

**UNDERSTANDING THE LIVES AND LABOURS OF LONE-MOTHER
STUDENTS**

by

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Abstract

This study has explored the experiences of lone mothers and their labours as lone-mother students in Higher Education and en route to accessing Higher Education. The main aim of the study was to investigate barriers and constraints in provision of support for lone mothers wishing to study in Higher Education. The importance of education for lone parents has been well documented (Fryer, 1997; Scottish Office, 1998; Powney et al., 2000), and there has been a plethora of research undertaken on Higher Education. However, the connection between the lone mother and education has not received much attention; little is known about the support that is offered to lone mothers whilst accessing Higher Education. Research by the National Union of Students (NUS) (2009) has shown that in many ways the responsibilities of mothering and mothers have not been considered by educational institutions as many courses operate in a climate of assumption that most students are free from family obligations of providing care. Due to lack of empirical research undertaken in this area, this study adopted a qualitative ethnographic approach to investigate the lives of lone-mother students. Furthermore, the study was conducted by an international student from Pakistan who is a lone mother herself and whose experiences also form a part of this research. An ethnographic approach was adopted and developed, to enable a holistic understanding of the lone mothers' experience in Higher Education and specifically in relation to their cultural background. Hence, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were opted for to collect data.

The research revealed in-depth knowledge about the relationships that the lone mothers share with their children, extended family, friends and with studies. The data suggested the need for socio - economic support for lone mothers in Higher Education. The qualitative inquiry method used in this study allowed for an examination of the phenomenon of 'lone motherhood'. The depth, range and longitudinal nature of the data allowed to see contradictions or contrasts in the data (e.g. extrinsic/intrinsic motivations), as well as changes and developments over time (anxiety/self-esteem). The iterative approach also enabled emerging theories and concepts to develop and to be tested over time (e.g. 'modelling', 'utopian' narratives). Thus, the ethnographic approach enriched the possibilities of 'grounded' theorising, and also improved the possibilities of extending previous studies. Thus it indicates that lone-mother students'

experiences of education are complex and therefore it is argued that the study of lone-mother students should be extended to conduct further research into different aspects of lone mother students in Higher Education.

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List of Figures

Figure	Title	Page
Figure 1.1	Lone Parents with Dependent Children, 2001-2011	8

List of Tables

Table	Title	Page
Table 2.1	Methodological Paradigms	50
Table 2.2	Brief Demographic Profile of Lone-Mother Students	61
Table 2.3	Participants' Name and their Codes	62
Table 6.1	Checking the Originality of this research based on Philips and Pugh's (2005) Markers	213

List of Appendices

APPENDIX A	:	Letter to Gate Keeper
APPENDIX B	:	Recruitment Call
APPENDIX C	:	Visit Form
APPENDIX D	:	Participant Information Sheet
APPENDIX E	:	Consent Form
APPENDIX F	:	Demographic Questionnaire
APPENDIX G	:	Interview Schedule
APPENDIX H	:	Sample of Interview
APPENDIX I	:	Ethics Approval For Study
APPENDIX J	:	Permission from Prof Ian Stronach
APPENDIX K	:	Paper Publication in BERA Research Intelligence (Bibi-Nawaz, 2012).
APPENDIX L	:	Paper Publication in International Review of Qualitative Research (Bibi-Nawaz, Winter 2015) (expected date of publication)
APPENDIX M	:	Paper Publication in Qualitative Inquiry (Stronach et al., July 2013)
APPENDIX N	:	Paper Publication in International Journal of Research and Method in Education (Frankham et al., June 2013)
APPENDIX O	:	Paper Publication in International Review of Qualitative Research (Stronach et al., December 2014)

Table of Contents

Title Page	i
Abstract	ii
Acknowledgments	iv
List of Figures.....	v
List of Tables.....	v
Appendices.....	vi
Table of Content.....	vii

INTRODUCTION	1
Structure of Thesis	5
1 CHAPTER ONE: LITERATURE REVIEW	7
1.1 Introduction	7
1.2 Historical Perspectives	7
1.2.1 The ‘Lone mother’: Emerging from the Chrysalis	9
1.2.2 Changes in Demography and Social Perspectives	9
1.2.2.1 Malthus and Morality	10
1.2.2.2 Marxism	11
1.2.2.3 Max Weber	13
1.2.2.4 Murray- Moral Underclass	14
1.2.3 Valorisation of the Nuclear Family	15
1.3 Lifelong Learning	19
1.4 Higher Education	21
1.4.1 Higher Education and Consumerism	21
1.4.1.1 Introduction of Fees	23
1.4.2 Culture of Higher Education	24
1.4.3 Care-giving and Higher Education Policy	26
1.4.4 Risk	28

