this is their attitude to risk taking. An important find is the positioning of others in relation to self. The theme of economic capital, specifically in relation to financial resources is a useful theme to emerge. The final theme is the use of artefacts as objects of positioning.

5.1.1 Commencement of the Journey

I will start this section by considering the starting point of each participant's story. Without prompting, each of the participants in this study chose to commence their narration prior to joining university from their compulsory secondary education experience in their teenage years. The fact that they decided to start from an educational experience perspective initially appears coincidental. This revealed that they were narrating university as part of a "standard plot" (Holland et al 1998:53). The notion of the "standard plot" is related to figured worlds as discussed in chapter three. Holland et al (1998:53) acknowledge the role of the narrative as to how a story or drama is conveyed in relation to the "standard plot" and suggest that there are "taken for granted sequences of events". In this study, the narratives conveyed by the four participants reveal particular "taken for granted" elements within their sequence of events prior to joining university. These include a notion of a standard trajectory of school and/or college education, possibly followed by a gap year, followed by university, followed by full-time employment. Paul articulated this in the following way:

> *"I had a really good job and I had done the travelling and the last thing was the university bit"*

They were deliberately comparing themselves to this standard plot even though they had not followed it in a "standard" way; it seems that the aspect of a standard plot is in their consciousness when relating their journey. In this study, the mature student articulates an awareness that their journey does not follow the standard plot and they consider themselves at odds with the young, traditional student. In previous studies, such as those by Baxter and Britton (2001), the focus of the mature student experience is from when the mature student has enrolled at university rather than exploring their experience prior to joining, so the aspect of the "standard plot" in these studies is not apparent.

The notion of a "good" student has emerged as a theme in this study for each participant; this is evident from their school and college years, prior to joining university. In the case of Paul, the use of Gee's (2014) Building Tasks Model enabled an analysis of the significance with which Paul narrated events. It was useful to see the way in which Paul articulated possible negative events as a student into positives; an example of this was his failure to achieve a pass grade in his GCSE music. It was also useful when analysing the narrative relating to his place at the Guitar institute in relation to not securing a scholarship. In the case of Hillary, she narrated how she had formed her study patterns in her further education college with her friend by starting class early in the day and turning the computers on for her fellow students; this behaviour was endorsed by her teacher, which in itself provides a useful insight to the role of "significant others". Holland et al (1998:127) suggest that the role of others and how one feels in relation to them can affirm and transform positional identities; for Hillary gaining the affirmation of her teacher to the behaviour he perceived as demonstrating "good student" behaviour enabled Hillary to embed this within her positional identity as a "good student". In the case of Susan, she narrated how she and her family were encouraged to apply for a grammar school bursary by her teacher. Susan had demonstrated her capability as a "good student" through her results and application to her studies, which was affirmed by her teacher encouraging bursary application. At the same time this positioning of Susan by her teacher, transforms her positional identity in her figured

world of school, by setting her out in a high position in relation to her fellow students. On the other hand, Andrew admitted that he did not work hard enough for his A levels; however, this reflection by Andrew demonstrates an awareness of the behaviour that he associates with being a "good student". Likewise, Paul demonstrates the notion of a "good student" in the following quote:

> *"I said to my other half "final year is your life". It is not taking over your life it should be just part of your life"*

This demonstrates that each participant perceives themselves to be aware of the conventional practices and characteristics that constitute their positional identity as good students.

It is now useful to reflect on the stage at which these participants stopped engaging in full-time education; in two cases, they had achieved the necessary qualifications to gain access to university. In one case, Susan had unsuccessfully attempted two university courses at research-led universities. In the other two cases, Hillary had left education aged sixteen, Andrew had unsuccessfully attempted to obtain qualifications that could have gained him access to university; in both these cases, they had to return to further education as mature students in order to achieve this goal. Bates and Riseborough (1993) found that career trajectories were largely dependent upon the qualifications gained at sixteen plus. The findings from Bates and Riseborough (1993) are relevant in this study in that each participant, whether they had pursued their education until sixteen or eighteen, had found their career prospects limited without a university level qualification and this had provided the motivation to register at university as a mature student. In this study, all four mature students expressed their feeling of being unable to progress further within their existing career prior to joining university. The mature students in this study considered that enrolling for a university degree would provide them with the required cultural and symbolic capital to access the field of accountancy and thus gain better career prospects. From a Bourdieu perspective, the notions of "capital", "field" and "habitus" enable an insightful view of this phenomenon. Previously, in chapter three (section 3.6) I referred to Bourdieu's (1991:12) notions of "field" and "habitus". Habitus is a way of being influenced by practices, perceptions and attitudes, which affect the way in which the individual acts and reacts without them

necessarily being conscious of these influences. Bourdieu (1991:14) considers the "field" as a space where individuals compete for the different forms of capital and the outcome is determined by the different volumes of capital individuals are able to accumulate. In the field of higher education, the classification of degree awarded is considered by students as the means by which they will be able to compete for graduate level jobs; this is turn will increase their economic capital arising from the higher salaries available. The profession of accountancy is considered a desirable choice of career with the perceived benefits of high salaries. The profession has numerous chartered professional bodies, which can enable an accountant to specialise in an area such as taxation that can lead to further salary increases. In the Accounting and Finance profession, a good honours degree, will also enable them to compete for training contracts to study for their chartered accountancy qualification, this will also enable them to accumulate symbolic capital and once qualified enable them to further increase their economic capital in terms of increased salaries. Bourdieu (1991:15) acknowledges that the notion of capital is a term taken from the language of economics, however, he uses it in a broader sense to encompass interactions between individuals, which are not necessarily economically based.

In summary, at this stage of the discussion, two key themes have emerged; the mature students' articulation of their trajectory to university reveals that they consider themselves to deviate from Holland et al's (1998) notion of the "standard plot" and their desire to project themselves as "good" students.

5.1.2   Support Systems Prior to Joining University

I will approach this from two aspects; the first being support with the university application process and the second being the financial and non-financial support provided by family members for becoming a full-time undergraduate student.

Considering each student's familiarity and engagement with the university application process is useful in further understanding the challenges mature students face when they consider undertaking an undergraduate level qualification. Universities need to

consider how potential students, not in full time or part time education can access the guidance for the application process. Paul and Susan, who had achieved the necessary qualifications to access higher education at eighteen years of age, had previous experience of the university application process during their school years. In this study, they made little reference to the process, although they did acknowlege family support in relation to encouragement for them to pursue this course of action. These two students who had considered university at eighteen felt more confident that they were easily able to engage with the process of applying than the other two students. From a Bourdieu (1991:12) perspective, these two students possessed the symbolic capital to access the field of university admissions. With reference to Bourdieu's (1991:12) notion of habitus, acquisition of these dispositions occurred during their post-sixteen school education. These appear unconscious as their prior experience was not recalled when each of these two participants narrated this aspect prior to joining university.

Family members were revealed as particularly important as part of the step to apply to university. Firstly, I will revisit which family members provided guidance and support prior to the application process; I analysed this from a Bourdieu perspective in terms of symbolic capital. In two of the cases, Paul and Hillary, they had parents or stepparents who possessed the symbolic capital of the university admission process. Paul expresses this in the following quote:

> "*My mum is probably the biggest influence in my life… the minute she said to me… it is funny when you are thirty and your mum and dad say that it is all right you can do it. You know you can do it. So she said why don't you think about going to university?*"

For Paul, this seems to both overlay and confirm his own personal desire to seek out a new profession. Similarly, Hillary illustrates the significance of a family member in her decision in the following quote:

> "*His (stepfather) family were in the legal profession and he has encouraged me and he probably has been the difference because he was like, because I have got a step-sister as well, and she went to university… he was saying, "You can do it, it's not what you think".*

Andrew and Susan, had to rely on individuals outside of the family. In the case of Andrew, a friend's mother and Susan a teacher as evidenced in the following quotes:

> *"My friend's mother she helped, because my mam isn't too, she's a bit older she is not aware of further education and stuff, but my friend's mam did a course a few years ago. She helped me look into courses that were good career prospects"* (Andrew)

> *"In relation to my family background, education wise I am the first to go to uni. Erm, when I was at primary school my teacher told my mum to apply for an assisted place at a private school and then I got a bursary"*. (Susan)

It appears to be an important find that the two youngest mature students in this study did not have immediate family members with the requisite symbolic capital to advise them on how to access the field of higher education whereas the two older students did, however, it could be coincidental. The role of significant others is apparent for all four mature students in this study, whether they are immediate family members or individuals in a position of power and influence such as tutors. I refer to chapter three (section 3.3) where I drew upon Holland et al's (1998:40) notions of identity and agency and also Holland et al's (1998:170) notions of self-authoring. These notions draw on the influences of "others" that we are not "freewheeling agents"; we are products of the cultural worlds we have inhabited and this includes individuals who have influenced our lives. It is helpful to be aware of the influence of "others" involved in the decision of the mature student to undertake university studies, no matter their age and experience. Furthermore, academics need to avoid assuming that the younger mature student will possess the required symbolic capital to access the university admissions process. A challenge for universities is to make potential applicants aware that there is advice and support available whatever their background irrespective of whether they have access to individuals with the symbolic capital to advise them of the process. It appears to be the case that previous researchers have focused on the period of time the mature students are studying. As a consequence the influence of "significant others" such as mature student parents has been overlooked. It is also important that for some of the mature students in this study the influence and support of parents, in particular the mother, remains an important aspect when they join university. This provides further

challenges for universities when aiming to attract mature students, as it is unlikely that a mature student would involve their parents in attending an open day event, which is frequently the case with younger students.

The following section will consider the forms of support that the mature student can be provided with by fellow family members, whether or not they possess the requisite symbolic capital for the university admissions process. Research undertaken by Baxter and Britton (2001) found that the gender of the mature student affected the type of support received from their partners. In the case of mature male students, the female partner experienced a sense of adjustment to their partner no longer being the main earner, however, in some cases it empowered the female partner to become more independent. In this study, Paul had resigned from a successful career in the police; however, he had put in place sound financial plans to finance his three years of study by saving and relocating from an expensive area of the country to a more affordable location. Susan had also alluded to being in a strong financial position, prior to her undertaking studies as a mature student. The aspect of an individual's propensity to put in place financial plans prior to becoming a mature student, does not seem to have been considered in the Baxter and Britton (2001) study and appears to be an important aspect to being a successful mature student. Howard and Davies (2012) suggest that mature students often need to be in some form of paid employment, perhaps more so than the younger undergraduate student is in order to sustain existing life commitments; however, in this study there is evidence that where financial plans have been put in place prior to commencement of study this is not the case.