1.4.5 Individualisation	30
1.4.5.1 Opposite of Individualisation	31
1.4.5.2 Rational Economic Man	32
1.5 Lone Mother: Poverty, Policy and Prejudice	33
1.6 New Deal for Lone Parents	38
1.7 Lone Parents and Childcare	41
1.8 Chapter Summary	42
2 CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY	45
2.1 Introduction	45
2.2 Philosophical Standpoint	47
2.2.1 Positivism	47
2.2.2 Post-Positivism	48
2.2.3 Interpretivism	49
2.3 Journey Towards the formation of an Epistemological and Ontological stance	51
2.4 Phase One: Reflexive Interactive Interview	54
2.5 Phase Two: Pilot Study with Lone Mother Students	56
2.5.1 Aim of Pilot Study	56
2.5.2 Objectives	56
2.5.3 Data Analysis of the Pilot Study	58
2.6 Phase Three: Main Study	59
2.6.1 Recruitment of Participants	59
2.6.2 Semi-structured Interviews	63
2.6.3 Feminist Ethnography: Is there such a thing?	63
2.6.4 Data Analysis and Interpretation	64
2.7 Ethical Consideration	67
3 CHAPTER THREE: REFLEXIVITY	69
3.1 Introduction	69
3.2 Preliminary Methodology	69
3.3 Backgrounding the Self of the Researcher	72
3.4 Learning to be a Lone Mother	74
3.5 Floating Metaphors: Purity/Impurity/Contamination	76

3.6 Being a Lone Mother: Is It Just Another Lifestyle Choice?	78
3.7 Family and Support	82
3.8 Similarities and Differences in Interpretation and Approaches	84
3.9 Dilemmas of Writing Reciprocal Reflexivity	86
3.10 Some Interim Conclusions	87
3.10.1 Conclusion A	87
3.6.3 Conclusion B	87
4 CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS	90
4.1 Introduction Four Extended Cases	90
4.2 Thematic Analysis	90
4.3 Case Number 1: LMH	91
4.4 Case Number 2: LMTs	111
4.4.1 Burglary Incident	114
4.4.2 Higher Education Pedagogy and Workload	117
4.4.3 Administrative Problems	119
4.4.4 Cultural Distancing	121
4.4.5 Missing Father and New Relationship	122
4.4.6 Priorities and Time Management	124
4.4.7 Latch-Key Kids	126
4.4.8 ‘Lonely’/Single Mother Debate	127
4.5 Case Number 3: LMT	132
4.5.1 Support Network	142
4.5.2 Becoming a ‘School Failure’	143
4.6 Case Number 4: LMJW	145
4.6.1 Support Network	154
4.6.2 Support from Social Services	156
4.6.3 Social Isolation	156
5 CHAPTER FIVE: ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS PART 2	158
5.1 Introduction	158
5.2 Lone Motherhood	158
5.2.1 Hetrogeneous Category	158
5.2.2 Lone Motherhood as a Pejorative Term	162

5.2.3 Typical days	164
5.2.4 Society's Expectations and Personal Guilt	166
5.2.5 Juggling	167
5.2.5.1 Complexities of Management	169
5.2.5.2 Issues Arising in the First Couple of Months on the Course	170
5.2.6 Lone Motherhood and Culture	171
5.2.7 Lone Mothers in Paid Work or Volunteering Work	173
5.2.8 The Missing Self	173
5.3 Role of Father	175
5.4 Children	177
5.4.1 Older Children	177
5.4.2 Younger Children and Illnesses	180
5.4.3 Childcare Priorities and Course Demands	181
5.5 Higher Education	182
5.5.1 Extrinsic Motivation	182
5.5.2 Intrinsic Motivation	187
5.5.2.1 Instrumental Gains from being in HE: It's a job	189
5.5.2.2 Emancipation, a New 'Critical' Language	193
5.5.2.3 Single Mum as Feminist	195
5.6 Support	196
5.6.1 Tutors as Support Network	197
5.6.2 Financial Support	199
5.6.3 Childcare Support	201
5.6.4 Other Forms of Support	203
5.6.4.1 Counselling Services in University	203
5.6.4.2 Friends	204
5.6.5 Positive Organisational Ethos	205
5.7 Boundaries	206
5.7.1 Personal Isolation/Depression	208
6 CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS	210
6.1 Introduction	210
6.2 'New' Knowledge and 'Originality'	212

6.2.1 'Empirical' Knowledge	215
6.2.2 Grounded Theoretical Approach	215
6.2.3 Lone Motherhood Concept	215
6.2.4 Extrinsic/Intrinsic and Horizontal/Vertical Modelling	218
6.2.5 Neo-liberal World and the Role of Education	220
6.2.6 Unhappy School Days: The Theme of Redemptive Narratives	221
6.3 Future Research and Recommendations	222
6.4 Final Remarks	224
REFERENCES	226
APPENDICES	254

INTRODUCTION

This thesis is based on research that was carried out with lone-mother students in Higher Education or en route to accessing Higher Education. These women were either students at universities or on access courses leading to university. The women who agreed to take part were at various stages in their course across the spectrum.