The study found that other forms of personal support are therefore important for the mature student. Baxter and Britton (2001) found there might be little change in the notions of masculine and feminine roles within the home; in this study, there is evidence of this in the case of Hillary who continued to maintain some responsibilities for her student son as illustrated through her comment on continuing to do his laundry. These support needs are frequently overlooked in the wider discourses prior to joining university and can contribute significantly to the success of the student. As an academic, I need to be aware of these additional pressures on mature students and provide

support in how they might effectively manage their studies to fit around competing demands on their time. Trying to ensure that courses have flexibility within them so that students have the scope to adapt them to fit personal needs thus becomes important.

This section has shown that support; specifically encouraging and affirming a move to university, from close family members i.e. parents, stepparents, partners and also teachers, has been an important factor for these students to commence full-time studies at a later stage in their lives. Baxter and Britton (2001) identified in their findings specific gender roles of mature students in terms of their roles within the home. Findings emerged in this study that for the female with childcare responsibilities she continued to maintain these as a mature student; this correlates with the previous findings. However, for the male he manages to share the childcare responsibilities with his partner enabling her to fit employment with his study commitments. This study has revealed the male mature students working in partnership with his partner, rather than a role reversal. This finding adds to Holland et al's (1998) notion of figured worlds in the way in which individuals can reposition themselves by undertaking non-stereotypical roles, in this case, the male mature student undertaking perceived female roles. Furthermore, other forms of support needs have emerged. It is clear that in all cases, they were financially secure and had the propensity to put in place financial plans in order to support their full-time studies. However, there is an expectation for those with childcare responsibilities to maintain and possibly increase their finances during their studies.

5.1.3 Motivation for Becoming a Mature Student

For all four students in this study the main motivation to undertake higher education studies as a mature student is to enable entry into an accounting and finance related professional career. They all articulated how their current employment was not offering them the chance to progress without higher-level academic qualifications. This study suggests that the main motivator is financial and the perceived opportunity to gain higher financial rewards. The pursuance of seeking employment that will generate higher rewards, correlate to previous research undertaken by Davies and Williams

(2001) who found that many of their participants articulated dissatisfaction with their current jobs and a strong belief that the achievement of a higher education qualification would improve their employment prospects. It is important that in this study, the initial push for some of the participants involved an element of dissatisfaction with their managers. In the cases of Paul and Hillary, they encountered individual characters who displayed traits they considered undesirable. Paul encounters "bullying" managers within the police, which drives him to seek promotion to escape the situation in which he finds himself. For Hillary, in her final employment prior to becoming a full-time student, she describes the unprofessional behaviour of a husband and wife. I will revisit this in more detail in section 5.1.4. However, this seems to be contradictory to previous studies undertaken by McCune et al (2010) and O'Boyle (2015) where motivation ranged from a desire to learn and the acquisition of a new academic language, which O'Boyle (2015) considered vital to forming a new identity; differences may occur here in relation to the type of degree undertaken. In this study, the University programme examined is a professional vocational degree award. Holland et al's (1998) notion of "serious play" can also provide a useful insight as the students demonstrate that they can imagine themselves in higher-level roles with the achievement of an undergraduate degree.

This section has shown that for all the participants in this study, the key motivator is to acquire the necessary qualifications to enable them to enter the field of professional accounting and finance. There is a clear perception that this will enhance both their symbolic and economic capital, thus, their decision to attend university was specifically focused on vocational outcomes.

5.1.4 Attitude to Risk Taking

With the perceived benefit of achieving improved financial rewards through attaining an accounting and finance undergraduate degree, the students in this study seem to value this above the financial risk of incurring student debt and the sacrifice of established careers. Howard and Davies (2015) explored the social and cognitive risks arising from participation in higher education for the mature student. They found that social risks arose from the mature student seeing themselves as "non-learners". This

social risk was not apparent in this study. However, there is clearly a transformation for each participant in this study from being a "non-learner" (in an academic sense) to becoming a "learner". Despite Paul not having university level qualifications he had managed to continue studying for police exams, which were required for career progression. Hillary and Andrew had joined university having achieved academic success within further education. It is possible that they felt they were "learners"; this is not to say that each participant joined the university confident of academic success within the university academic environment. Each had voiced fears initially of being ignored by fellow students, however, their achievements in the first year confirmed their ability to become a "learner". Holland et al's (1998:272) notion of "serious play" (discussed in chapter three) is a helpful tool to analyse this phenomenon further. It is useful to revisit Hillary, where she described adapting the practices she had learnt as a student in college (chapter four section 4.2.3) involving getting into class early to start work before the class commenced. Paul also described the practices that he considered those of a good student (section 4.1.3.2). Andrew also narrates his rejection of engaging in the acts of other students he considers non-desirable such as drinking and missing classes. They are illustrating here particular imaginings of being a student that they are playing out in their change of identity into a university student. A challenge for academics and universities is to understand the role they can play into convincing potential students that they can switch from being a "non-learner" to become a "learner".

Not all mature students can see themselves as being able to fit in any university. Hillary described forgoing an offer at a neighbouring research-led university in favour of a new post-1992 university as being "more me". Holland et al's (1998:272) notion of "serious play" is again useful when investigating what is happening here. The student in this case, Hillary, is demonstrating the ability to imagine herself as fitting into the post-1992 university but not in a traditional university. It is not clear whether she perceives the post -1992 university as better suited to preparing her for the professional world of accountancy rather than a traditional research led university. Perhaps it could be that she sees it as less academic and therefore an easier transition from being a "non-learner" to a "learner". Susan had also dropped out of two research-led universities prior to joining us. It may be that these students felt that they lacked the academic skills and

cultural capital to succeed at these other universities and felt a better fit with a professionally focused degree. Previous research such as studies undertaken by Bandura (1995) and Pajares (2001) found that cognitive risk involved the concept of perceived self-efficacy and that low self-efficacy prevents mature students accessing higher education; this can arise from unhappy memories of their school experience of not being able to achieve or having struggled with subjects. Holland et al's (1998) notions of identity are useful here. They acknowledge that the individual cannot divorce themselves from their past and their social background. In the case of the mature student, they may be struggling to rid themselves of an image of a "non-learner" through poor experiences at school and a break from formal learning. In the case of a successful mature student, the ability to imagine themselves as a successful "learner" together with the "others" that feature in their world validates their new identity as a "learner"; thus transforming them from "non-learner" to "learner". From my own perspective, this is a challenge in how a university can improve a potential mature student's self-efficacy into believing that they are able to succeed, although there are possibly many young, traditional students that have similar anxieties. Universities may need to consider dropping the label of "mature" for the students who return to learning as an outdated term.

Other risks identified by Davies and Williams (2001) involved sacrifices having to be made for the mature student in terms of study time. In this study, they found that the mature students with family commitments and children articulated forgoing time to be with their family as a sacrifice and equated to a potential high cost. Davies and Williams (2001) study also revealed that at times mature students are fragile and although they may be eligible for childcare support, this can be at the expense of loss of other welfare benefits. Another finding was that many mature students were not aware of their entitlements until they enrolled at a university. Bourdieu's notions of capital arose from his observations within the dominant society in the field of education and as such has been criticised by Albright and Luke (2008:17) for the lack of ability to account for difference and agency. Holland et al (1998:59) also suggest that had Bourdieu mediated his understanding through the notion of figured worlds he may have reconfigured his notions to include the practices learnt by individuals being embedded and socially

reconstructed and adapted to other settings. With the broader discourses of widening participation, which enables non-traditional students' access to university, Bourdieu's focus on elite society seems more at odds with the education practices today. Referring back to a previous point I made, as academics we need to ensure that appropriate information is provided for all students to help them balance outside commitments and reduce the possibility that lack of knowledge deters application.

This section has shown that all the participants were ready to take a risk and move away from the employment stability that they already had. Their imaging of themselves in a different profession with more prospects was sufficient for them to take the risks, this is further discussed in the next section. Additionally, they identified a key risk was having to make the transition from "non-learner" to "learner", this has caused them more anxiety than other perceived risks. It is important that despite some of the participants being eligible to gain entry to research led universities they considered that the post-92 university was a better fit for them. Furthermore, despite having support from family members, those with childcare responsibilities were expected to juggle this with study demands.

5.1.5 Positioning of Others in Relation to Self

In this section, I will be focusing on positioning and transitions in identity for each student prior to joining university. This is important as each student positions themselves against others as part of the processes in which decisions are made for a career change. I will refer to Holland et al's (1998) notions of figurative and positional identity which was discussed in chapter three (3.2.1) as a way in which to provide a meaningful way in which to explore this phenomenon. I will also draw on other relevant aspects from Holland et al (1998) such as the notion of "serious play" as well as Bourdieu's (1991) notions of field and habitus. The notion of "serious play" and the ability to imagine emerges as an important aspect in the success of the participants becoming students following a period of full-time employment. The ability to imagine helps them reposition themselves as accounting and finance undergraduate students. Holland et al (1998:141) highlight the importance of imaginative framing, which enables

the individual to transform their figurative identity. There are also incidences where some of the participants position themselves against characters they deem undesirable, which pushes them away from an organisation. The desire to leave precedes the desire to imagine their new destination.

In the case of Paul, his ability to imagine another world is evidenced in his narration of the student protest. Paul describes how he had first considered the police in the following quote:

> "*I went outside and there were all these students protesting at the gate of the university and they were on one side and there were all these police officers on the other side and I was sitting there and I was thinking, as probably loads of people do, oh that looks so exciting, I wish I was there doing it, fighting these students.*"

In Paul's narration of the event he witnessed, in which the police were present, he illustrates his ability to transform his figurative and positional identities. Holland et al's (1998:272) notion of "serious play" is useful in analysing Paul's transition from the field of finance role to the field of the police. I referred to this incident in chapter four (section 4.1.2.2) in relation to Happenstance Learning Theory which involves an element of chance (Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997). It is useful to refer to Holland et al's (1998) notions of figurative and positional identities in examining these phenomena, as Paul was able to imagine himself as a police officer in such an incident. This illustrates that such chance events also influence positioning to enable an individual to transform their positional identity, not necessarily arising from sustained contexts. There may be some sense in which the mature students were able to imagine themselves in other careers and perhaps as students. Referring to Ecclestone et al's (2010) view of identity involving emotional capital, Paul did narrate feelings of excitement at witnessing the event. Analysing this further it may depend upon the timeliness and nature of the chance event as to how an individual responds; this may depend upon the individual's attitude to risk, which I will not explore any further in this study.

A further illustration of Paul positioning himself against his peers is when he narrates his pursuance of promotion from a police constable to a detective. He portrays his "buddy" as a bully whilst Paul perceives himself as popular with his team. The notion of Holland

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et al's (1998) "serious play" is useful here as Paul has the ability to imagine himself in the field of management within the police. Later in the interview, Paul describes another boss as a bully. Holland et al's (1998) notions of positional and figurative identities is useful here to understand what is happening. It can be difficult to see where the notion of positional identity differentiates itself from figurative identity. The impact of being bullied seems significant for Paul; individuals who bully colleagues at work are not restricted to the field of the police. These individuals can be encountered within the fields of accountancy and education for example. In this sense, the bullying nature of an individual can be considered part of their positional identity. However, viewing this from Paul's perspective, he clearly sees this behaviour as undesirable as it is not part of his figurative identity, if his working environment within the police is viewed as a figured world for him. Paul does not refer to any other encounters with bullies outside of the police. In addition, his response confirms this by avoiding retaliation and seeking a way out of his situation via promotion. Clearly, he sees alternative professions as not having bullies. In these incidents, Paul is positioning himself against individuals he considers to have undesirable characteristics causing him to imagine leaving his current position before imagining his desired destination.

Another dimension of Paul's figurative identity is illustrated when he narrates his pursuance of promotion is the study aspect. Paul sees study and the acquisition of symbolic capital as the way in which he can advance himself in terms of his career. For Paul, study is becoming a way of being and he associates it with a tool with which he can transform his positional and figurative identity. From a Bourdieu (1991) perspective, Paul considers study and acquisition of symbolic capital as a way of progressing himself and entering new fields of management and access to economic capital. I will revisit the value Paul places on study which continues to be part of his figurative identity through his transition into the field of higher education in section 5.2.

In the case of Andrew, he provides a useful insight into his figurative identity in the following:

"I went to A level college anyway because all my friends were… my friends have already graduated now and I see like they're going on career paths… and I think seeing all of them graduating doing well, I just want that as well".

I am using the term figurative identity in relation to Andrew in referring to his figured world of his school friends. This illustrates that Andrew positions himself closely with his friends since school and this continued to be the case at the time of the interview. It seems as though for both Paul and Andrew they consider higher education as part of their "standard plot" during their school and/or college education.

It is interesting that both Hillary and Susan were the first in their family to go to university and it is not as clear as to how or whether they positioned themselves against their peers at school. It is useful to draw attention to the fact, that despite both Hillary and Susan being the first in their family to register at university, they both show aspiration for higher education studies during their school years. From a Holland et al (1998) perspective higher education was considered as part of their "standard plot" to some extent.

Although Hillary did not imagine herself in her early life as possessing any such expectation. This is illustrated, in the following quote:

> *"I wasn't from a family that was university educated anyway. More like labouring type things so it wasn't expected of you it really wasn't."*

She did reveal her aspirations to become a teacher as evidenced in the following quote:

> *"I wanted to go into primary education."*

The notion of figurative identity is a useful tool in reaching an understanding of why Hillary eventually changed direction to hairdressing following a period of what she described as "dead-end jobs". She revealed how she decided on hairdressing in the following quote:

> *"I had always done a bit of hairdressing anyway. My aunty is a hairdresser and my uncle and I used to work in the hairdressers as a child, washing hair. So I was used to it."*

This quote reveals a strong connection to the field of hairdressing for Hillary. The use of the word "aunty" also indicates her relationality to her relatives here. It indicates a term

of endearment without the formality of referring to her as aunt. In Hillary's figured world of hairdressing, her aunt and uncle appear as important characters as they provided her with the opportunity to enter the field of hairdressing as a child; this in turn forms part of Hillary's figurative identity. Hillary then continues to explain how she transitioned into the field of accountancy:

> "*I went back into accountancy, office work again. So I was like, kept doing these little circles.*"

Hillary's use of the metaphor of circles is revealing. This could seem that she has not evolved in terms of career progression, as she considers herself to be stopping and restarting her career. However, Hillary reflects later that by experiencing redundancy she had the opportunity to study for an accountancy qualification. After re-entering the field of accountancy, she realised that she needed to acquire further symbolic capital in terms of accountancy qualifications in order to progress a career in that field. It is clear from this that figurative identities are not static and are constantly evolving and being reformed. It is interesting that Hillary, like Paul, positions herself against individuals she considers having characteristics, she considers undesirable.

> "*They would come in and have a full-blown row and there were doors slamming and I would just carry on.*"

This clearly demonstrates that Hillary considers that this behaviour is part of that organisation and wants to leave before considering what she wants to do after.

Similarly, Susan mentions:

> "*In relation to my family sort of background, education wise I am the first to go to uni.*"

The notion of positional identities seems to be useful here to analyse what is happening. In this study there appears to be an aspect of gender and / or class in terms of what Hillary and Susan are "allowed" to do. In terms of the figured worlds of Hillary and Susan, not having family members who had experienced the field of higher education, impacted upon their ability to imagine themselves entering this field in their early lives. Using Holland et al's (1998) notion of figurative identity, this appears to have prevented them from imagining themselves in the field of higher education. Even though Hillary

had imagined higher education in her mid-teens, she did not revisit the possibility until she was in her early forties. For Susan the change for her originated from the advice of her teacher to her mother in terms of seeking a funded grammar school place. In the case of Hillary, her tutor at the college she attended and her stepfather convinced her that she was allowed to register at university. This transition in their figurative identities by these "significant others" enabled Susan and Hillary to imagine themselves within the field of higher education.

The issues raised here highlight the needs for the transition to university, at whatever phase in life, to be more clearly explored within the broader notion of life course (Ecclestone et al (2010). It is the case that the mature students in this study were unable to envisage themselves as university students during their school years, but for various reasons they chose not to register at university as "young" students. In terms of the various forms of capital, all the mature students in this study were the first to go to university in their family, so it could be argued that they lacked access to the cultural capital necessary for the entering the field of higher education.

In the cases of Paul and Hillary, their personal economic situations prevented them from registering at university as young students. Despite the personal situations being markedly different, each were driven by the need to gain full-time employment in order to maintain themselves so registering for a full-time undergraduate degree was not an option for them at that stage. The student that aligns most closely to a young student was Susan who registered at two universities following school, however, dropping out. I will consider the structural factors that Ecclestone et al (2010:11) refer to when considering agency as well as Holland et al's (1998) notion of figurative identity. Susan who was living in a single parent household, had to apply for a bursary for her schooling, and reveals how she had to work to fund her studies:

> "*To stay on for sixth form she (mother) had to pay a percentage of the fees and that's why I got a job. I was paying towards my own fees. So that's why I started work at sixteen.*"

In Susan's case, it seems as though she was expected to juggle paid employment with her studies in order to fund her studies. This experience forms part of her figured world

and her figurative identity in the field of her grammar school education, there is clearly an element of class and social positioning playing a part here.

One of the key findings from this section is imagining. This emerged from using Holland et al's (1998) notion of "serious play" which enables each participant to imagine themselves in alternative situations, which in turn leads them through a transformation in identity by inhabiting new fields of employment. Furthermore, encounters with individuals who displayed undesirable characteristics created the drive for the participants to seek alternative fields of career. For the male participants, the influence of their friends in staying in further education was also an important factor in their participation in this field.

Also demonstrated in this section, figurative identity is unique to the individual within a figured world and yet this discussion surrounding Holland et al's (1998) notions of figured worlds and positional identity provides useful tools to consider the participants as a collective. Despite their individual differences and uniqueness in relation to their journey's to become mature students, the value of education and studying is evident to each of them. This has become a dimension of their figurative identity and their figured worlds, even when disruptions occur, for example, in the case of Hillary where due to personal circumstances, pursuing studies was not always possible.

5.1.6 Financial Security

From a Bourdieu perspective, the aspect of economic capital provides a useful analytical tool to explore the agency aspect of each mature student in this study. The decision to become a full-time mature student and to leave paid employment is important to understand.

For Hillary when her difficult personal circumstances forced her to move out of her family home and seek paid employment, it prevented her from pursuing the higher education programme she had set her mind on. Hillary's financial situation and lack of economic capital prevented her from accessing higher education as a young student.

For Susan, she had had to juggle part-time paid employment to fund her sixth form education, which did enable her to progress to university, albeit briefly before dropping out on two occasions. Andrew had to find paid employment after failing his A levels; it appears that he faced a similar situation to Hillary, in that he lacked the economic capital to continue in further education. Paul had applied to university, but decided to seek full-time paid employment and to buy a property. He lacked the confidence to move away from his home city and he may have also lacked the economic capital at that time to pursue a higher education qualification.

In each of the four cases, they reached a point of financial stability where they could change career path and seek greater potential for economic reward after their studies. The pursuance of further economic capital seems to be a key driver to become mature accounting and finance undergraduate students. They all perceive that this will offer them the opportunity to enter the field of professional accounting.

5.2 In What Ways do Students Identify and Articulate Changes to their Identity, as they become Mature Full-time Students?

The following sections will explore student identity and their engagement within the university. I will be exploring how each student adapts to the university environment. Furthermore, how they articulate changes to their identity. Holland et al's (1998) notions of positional and figurative identities will enable the analysis of their transitioning from full-time employment to full-time undergraduate student.

5.2.1 Student Identity

For the mature students in this study, engaging in higher education was a positive experience. However, previous researchers such as O'Boyle (2015), Baxter and Britton (2001) found that a new student identity can conflict with existing identities prior to engaging in higher education. Ecclestone et al (2010) refer to the shift in identity, as a transitional phase in the life course; this requires the individual to succeed to change, as their existing identity needs to adjust and adapt to another context. On one level, for

the mature student this means that they need to be able to readjust their identity from being a full-time paid employee to becoming a mature full-time undergraduate student. On another level, they need to be able to readjust their change in identity in their home and social lives. In the following sections, I will examine each participant in relation to how they articulate changes to their identity, as they become full-time students.

In the case of Paul, prior to joining university his positional identity within the figured world of police, was clear. He had held a position of power over his colleagues, which he perceived as contrasting with his position as a student, which he articulated in the following way:

> "One thing I am looking forward to is actually having the status back… no one called me by my first name, that was very disrespectful. I was either called "Sarge" or "Sargeant" and when I was inspector for the last year everyone called me "Sir". So I had gone from having this real status to when I came here I was like a child again".

Paul's positional identity within the field of police is one that has transformed to his position of power over his colleagues, which is clearly important to him when he articulates that he is seeking this in his future career. Paul is clearly articulating that he feels comfortable commanding others within the figured world of the police. Paul demonstrates that his figurative identity within the police was strong, whereas becoming a student presented a disruption to his identity and made him feel childlike.

In the case of Hillary, the first clues as to her positional identity are provided when exploring her choice of university. She articulates it in the following quote:

> "My son was actually coming here and it's a bit more me."

Referring to Holland et al's (1998) notion of "serious play" this indicates that Hillary cannot imagine herself at a traditional research-led university; it may be that she felt more of a sense of entitlement to attend the post-92 university than a research-led one. This is an interesting aspect of Hillary's positional identity, as it demonstrates that she had come to this conclusion without necessarily exploring the option of attending another university. It does demonstrate that she positioned herself in the post-92

university and sensed that she would fit within this environment. Despite that, she did articulate concerns about being accepted by younger students:

"W*hat if no-one speaks to me and I am sat in the corner by myself for two years*?" Hillary is articulating her concerns about her positional identity in relation to the young students. She is conscious of her age and how this may be perceived by younger students, this may in part have arisen from conversations she has overheard between her teenage children and their friends. Another interesting perspective Hillary provides concerning her age is articulated in the following quote:

"*The kids keep you young don't they? Because I have always got a house full of teenagers*".

This reveals a further aspect to Hillary's figured world of home and how the presence of teenagers, transforms her figurative identity.

In the case of Susan, she articulates her concerns relating to her positional identity in becoming an undergraduate student in the following quotation:

"*Coming in and being sat in a class with a load of eighteen year olds that had just come fresh from college, it did concern me but I just seem to blend in OK. A lot of them don't know how old I am*".

She then articulates how she gravitated towards the "older" students on the course. Holland et al's (1998) notions of positional identities are useful here, it is interesting that in the case of Susan she felt a fit with similar students. In terms of Holland et al (1998), it can be considered that Susan became part of the figured world of the "mature" student within the figured world of the accounting and finance undergraduate degree. Susan is clearly consciously associating herself with other "mature" students or students she perceived to be "mature" in their behaviours as students. It would be interesting to explore this further in future research.

In the case of Andrew, he does not appear to associate himself with many of his fellow students as articulated in the following quotation:

"*I don't want to be stereotypical but some are really immature and they come for the social aspects… the girl who is 21 is close friends*".

In this study, changes to identity arose from a loss of status where students had been in a position of power, which had earned them a degree of respect from colleagues when becoming a full-time undergraduate student. Another example was a loss of financial independence and feeling like an unpaid slave, when they assisted their husband with his business. All four students expressed their initial concerns at being accepted by fellow students. Using the notion of Holland et al's (1998) "standard plot" enables us to see that the mature student sees themselves as different from those who they identified as following the standard plot and thus in some senses, therefore, see themselves differently. The sense of belonging is an important aspect to these students and seems to be ranked as the most important concern over and above academic skills which one may have expected to have been the case with two of the students having been out of education for a few years prior to joining university.

Hillary brings her experience to the classroom in a debate in a class relating to the welfare system and tax. Holland et al's (1998) notions of positional and figurative identity is useful here, as Hillary's contribution has arisen from her social relationships with her stepdaughters. Hillary articulates it in the following quote:

> "*There was a young lad, he had obviously not really struggled in his life… you find actually the people that aren't badly off are the single parents on the dole. The ones that are badly off are the single parents who work and the ones that work on a low wage… I had to save up for baby stuff and I could not afford a new pram… I knew people on the dole that had never had a job… all getting these brand new prams.*"

She is illustrating how she consciously associates herself with the position facing her stepdaughter, and at the same time positions herself in a position of power over the "younger" students. She is demonstrating that she felt comfortable in making her contribution to the debate through her own experiences, it is clear here that Hillary is making an assertion about the "young lad" in relation to struggles, based upon his contribution to the debate. This incident narrated by Hillary, gives me cause to consider my own practice in relation to the course structure and university systems. There is an assumption that undergraduate students lack employability skills and that university can

develop them, but this illustrates that for most of the time the mature student conceals them.

In terms of my own practice, this demonstrates how "mature student" experiences can enhance the learning opportunities for fellow students by providing a critical and application dimension to a topical subject.

Hillary and Susan expressed a fear as to whether fellow students would engage with them prior to joining university. This in line with previous research such as that undertaken by Mallman and Lee (2016) found that belonging was a key concern for the mature student. It is interesting that one of the students in this study narrated how he felt a strong affinity towards Manchester prior to joining the university and recalled positive experiences of each time he visited the city. Their study also found that from both an institutional and younger student point of view mature students are assumed to have the ability to adapt more quickly to university in their first year. In future, it is helpful as an academic to factor this in when interacting with mature students, particularly in their first year of study.

The key issues identified in this section, as they become students are as follows. The skills they require to successfully transition the change, involve acceptance of a loss of positional power from the move from full-time employment to undergraduate student; they perceive that they do not fit with the "normal" student. The findings suggest that they have to conceal their previous employment expertise in order to try to fit in. However, their skills in professional adaptability are used, as they become students managing their learning.

5.2.2 Engagement in University

In this section I aim to discuss the aspects of university the mature student accepts and engages with and which aspects they do not. I will also include consideration of accepted behaviours in classes by fellow students as this impacts the mature student sense of belonging.

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In terms of engaging in social activities with younger students, Andrew positioned himself as more mature than his younger counterparts, describing them as "immature" and not always attending classes. Referring to Holland et al's (1998) notion of "serious play", Andrew does not imagine himself acting in this way and considers this behaviour not fitting with his notion of a "good student". When he did miss a student meeting due to external work commitments, he demonstrates his responsibility in the following quote:

> "*I am a student rep as well. I missed the last rep meeting because I had work, but I messaged X (the Student Experience Tutor) and he said it was fine.*"

The remaining three students did not refer to socialising with fellow students, this may be due to outside family and other commitments.

However, there seems to be a lack of awareness of what is considered acceptable behaviour in the classroom by young students. Paul articulated this:

> "*The teacher said to everyone "who enjoys accountancy?". I was the only person to put my hand up out of 20 people.*"

This did cause him to reflect upon the lack of reaction from fellow students, which shows an element of maturity and confidence. Holland et al's (1998) notions of positional and figurative identities are useful tools to analyse what is happening here. Paul is eager to identify his position in relation to his fellow students as a student that is keen and he clearly feels comfortable indicating his enjoyment of the subject whereas his fellow students do not. An alternative possible explanation of Paul's response to the teacher's question may have unconsciously arisen from an earlier experience. In his first job, Paul articulated that the promotion process was invisible and he later realised that one had to "get in with the bosses" (see chapter four; section 4.1.2.3). Paul may have been unconsciously feeling that he had to get in with the teachers.

There are practices, which the mature students have learnt from their previous experiences as students. There is an illustration of this when Hillary relates that she had developed the habit of arriving early to enable her to meet with a group of fellow

students to discuss their work. Having successfully achieved her previous qualification employing this study pattern has enabled Hillary to understand what works for her with her competing family demands. Referring to Holland et al's (1998) notions of positional and relational identities, Hillary has found a method of working that she feels comfortable with and does not feel constrained to confine her study to the library, by also making use of the café before 9.00 a.m.

It is also enlightening to see that where Hillary has had the experience of having to leave education due to personal issues, she gives increased value of education for her children. Given the wider discourses surrounding the widening participation agenda and universities being encouraged to take students from lower socio-economic and disadvantaged backgrounds, it seems if mothers can be encouraged to engage in higher education as mature students this can positively impact upon their children. There was further evidence of this when Andrew was able to access advice from a friend's mother, who herself had engaged in further education a few year's previously. (Chapter four; section 4.3.2). This effectively breaks the cycle for the family and future generations; this aspect is an important finding in this study and does not seem to have been a finding in previous research. The extent to which this is a gender issue is also an area for future research, as in this study, it is the females that seem to be encouraging future generations to study in higher education.

In this section, it is of importance that the mature students do not actively engage socially with the younger students, furthermore, they do not follow their younger students' patterns of behaviour in terms of engagement with academics; this may be due to their increased confidence. Additionally, when provided with the opportunity they reveal experiences from their employment, which they previously concealed. It is also revealing how those with children talked about how they deliberately try to instil the value of education in them from a young age through their expectations and study practices. This may be because they hope their own children will take a different pathway through education.

5.3   How do Structure and Agency Affect the Career Choices of the Mature Undergraduate Student?

5.3.1   Structures within the Workplace

In this section, I will be considering the structures that are in place both in the field of employment and university for the participants.

I will consider the use of artefacts, which are used to create positionality within the workplace for the participants in this study. A refocus on Holland et al's (1998) notion of figured worlds in relation to artefacts is helpful here. Figured worlds can encompass practices, symbols or artefacts and I will use this to provide an insight into the world of accounting practice from the participants' perspective. In section 4.1.2.3, I explored the references that participants made to artefacts to delineate positionality; in the case of Paul, the use of "posh" coffee and his posture as he felt the need to "straighten" himself up prior to a meeting with the Finance Office, in the case of Hillary when she had a visit from management from head office whom she considered "posh".

The practice of providing higher quality coffee acts as a reminder of the senior position of the meeting provider, in this case the Finance Office, in relation to Paul and his colleagues. Paul's reaction to the meeting is interesting when he feels the need to "straighten himself up", in relation to his posture which in itself provides the means by which he can reposition himself. Paul clearly perceived that the Finance Office held a position of power over him and his colleagues.

Hillary also described the senior management of a company she worked for in using the word "posh". Hillary did not elaborate as to whether this was in their practices, symbols or artefacts they used for her to make this conclusion. Although Hillary did allude to what she considered poor behaviour by her immediate bosses:

> "*It was quite a scruffy office… they would come in and have a full-blown row and there were doors slamming and I would just carry on and one of the big bosses, because in Scotland they were quite posh.*"

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This can be partially analysed using Holland et al's (1998) notion of positional identity. Hillary is aware of her lower ranking in terms of the organisational hierarchy. She is managed by her immediate bosses, the husband and wife team, additionally there are senior management from head office who manage them. In this sense, it is apparent why Hillary considers senior management from head office as "posh". Hillary had had experience of what she considered an authentic job (section 4.2.2.2) which had involved writing cheques and completing a manual ledger. It is notable that Hillary considers these the artefacts of a "proper" job.

The distinctions they make here reveals a distinction between themselves and others whose position they aspire towards. They recognise that particular cultural artefacts and practices help delineate the space between them and others. As part of their decision to become a mature student, they are unravelling their own identity in order to transform it in complex ways. The university offers them both the course and the context in which they are beginning to achieve this new positioning.

Now I will consider the presence of or perceived lack of clear structure for career progression. I will revisit Paul's move from finance to the police, which was considered, in section 4.1.2.3. Paul's perception in the finance office at the university was that in order to obtain a promotion one had to "get in with the bosses"; however, Paul considered that the police had a more transparent process involving taking exams and succeeding at an interview; despite this, he encountered characters he considered undesirable in terms of their actions and leading him to seek alternative career paths. What he had thought to be a clear structure for progression, in reality was not the case. Hillary considered leaving her last job when she realised that her employers were not willing to invest in her obtaining further qualifications; the structures in her previous employment were therefore tight and not open for further development; when offered redundancy, she then considered further study.

5.3.2   Structures within University

In terms of becoming a student, Paul is the only student to comment explicitly about his thoughts in relation to the university environment, prior to joining:

> "*This is wonderful, these people do not realise just how lucky they are. New computers and the building is so lovely and I went to the lecture theatres.*"

Paul's reference to lecture theatres demonstrates that he considers this a symbol or artefact that he associates with a university. He was imagining himself as a student having access to all the facilities he would require for studying. Following registering at university, it is clear to see that Paul's positional identity as a student transcends his home life:

> "*(My daughter) she might sit next to me and I give her a pad of paper… she will sit with the calculator and she says "come on daddy we are doing our homework".*"

Paul does not refer to using the facilities within the university, such as the library, but has developed a study pattern, which is inclusive of his family.

Following registration at university Hillary refers to aspects of the university, she finds useful to support her studies:

> "*We usually meet up in the library or if we've got a 9.00 a.m. start we usually meet in the café and get a coffee or something and it's usually quite good because the same kind of people so you can work and do stuff.*"

Hillary considers the library a symbol of the university and of her study. This differentiates the university from her previous college by providing a space that she finds conducive to studying. Her reference to fellow people in the café is also enlightening. Hillary is consciously positioning herself with people she does not know and yet she has made assumptions that they are similar to her. Her assertions have arisen from her observations of their demeanour and / or actions while spending time in the café. It is useful to refer to Holland et al's (1998) notion of figured worlds here. It is clear that the café before 9.00 a.m. is not part of a particular figured world for students, like Hillary, who want to use the time studying with their friends. If she observed the café at mid-day, when it is busy with individuals eating their lunch it would

be seen differently into a figured world and her positional and figurative identity would change.

Furthermore, the significance of these observations by the participants in this study can be analysed and considered from the notion of Bourdieu's cultural capital. As academics, we are responsible for preparing our undergraduate students for the world of professional accountancy, which has its practices, symbols and artefacts that are not always explicit to those lacking the experience of this field. As well as teaching students the academic knowledge and language of the field, we need to equip them with the knowledge of the expected symbolic and cultural capital aspects of this field. Paul provided a useful insight into this when he narrated his visit to the head office of an accountancy practice and referred to polishing his shoes, which demonstrates an awareness of the required practices, again, like Hillary, this demonstrates Paul's awareness of his positional identity. These narratives reveal that these participants were already aware of their positional identities within different contexts and an awareness of how change would be required. From a Bourdieu (2010) perspective, Paul is demonstrating his awareness of the field and habitus of the accountancy profession by his ability to differentiate and appreciate the required practices and reproduce them. It may be that the field and habitus of the police and earlier experience within a finance office, requires similar practices and familiarity with these enables Paul to adapt seamlessly into accountancy. Andrew, however, is aware that he does not possess the cultural capital of the field of the accountancy profession and articulates this in the following way:

> "Well I have got a job at the moment paid. But I am leaving there next month, because I am going to try and get some work experience unpaid or whatever. Maybe an accountancy from applying for an Internship… the internships will give me experience so when I apply for it then… I am just trying to do stuff that goes on my C.V."

It is clear here that Andrew is consciously attempting to transform his positional identity in order to position himself above his peers when the time comes for him to seek full-time paid employment. He is setting his sights on accountancy related work experience. Holland et al's (1998) notion of "serious play" is a useful tool here, as Andrew is

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imagining himself gaining experience within the field of accounting and finance and making plans that will enable him to achieve this. Andrew also has the capacity to distinguish between what he considers relevant and non-relevant work experience.

The tool of the timetable enables the student to juggle their study patterns with classes and any part-time employment they need to finance their time as a full-time student. This leads me to consider how the timetable can restrict or enable the mature student to study for a full-time undergraduate degree, with constraints such as classroom availability and staff, it is not possible to tailor timetables to meet individual student needs. However, the university seems geared towards the "young" student, by timetabling three days a week, to enable them to juggle part-time paid employment. Yet the students in this study are financially secure and the need to juggle part-time paid employment is not as pressing as for other students.

The mature students in this study have imagined and then utilised particular structures in the University for their own repositioning and refiguring. They do so in ways that draw on their previous experiences and are used to transform themselves into the new professionals that they have chosen to be. Although this study does not compare mature students with typical undergraduates, it is clear that their previous cultural capital is utilising university structures in particular ways, which are deliberately different to some of those used by traditional students.

5.3.3   Agency

By agency, I am referring to the degree of choice an individual possesses in order to make career decisions. Holland et al (1998:171) refer to the figured world of Holquist's (2002) dialogism. I find the notion of dialogism useful in terms of agency, although an individual can author events from the position of "I", the words they use are formed from a collective meaning and so that individual cannot claim to own them for themselves. In this study, the role of "significant" others has emerged as important for the mature student in making the transition to become a student, irrespective of their age and position.

5.3.3.1 Agency Prior to Joining University

In the case of Paul and Susan, they had achieved the requisite qualifications at school to register at university. Paul, however, decided not to take the chance, instead he purchased a house, and found full-time employment as an alternative. Susan, however, did take up the opportunity dropping out of two research-led universities before undertaking full-time paid employment. To some extent, Paul and Susan had more choice in terms of whether they registered at university at the usual stage students register at university. However, in the case of Hillary and Andrew, due to not having succeeded at gaining the required qualifications, seeking employment was the only option available to them at that stage in their lives.

The "significant" others have arisen from close family members or friends and in some cases teachers. For Paul this was his mother, Hillary her stepfather and teacher, Andrew his friend's mother and Susan her partner.

5.3.3.2 Agency Following Joining University

This period in each participant's life has resulted in changes in their position in relation to family members. With Paul, he has to juggle childcare with his wife and he is no longer the main breadwinner. With Hillary, she referred to herself as an unpaid "slave" in relation to providing administrative support for her husband's business. With Susan, she has forgone full-time paid employment and for Andrew he has managed to juggle part-time paid employment with his studies.

The themes that have emerged in this section of significance involve artefacts in the workplace and university that act to delineate positionality. These may be physical in nature such as the "posh" coffee or working environment in terms of the perceived state of the offices. However, there are also hidden practices that may not be apparent to the individual, these involve the hidden aspects to gaining promotion such as getting to know the management or ensuring that you are dressed smartly. The university also continues to recreate traditional artefacts that delineate it from other academic institutions, for example lecture theatres and libraries. Furthermore, students adapt

study practices learnt from earlier studies to fit the university environment. A further theme of significance here is that although the individual has the capability to make career change decisions, becoming a full-time undergraduate student at a later stage in life impacts upon one's economic capital. In this study "significant" others play a large role in supporting the mature student both in financial and non-financial terms. As an academic, I need to be aware that the mature student may undertake more non-financial related duties in the home, to enable their partner to provide a higher economic contribution to the household. The need to juggle these competing demands needs to be accommodated in the flexibility of the delivery of the programmes.

CHAPTER SIX – CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

6.1   Summary of the Findings

In the introduction, I explained why this study was of interest to me and what I was setting out to investigate. One of these included whether the increase in fees from September 2012 to £9,000 had an impact on the mature student's decision to engage in full-time higher education. In this study, all four participants were subject to this new fee regime and had not made any direct reference to it. However, all four students had made financial provision to enable them to become full-time undergraduate students and had put financial plans in place. Their motivation to relinquish full-time paid employment to become full-time accounting and finance undergraduate students intrigued me. This study has shown that there was no difference in motivation between the genders and that the main motivator was to acquire the necessary symbolic and cultural capital, which they perceive the degree to provide them, in order to enter the field of professional accountancy. A further important trait for these participants is their ability to imagine or visualise themselves in different roles, as students and as accountants, which leads to a transition in their positional identities.

6.2   Implications for Self and Practice

This study has provided me with a deeper insight into aspects of the mature student of which I was not previously aware. As a leader of the accounting and finance undergraduate degree programme, I will be mindful of the dangers of assuming that all students are young and lack experience of the world of work and that some are juggling competing demands of childcare with their studies. As a consequence of this research, I need to be more mindful of how flexibility is built into the programme timetable to enable all students to exercise a degree of freedom as to which classes they attend to enable them better to juggle their competing demands. The aims underpinning the rhetoric of the "Early Career Professional" needs reconsidering in the case of the mature student to enable them to reveal their experiences so that they are aware that they possess the attributes valued by employers.

The fact that the mature students in this study felt that they needed to conceal their previous professional experience on the course is of concern. In my own role, I am aware of the importance of preparing students for employability. Any students that feel they have to conceal their employability skills whilst on a degree programme is not being served well by their course. This is an area that requires further consideration by those leading and teaching programmes.

6.3   Contribution to the Field
6.3.1   Knowledge

In this section, I will draw upon the emergent themes in the previous chapter in relation to the three research questions.

The first question, considered the distinctions about the processes that are involved in making a career change decision from full-time paid employment to full-time undergraduate study. Four key contributions emerge from this research question. They are: the student trajectory in relation to Holland et al's (1998) notion of a "standard plot"; the perception of a "good student"; the role of "significant others"; the importance of establishing financial plans.

1. In articulating their story to being a mature student, all participants did so with reference to a "normal" undergraduate student journey. Thus, using Holland et al (1998), they did so against a "standard plot", they thus revealed themselves as having deviated. In a culture of widening participation as well as seeking to extend the range and type of the student journey, this study reveals that mature students identify themselves as not being "standard". More work needs to be done to help with understanding how they make sense of their own life course trajectory and why they feel that this needs to be grounded against the more traditional trajectory.

2. In the narratives, it became clear that all participants perceived themselves as "good students" despite previous findings, such as those by Howard and Davies

(2015) which revealed that one of the social risks associated with being a mature student arose from the self-perception of failing to transition from being a "non-learner" to "learner". Thus, using Holland et al's (1998) notion of "serious play" they were able to imagine themselves as "good students". A combination of their own successful study practices and at the same time a rejection of others practices they considered undesirable, revealed their self-perceptions as "good students".

3. A further contribution to knowledge is that despite each participant's ability to make the decision to become a full-time student, support from close family members has been an important factor for these students to commence full-time studies at a later stage in their lives, this includes parents, stepparents, partners and teachers, this was important for all the participants in this study. This finding adds to the way in which Holland et al's (1998) notion of figured worlds is used to reflect the ways in which individuals position themselves using the voices of others. Furthermore, it gives important insight into the importance of ensuring encouraging potential students to discuss their ideas for moving into HE with family and friends.

4. Various forms of support needs emerged from the findings. The first of these relate to financial support. All participants in this study articulated their propensity to put in place sound financial plans in order to support their full-time studies. Previous research by Tholen (2015) suggested that individuals employ cost-benefit analyses prior to taking any actions implying that mature students undertake such an exercise prior to joining university; however, this study has not revealed this the case. Furthermore, using Bourdieu's notions of symbolic, economic capital and field, led to the revelation that the key motivator for the participants, is the perception that the acquisition of symbolic capital will enable them to increase their economic capital by providing them access to the field of professional accountancy.

The second research question was "in what ways do students identify and articulate changes to their identity as they become full-time students?" Two key contributions

emerge from this research question. Firstly, the importance of participants imagining themselves differently, the relevance of this finding is shaped in relation to Holland et al's (1998) notion of "serious play". Secondly, the participants reveal how they position and reposition themselves both personally and professionally. Holland et al's (1998) notions of positional and figurative identities is used to tease out the importance and significance of this finding.

1. In articulating their stories about becoming mature students, all participants revealed that they imagined themselves as students and inhabiting other fields of employment. This related to Holland et al's (1998) notion of "serious play". Furthermore, in such imaginings two of the participants had imagined that their change would reduce their contact with existing colleagues who were undesirable. Their imaginings were therefore about both the context they were leaving as well as one they were moving towards. This is often a different context from younger "typical" students who move onto university as their education progression more naturally leads them on. A further contribution in this study is that all participants imagined themselves fitting better with a post-92 rather than a research-led university.

2. A further contribution to knowledge is the way in which the participants articulated changes in their power positions and fears about becoming a student. Previous studies such as those undertaken by O'Boyle (2015), Ecclestone et al (2010) and Baxter and Britton (2001) found that new identities could conflict with existing identities prior to engaging in higher education. Holland et al's (1998) notions of positional and figurative identities were useful in revealing how the participants became full-time students. All participants in this study revealed fears in relation to being accepted by younger students and in order to do so they avoided revealing details in relation to their positional identity.

The third research question is "how do structure and agency affect career choices of the mature undergraduate student?" A key contribution emerged from this research question: how structures enable and disable the agency of the individual.

1. A contribution to knowledge is that in some fields of employment there are hidden structures that act to hinder the progression of the individual. All the participants in this study became aware of such structures where they existed and actively sought alternatives as they became aware of them. Their narrations revealed that they were continually rethinking and changing their ideas of who they are and what they wish to do. The study reveals that for these students their past, present and future are complexly bound up at every stage of their life-course.

6.3.2 Policy

The White Paper, Higher Education: success as a knowledge economy (May 2016:53) suggests that "students from under-represented groups" often register at universities for which they are over-qualified. It also suggests that this is a result of the student lacking self-efficacy. This was found to be the case for students who are first in their families to go to university in their family. This seems to imply that high performing students would be better served at research-led universities. However, the students in this study perceive that a post-92 university is professionally and vocationally focused and better suits their need to study for an accounting and finance undergraduate degree. In this study, Susan could be considered to be in this category given that she had previously dropped out of two traditional research-led universities. However, Susan had not enrolled previously for a professionally focused degree having studied languages, so in her case registering for a professionally focused accounting and finance degree at a post-1992 university seems to have arisen from being employed within the field of finance prior to registration. In this case, the government policy appears simplistic in its verdict or not necessarily taking account of the discipline being studied. As noted in chapter five: 5.1.4, students who are first in their family to enter university are able to transition their figurative identities through the encouragement of "significant others"

to consider themselves allowed to enter the field of higher education. This study shows that this aspect should not be overlooked by government and institutional policies. The challenge is how to ensure that prospective undergraduate students have access to "significant others" outside of the family who can galvanise this transition whether they be teachers or family acquaintances. It is also clear from this study that in the case of the male participants they are strongly influenced by their friends at school and cite this is a reason for "staying on". The challenge to encourage potential students from neighbourhoods that traditionally have low participation rates in higher education seems an important factor and needs to continue in policy initiatives focused on widening participation.

Using Holland et al's (1998) notions of figurative identities and "standard plot" work needs to be done in relation to looking at how these individual's figurative identities can be reconfigured to enable them to more consciously view higher education as part of their "standard plot". In addition, to feel that being a mature student is not a deviation from a "standard plot". There are wider discourses about a lack of engagement in higher education of black, young males and the gender balance has shifted from predominantly male to female students. However, this was not a focus in this study.

6.3.3   Implications for Practice

In terms of my own practice, this study has made me reconsider how we get to know our students and this is important. At the outset, I have made clear my main motivator for this study was the lack of opportunity to get to know our accounting and finance undergraduate students with cohort sizes of over four hundred. The role of the personal tutor is designed to offer a focal figure for personal contact. However, further development of this role is needed in the light of this study particularly for mature students. My colleagues have paid particular attention to first year student induction, helping students to get to know each other and helping them settle in to university life. However, the first individual personal tutor meeting focuses on the completion of a form, which in itself does not allow the tutor to get to know the student in terms of their background. In addition, this is largely designed around the traditional young student. It

includes questions such as "have you registered with a G.P?". This study, inviting each student to tell me his or her story has demonstrated how much more we can learn about the individual student both from an academic and non-academic perspective. I would like to try this approach in the future with each of my personal tutees so that I can better understand their motivations and background, as well as what they are hoping to achieve in terms of academic and non-academic goals.

I have found that the students in this study were highly motivated individuals. Three who have since graduated achieved first class degrees. The university should seek ways in which potential students, currently outside of the field of education, are able to access university. In this study "significant" others provided the support for them undertaking this career change decision. Academics within the department should look at fostering links with adult education providers in order to promote the higher education opportunities to them, so that others like Hillary can benefit from an undergraduate degree.

There is certainly a strong argument that schools and universities need to collaborate more in order to encourage these less represented young students to continue in education. In addition, to promote the notion that if you chose to take employment straight from school, then university education can just as easily be an option later in life.

At an institutional level, there is an important issue around the employability skills that mature students bring with them that are ignored to the extent that students conceal them.

As an academic, I need to be aware that the mature student may undertake more non-financial related duties in the home, to enable their partner to provide a higher economic contribution to the household. The need to juggle these competing demands needs to be accommodated in the flexibility of the delivery of the programmes.

6.4 Critical Reflections on and Limitations of the Study

The sample in this study was opportunistic and small. Prior to undertaking the research, the four students were known to me, either through contact with them through my teaching or at other university events. I could have drawn a stratified sample, which could have incorporated students from each year of the degree and a variety of ethnic backgrounds, which could have provided different outcomes. However, the focus for this study was not on seeking particular coverage of cases but on the narratives, the criteria were simply for them to have experienced full-time employment following achievement of either level two or three qualifications as well as not engaging in either further or higher education at that point in their lives. In addition, they undertook full-time paid employment for a period of two or more years prior to reengaging in full-time education. I also restricted this study to accounting and finance undergraduate students, I could have extended this to students across other disciplines with a professional focus. The participants in this study, however, were chosen particularly to explore the field in which I work and student experiences related to the courses that I manage. I cannot claim that the findings from this study would be pertinent to health care professionals for example. A further feature of the sample that emerged from data upon analysis was that all the participants who had achieved their university entry-level qualifications at eighteen years of age had engaged in the university admissions process at that stage in their life.

It has become apparent in the interviews that most of the participants spoke more about their pre-university decisions and how they made these early choices and less about their experiences as a mature student. This may have been because anything they found difficult whilst at university they might have thought was a reflection on me as a leader so they said less about them. Although I cannot adjust or interpret results to account for this possibility, it is something that requires acknowledgement.

I am also mindful that I have interviewed only my four participants and not any other individuals who they have narrated in their stories. A much fuller study might have included a broader range of "significant" individuals connected to each participant. This

would have enabled me to present a broader perspective of each participant, however, this was not possible within the time constraints of the thesis. However, the research design created the opportunity to focus on each participant's narrative, and how they self-author which was the main aim of this study.

Other research tools could have been incorporated into this study, to both broaden the sample and gain different types of information about mature students. Section 3.6 highlighted the deliberate purpose of the small sample in this study. Other research tools such as a questionnaire would certainly offer a different type of data and perhaps allow more data that are generalizable within the university. However, this was not the primary aim of this study, which focused on narrative enquiry. The narrative enquiry has provided a two dimensional approach. One dimension, reflecting upon Cohen at al's (2010:253 quoted on page 58), case study method which I have adopted. This offers cases, which can be read and explored in the field and compared to other similar cases, phenomena and situations. The second dimension, reflecting upon Hinchman and Hinchman (2001: xvi in section 3.7) concerns the narrative enquiry. It has enabled the participants to narrate their experiences and for the interpretations which this research offers, to provide connections to meaningful events during and before their time as a mature accounting and finance undergraduate. Furthermore, reflecting on Gee (2014:19 in section 3.4) the narrative enquiry has also illustrated how each participant has portrayed events, which have unique meanings for them. Similar events could portray different meanings to other individuals, which are revealed from the employment of a narrative enquiry.

The potential for broader research, which may draw on such techniques, would certainly be welcomed to further develop the insights and issues, which this study reveals. The interview technique chosen had a minimal structure in order to allow the participants to narrate their own stories. This was important, as the decision was not to impose an interview structure, which might guide and distort their own stories. However, some participants were more fluent in articulating their stories and did so in more depth. The difference in the types of accounts that emerged from the fieldwork is not considered problematic within the framework of the methodology adapted. However, for some of

the students it may have been worth trying to get some more interview opportunities, so that they had some thinking time in between.

6.5 Implications for Further Research

As I have identified in the previous section, one of the limitations was the opportunistic nature in selecting the sample of participants in this study. In the future, it would be useful to undertake further studies, which consist of a more stratified sample. This could incorporate students at various stages of their studies and provide a more ethnically diverse sample. Without the time constraint attached to this study, a longitudinal study would provide further insights into the student journey through their three years on the degree.

For me in carrying out this study implications for my own practice as a leader that I need to create an environment for the mature student where their experiences are valued so that they no longer feel the need to hide their knowledge of the workplace. By creating an environment where these experiences are shared with the young students, will enhance the learning opportunities for both the young and mature student. Furthermore, the implications for me as a researcher are to continue further research in the field of the mature student. I have identified the need to undertake a wider range of interviews in the future with a stratified sample to see whether such a study reveals further contributions to knowledge about the mature student.

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Appendix One – Themes from Paul's Interview Transcript

Career change literature and theories	
Hodgkinson & Sparkes (1997): Career Trajectories dependent upon qualifications gained at aged 16 plus	1. So, I ended up with all grade C's. I got eight C's and ironically, I got one D in music and I was very good, not at the side of music, they were teaching this is the thing. 2. But, although I could sing relatively well and I could write songs and I could play the guitar well I did not have the grades so I got offered places but some of them were like on Foundation degrees and then I got offered a place at Salford and I was thinking do I really want to move that far away, you know?
Super's (1953, 1957, 1980) Carer Developmental Model: Trial, Establishment, Maintenance, Decline	
Levinson (1986) Age related developmental model: (based upon males) 17 – 22; 22 – 28; 28 – 33; 33 – 40; 40 – 45; 45 – 50; 50 – 55; 55 – 60; 60 - 65	1. **17 – 22: Early Adult Transition:** *the shift from pre-adulthood to early adulthood:* **A levels; bought house; full-time employment – Local Council; Student Finance Role; Police** 2. **22 – 28: Entry Life Structure:** *building and maintaining an initial mode of adult living:* **Police** 3. **28 – 33:** *Transition: reappraise and modify the entry structure to create the basis for the next stage*: **Left Police to become full-time undergraduate student.** 4. 33 – 40: Culminating Life Structure for Early Adulthood: *completing this era and realizing youthful aspirations*: **Graduated, achieved full-member status of professional body and undertaking MSc – within 12 months of graduation**.
Krumboltz (1976) Social Learning Theory Explore how genetic factors; environmental conditions, learning experiences, cognitive and emotional responses and performance skills interact.	
Krumboltz et al (2013) Happenstance Theory Recognise and incorporate chance events into career development	1. There was one lunchtime, I really can't remember the exact day it was, but it was around this time and I went outside and there were all these students protesting at the gate of the university and they were on one side and there were all these police officers on the other side and I was sitting there and I was thinking, as probably loads of people do, oh that looks so exciting, I wish I was there doing it, fighting these students. Then the Metropolitan Police had this massive recruitment drive back in 2002 2. Met university students … that influenced me to go back to the Police and what happened, I was in Australia actually, and I had been listening to all these people saying how hard their lives were and I was thinking your lives are not hard at all. But there was something was that they did not have much money. I have got loads of money I get paid loads. So I thought maybe the Police is not such a bad place to be, because it was not all bad you know. 3. I was watching the news one day the coalition (government) had come in and was

	changing stuff and I am not politically orientated but they were saying we are changing the pensions. The pensions are a big thing and they said you are going to have to do forty years instead of thirty and I was on my tenth year and I thought another thirty years you know what I mean?
	4. I was phoning my mum and she said "well why don't you go to university?" and do you know what it was as simple as that. I could not believe it.
	5. My mum is probably the biggest influence in my life… it is funny even when you are thirty and when your mum and dad say that is all right you can do it. You know you can do it.
Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) Turning Points "significant transformation of identity". • **Structural**: *determined by external structures of the institution involved e.g. end of compulsory education* • **Self-initiated**: *the individual is responsible for the transformation* • **Forced**: *by an external force e.g. redundancy*	• **S** I got a bit scared of moving away from London, because I was only eighteen and I wouldn't say I had a panic but I bought a house in London when I was eighteen with someone then and I started in the local council, Haringey Council. • **SI** I was so tired and I was thinking I really don't know what to do because I was thinking I am not sure I want to do this for another 25 years … So I took a career break and so in 2007 I left for a year.
Kasworm (2010) • Students academically competitive • Position in classroom • Identity dissonance – forming new identity;	1. I have noticed as well is the first two years I would probably be the only person speaking in class but now there's a lot more coming out you know to try and say look I am being really serious but they've only started in this third year. 2. as sort of three years have gone on the one thing I am looking forward to is actually having the status back 3. when I was Inspector for the last year everyone called me "Sir". So I had gone from having this real status to when I came here I was like a child again and that is what I found the hardest. 4. If I had said to someone at work this person's got an accounting degree straight away that would have given them the kudos so I thought I don't want to do, I don't want to disrespect any other degrees, but I don't want to do another degree that would not be the same 5. I am also really, really interested in accounting standards and harmonisation so I would like to develop that and I would ideally like in ten years students to be learning the M model 6. Well you know you cannot really get away from your past because the model I am trying to develop is environmental analysis for public sector because there may be loads of models out there but I have not really seen one directly for the public sector and I want my old colleagues to see it
Mallman and Lee (2016)	1. I was sitting in a lesson on Tuesday and the teacher said to everyone "Who enjoys accountancy?" I was the only person to put

• "learn" what other students (young) deemed acceptable and non-acceptable practice in the classroom	my hand up out of 20 people. I was thinking to myself this is just mad. Then I thought well maybe they are just a bit shy, but the bloke sitting next to me , I am not going to say his name or anything, but the bloke sitting next to me turns round and says "You don't really like it though do you, it's just something you do isn't it?"
Rich and Schachter's (2013) study: 3 characteristics that nurture the development of student identity • Care from teachers • Teachers are role models • School cultivates the whole student (involves developing the student beyond their topic of study e.g. developing confidence and research skills)	1. In the evening, I sit there and read you know an article or a journal for my own interest and enjoy it 2. I sit in my classes and I'm looking at the teachers and I try and look at them thinking to myself "Oh I'm going to use that bit of style". You know I really want to do it 3.
Britton and Baxter (1999): narrative analysis • Men focus on isolated individual self • Women in relation to others	1. P mentions **mum and/or dad – 14** occasions; **partner – 9** occasions; out of **15,753** words. 2.
McAdams and McLean (2013) • Redemption Sequences: *emotionally negative event, which the individual manages to transform into a positive outcome.*	1. I got one D in music and I was very good, not at the side of music, they were teaching this is the thing. 2. I left street duties and went into the real team and he just bullied me for about a year and it was horrible because, although, I was actually quite popular on the team but he was such a big mouth he really made my life a nightmare for a year and I was so desperate right I started studying, studying, studying so I could get off his team. Then I became a detective. 3. Then what happened was I went travelling and met all the university students and all they did was moan about everything. About university about jobs about their lives and you know what after about six months after hearing all that I was thinking maybe I've got it really good. I am getting paid a lot of money here they are telling me the things that I am thinking that I want to leave are actually unfounded what they said… That influenced me to go back to the Police and what happened … So I thought maybe the Police is not such a bad place to be, because it was not all bad you know. There was a lot of times when it was very good
Discourse Analysis	
Gee's Building Tasks Model • Significance	1. It's a bit sad we split up, but we were playing to about 100 people at the time and we were offered more and more gigs but then the drummer's brother actually killed himself and then we had all these important gigs coming up with different people coming to watch us but the DRUMMER didn't turn up so we just couldn't play 2. Then I went to a couple of other bands but it was never the same, 3. HE didn't turn up for about three gigs 4. I got one D in music and I was very good, not at the side of music they were teaching, this is the thing.

	5. I suddenly felt really sensible and thought this probably is not the right thing for me to do and my friends were all doing A levels… it wasn't just about friendships, that was a big part of it because it was safe and secure and my school was a very good school.
	6. you are not going to get this job we have already given it to S…..". It was another person in student finance and she basically said he'd been making a big fuss about getting promoted because he was about thirty, but "we have to go through this process of advertising the job" and I just thought I can't believe it. You know it was really political, and it's illegal actually. Now I know that. But she was basically telling me that the way to get promoted higher than I was, because I was still quite low down and I was only on about the second rung, and yet it was the way you sort of get in with the bosses.
	7. I won't go into it too much but a new boss came along and he was, he had done a lot of wrong things he was never in work but he was a real sort of, he was a bully to everyone. He was a real bully to the point where he was burping in my face.
• Practices	1. We started this band the three of us, but none of us could sing or play or anything, but I was doing GCSE Music at the time and so part of it was that WE HAD to do a concert at the end of the GCSE
	2. I just suddenly felt really SENSIBLE and thought this probably is not the right thing for me to do and my friends were all doing A levels.
	3. I had very strong friendships then and it made me not want to break away from that group.
	4. The teacher said to everyone "who enjoys accountancy?". I was the only person to put my hand up.
	5. You are not going to get this job we have already given it to Sam. She was basically telling me that the way to get promoted higher than I was, because I was still quite low down on a out the second rung, and yet it was the way you sort of get in with the bosses.
	6. You go to like a central London office and you do loads of tests… they are like these graduate tests, but with some other ones. Like you watch a video of a crime and then you have to answer all these questions about what happened from what colour was his coat and all that sort of thing. Then you do a maths and an English test, a written test and then they put you all in a room and you sit there. Its lunch now and then, he comes out and calls your name and if he calls your name you have failed and you go home… I got to the second half of the day. It was some other sort of test but then you went in and there were about three high up police officers and they interviewed you and they asked you what you would do in this situation

	7. They sent me back to this room again… this time they call everyone out one by one because if they tell you, you haven't got it people don't know… luckily they told me I had passed the first day… about a month's time you do like a physical test
• Identities (see identity under Holland et al)	
• Relationships	1. and I was the LEAD GUITARIST so in my band I was the real sort of BOSS
Holland's Figured Worlds	
• Agency and Identity	1. Well the Finance Office were really looked up to by the Student Finance, you know what I mean. So, if you were going for a meeting with the Finance Office, you would straighten yourself up you know, you are going to get all the posh coffee. (*This is an interesting phenomenom reproduced in many large organisations and additions to coffee such as biscuits / cakes etc*) 2. Positional Identity: home life / study practices: (My daughter) she might sit next to me and I give her a pad of paper… she will sit with the calculator and she says "come on daddy we are doing our homework". 3. One thing I am looking forward to is actually having the status back… no one called me by my first name, that was very disrespectful. I was either called "Sarge" or "Sergeant" and when I was inspector for the last year everyone called me "Sir". So I had gone from having this real status to when I came here I was like a child again.
• Serious play	1. I went outside and there were all these students protesting at the gate of the university and they were on one side and there were all these police officers on the other side and I was sitting there and I was thinking, as probably loads of people do, oh that looks so exciting, I wish I was there doing it, fighting these students.
• Standard Plot	1. I had a really good job and I had done the travelling and the last thing was the university bit.
• Artefacts	1. We were in Student Finance, but then there was the actual Finance Office. The Finance Office was really looked up to by the Student Finance… so if you were going for a meeting with the Finance Office you would straighten yourself up you know, you're going to get all the posh coffee. 2. This is wonderful, these people do not realise just how lucky they are. New computers and the building is so lovely and I went to the lecture theatres.
Bourdieu's Habitus and Cultural Capital	1.
Significant Others	1. My mum is probably the biggest influence in my life… the minute she said to me… it is funny when you are thirty and your mum and dad say that it is all right you can do it. You know you can do it. So she said why don't you think about going to university?

Appendix Two – Themes from Hillary's Interview Transcript

Career change literature and theories	
Hodgkinson & Sparkes (1997): Career Trajectories dependent upon qualifications gained at aged 16 plus	
Super's (1953, 1957, 1980) Carer Developmental Model: Trial, Establishment, Maintenance, Decline	
Levinson (1986) Age related developmental model: (based upon males) 17 – 22; 22 – 28; 28 – 33; 33 – 40; 40 – 45; 45 – 50; 50 – 55; 55 – 60; 60 - 65	
Krumboltz (1976) Social Learning Theory Explore how genetic factors; environmental conditions, learning experiences, cognitive and emotional responses and performance skills interact.	
Krumboltz et al (2013) Happenstance Theory Recognise and incorporate chance events into career development	
Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) Turning Points "significant transformation of identity". • **Structural**: *determined by external structures of the institution involved e.g. end of compulsory education* • **Self-initiated**: *the individual is responsible for the transformation* • **Forced**: *by an external force e.g. redundancy*	
Kasworm (2010) • Students academically competitive • Position in classroom • Identity dissonance – forming new identity;	
Mallman and Lee (2016) • "learn" what other students (young) deemed acceptable and non-acceptable practice in the classroom	
Rich and Schachter's (2013) study: 3 characteristics that nurture the development of student identity • Care from teachers • Teachers are role models • School cultivates the whole student (involves developing the student beyond their topic of study e.g. developing confidence and research skills)	
Britton and Baxter (1999): narrative analysis • Men focus on isolated individual self • Women in relation to others	
Discourse Analysis	
McAdams and McLean (2013) • Redemption Sequences: *emotionally negative event, which the individual manages to transform into a positive outcome.*	
Discourse Analysis	
Gee's Building Tasks Model	
• Significance	1. My father was an alcoholic so I ended up leaving college, because originally I did join college and started doing teaching when I first left school but because of the way he was I had to leave home. So what I did was, I ended up dropping out of college because I

	needed a job to pay the rent and so it kind of got left
• Practices	1. It's really made me very conscious with my children about the education side. I have literally forced them to come to university.
• Identities (see Holland et al below)	
• Relationships	
Holland's Figured Worlds	
• Agency and Identity	1. I wasn't from a family that was university educated anyway. More like the labouring type things so it wasn't expected of you it really wasn't. 2. I had always done a bit of hairdressing anyway. My aunty is a hairdresser and my uncle and I used to work in the hairdressers as a child, washing hair. So I was used to it. 3. I went back into accountancy, office work again. So I was like, kept doing these little circles. 4. My son was actually coming here and it's a bit more me. 5. What if no-one speaks to me and I am sat in the corner by myself for two years? 6. The kids keep you young don't they? Because I have always got a house full of teenagers. 7. There was a young lad, he had obviously not really struggled in his life……
• Standard Plot	
• Serious Play	
• Artefacts / practices / symbols	1. It was a scruffy office… they would come in and have a full-blown row and there were doors slamming and I would just carry on and one of the big bosses, because in Scotland they were quite posh. (Undesirable behaviour) 2. We usually meet up in the library or if we've got a 9.00 a.m. start we usually meet in the café and get a coffee or something and it's usually quite good because the same kind of people so you can work and do stuff. 3. Yes we had ledger when I first started working and we had the manual ledger for cheques because we had to write all the cheques out in the office, because it was like a proper job. 4. When we were at college our tutor used to let us go into the classroom at seven o'clock and it was open to be of use to us… we would start doing our work…
Bourdieu's Habitus and Cultural Capital – (E) Economic Capital; (S) Symbolic Capital and (C) Cultural Capital.	1. I needed a job to pay the rent (Economic E) 2. I had to get a job because I had to pay bills (E) 3. I wasn't really focusing; it was more about paying the bills (E) 4. I had to work a 24 hour shift at the weekend to pay the bills (E) 5. But where I was before I kind of got to the top of where I could go because there really was not anywhere else without some qualifications (S)

Significant Others	1. His (stepfather) family were in the legal profession and he has encouraged me and he probably has been the difference because he was like, because I have got a step-sister as well, and she went to university… he was saying "you can do it, it's not what you think".
	2. It was M my tutor there that said, "Go because you can do it… just fill in the form, it is £12.00".
	3. My mum was "do the best you can… my mum was quite supportive but it was hard… other people would go to their house and their mum was cooking their tea. I cooked the tea, because she would not get in until eight o'clock at night and sometimes she would get up at four in the morning to go to market to get fruit and veg and things

Appendix Three – Themes from Susan's Interview Transcript

Career change literature and theories	
Hodgkinson & Sparkes (1997): Career Trajectories dependent upon qualifications gained at aged 16 plus	
Super's (1953, 1957, 1980) Carer Developmental Model: Trial, Establishment, Maintenance, Decline	
Levinson (1986) Age related developmental model: (based upon males) 17 – 22; 22 – 28; 28 – 33; 33 – 40; 40 – 45; 45 – 50; 50 – 55; 55 – 60; 60 - 65	
Krumboltz (1976) Social Learning Theory Explore how genetic factors; environmental conditions, learning experiences, cognitive and emotional responses and performance skills interact.	
Krumboltz et al (2013) Happenstance Theory Recognise and incorporate chance events into career development	
Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) Turning Points "significant transformation of identity". • **Structural**: *determined by external structures of the institution involved e.g. end of compulsory education* • **Self-initiated**: *the individual is responsible for the transformation* • **Forced**: *by an external force e.g. redundancy*	
Kasworm (2010) • Students academically competitive • Position in classroom • Identity dissonance – forming new identity;	1. I think I was a bit too young in the head at the time… I was not liking the course and got really homesick. I came back home.
Mallman and Lee (2016) • "learn" what other students (young) deemed acceptable and non-acceptable practice in the classroom	
Rich and Schachter's (2013) study: 3 characteristics that nurture the development of student identity • Care from teachers • Teachers are role models • School cultivates the whole student (involves developing the student beyond their topic of study e.g. developing confidence and research skills)	
Britton and Baxter (1999): narrative analysis • Men focus on isolated individual self • Women in relation to others	
Discourse Analysis	
McAdams and McLean (2013) • Redemption Sequences: *emotionally negative event, which the individual manages to transform into a positive outcome.*	
Discourse Analysis	
Gee's Building Tasks Model • Significance	
• Practices	
• Identities	
• Relationships	
Holland's Figured Worlds	

• Agency and Identity	1.	Positional Identity: In relation to my family sort of background, education wise I am the first to go to uni.
	2.	Figurative Identity: To stay on for sixth form she (mother) had to pay a percentage of the fees and that['s why I got a job. I was paying towards my own fees. So that's why I started work at sixteen
	3.	Coming in and being sat in a class with a load of eighteen year olds that ahd just come fresh from college, it did concern me but I just seem to blend in OK. A lot of them don't know how old I am.
• Standard Plot		
• Serious Play		
• Artefacts		
Bourdieu's Habitus and Cultural Capital	1.	Economic; I had been looking at different degrees over the years but it's not just the financial aspect looked a bit, you know being able to afford to go part-time (work), but me and my partner are in a good place financially so we thought it's the right time to do it and look for a career.
Significant Others	1.	Erm, when I was at primary school my teacher told my mum to apply for an assisted place at a private school and then I got a bursary.
Structure	1.	

Appendix Four – Themes from Andrew's Interview Transcript

Career change literature and theories	
Hodgkinson & Sparkes (1997): Career Trajectories dependent upon qualifications gained at aged 16 plus	1. There was not a lot of career guidance about what I wanted to do… I did not have much guidance I did not know what I wanted to do.
Super's (1953, 1957, 1980) Carer Developmental Model: Trial, Establishment, Maintenance, Decline	
Levinson (1986) Age related developmental model: (based upon males) 17 – 22; 22 – 28; 28 – 33; 33 – 40; 40 – 45; 45 – 50; 50 – 55; 55 – 60; 60 - 65	
Krumboltz (1976) Social Learning Theory Explore how genetic factors; environmental conditions, learning experiences, cognitive and emotional responses and performance skills interact.	
Krumboltz et al (2013) Happenstance Theory Recognise and incorporate chance events into career development	
Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) Turning Points "significant transformation of identity". • **Structural**: *determined by external structures of the institution involved e.g. end of compulsory education* • **Self-initiated**: *the individual is responsible for the transformation* • **Forced**: *by an external force e.g. redundancy*	
Kasworm (2010) • Students academically competitive • Position in classroom • Identity dissonance – forming new identity;	
Mallman and Lee (2016) • "learn" what other students (young) deemed acceptable and non-acceptable practice in the classroom	
Rich and Schachter's (2013) study: 3 characteristics that nurture the development of student identity • Care from teachers • Teachers are role models • School cultivates the whole student (involves developing the student beyond their topic of study e.g. developing confidence and research skills)	
Britton and Baxter (1999): narrative analysis • Men focus on isolated individual self • Women in relation to others	
Discourse Analysis	
McAdams and McLean (2013) • Redemption Sequences: *emotionally negative event, which the individual manages to transform into a positive outcome.*	
Discourse Analysis	
Gee's Building Tasks Model • Significance	
• Practices	
• Identities	
• Relationships	1. I went to A level college anyway because all my friends were.

Holland's Figured Worlds • Agency and Identity	1. Figurative Identity: I went to A level college anyway because my friends were… my friends have already graduated now and I see like they're going on career paths… and I think seeing all of them graduating doing well, I just want that as well. 2. Positional Identity: I don't want to be stereotypical but come are really immature and they come for the social aspects… the girl who is 21 is close friends. 3. I am student rep as well. I missed the last meeting because I had work, but I messaged X (the Student Experience Tutor) and he said it was fine. 4. I don't want to be stereotypical but some are really immature and they came for the social aspects… they just come for the drinking… some in my class who don't even show and they say they have more important things to do. I am like: shouldn't uni be your number one priority?
• Standard Plot	
• Serious Play	
Bourdieu's Habitus and Cultural Capital	1. Economic vs Cultural Capital: Well I have got a job at the moment paid. But I am leaving there next month, because I am going to try and get some work experience unpaid or whatever. Maybe an accountancy from applying for an internship… the internships will give me experience so when I apply for it then… I am just trying to do stuff that goes on my C.V. 2. Economic Capital: These jobs were not a good income so then I applied to do an access course. 3. Economic – A lot of my friends have already graduated now and I see like they're going on career paths and stuff. 4.
Significant Others	1. My friend's mother she helped, because my mam isn't too, she's a bit older she is not aware of further education and stuff, but my friend's mam did a course a few years ago. She helped me look into courses that were good career prospects.