My initial aim when starting the research was very much personal. I came to the United Kingdom to study and, being a lone mother myself, I felt the need to gain a deeper understanding of what being a lone mother means to other women and also find out their experiences of being a student at university. The purpose was also to explore the lived experiences of lone mothers on behalf of other lone mothers. My original approach was very much positivist. It was to determine childcare facilities in the universities and their availability to women as lone mothers. However, going through the literature prompted me to broaden my research parameters to include lone mothers' experiences in Higher Education (HE). It was a move away from the quantitative approach to a much more qualitative paradigm. Hence, I opened up my research circumference in order to understand the lived experiences of lone mothers in HE. Thus the aims of the study were as follows:

1. To examine lone mothers' experiences in undertaking Higher Education, paying particular attention to the relationship between personal circumstances and educational attainment.
2. To explore current provision of support for lone mothers within Higher Education.
3. To evaluate the efficacy of the UK (United Kingdom) government policies in relation to widening participation for lone mothers.

Publications suggest that lone mothers make up only 3% of students in university and they are much more likely to be out of Higher Education and in low-paid jobs, as education costs are much higher (Guardian, 2001). It is hard for lone mothers to afford the debt that Higher Education would bring them.

It's tough being a lone parent on a degree course – would you risk poverty for your family in the hope of boosting your earning power? (Callender, 2001).

The Office for National Statistics reported that of the two million lone parent families 91% are headed by women (ONS, 2014). This thesis is based on these women's experiences in Higher Education. It does not involve 'men'. Instead of making the research inclusive of male-lone-parents, I restricted myself to women only – lone mothers. The reasoning behind this was that women are mostly at the sharp end of receiving 'demonising' rhetoric from the UK government, policy makers and media (Hinton-Smith, 2012). They have often been blamed for the ills of society. According to newspapers from 1993, lone mothers were a 'social threat', 'social problem', 'wedded to welfare' – *'Do they want to Marry a Man or the State?'* (Sunday Times, 11.07.1993). These are some of the long-standing derogatory remarks made against women raising children on their own (Standing, 1993). This demonisation has continued into the 21st century:

Children raised by single mothers are twice as likely to be misbehaving as those born into traditional two-parent families. (Telegraph 15.10.2015)

Shameless single mother still won't work and claims benefits... because she refuses to juggle a job and childcare. (Daily Mail, 16.02.2015).

It was more or less the same rhetoric against women raising a child under 18, in full-time education without the help of a cohabiting partner. (None of the lone mothers included in the research were living with a cohabiting partner at the time of interview.) Lone fathers are not considered to be social problems. It is mainly 'lone mothers' and not 'lone parents'.

At the start of my MPhil transfer to the PhD programme one of the supervisors, Professor Ian Stronach, suggested doing a reflexive interview among the three of us – former supervisor, Professor Ian Stronach and myself. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and reflected on, then we discussed our reflections, more recordings of reciprocal reflexive interviews were conducted, more reflexive commentary was written down, and thus we agreed to call this kind of reflexivity 'Reciprocal Reflexivity' (see Chapter Three and Appendix L). A chapter on

reflexivity was written and it became part of this thesis. The findings from these interviews, based on six interviews, became part of the initial focus of my PhD Interview Schedule (Appendices G). All reflexive interviews brought out my experiences of being and becoming a lone mother. The chapter is an insight into managing childcare and other commitments whilst undertaking a PhD.

Looking after my child and undertaking day-to-day responsibilities ... became my routine as a 'lone mother', but this, together with no support from family and friends, started haunting me like a scary dream. (Bibi-Nawaz, 2012 diary entry).

Chapter Three on 'reciprocal reflexivity' formed part of an article (Bibi-Nawaz, S., Stronach, I., Grant, D. and Frankham, J. 'A Reflexive Auto-ethnography of Doctoral Supervision: Lone Mother, Lone Researcher.')

It has been accepted by the *International Review Qualitative Research Journal* for publication in Winter, 2015 (see Appendix L).

I have also written a short piece for British Education Research Association (BERA Research Intelligence (Appendix K) (Bibi-Nawaz, S. 2012. Doctoral Journey: An emotional roller coaster of a lone mother and a lone researcher. *BERA Research Intelligence*, 118. pp. 12).

In addition to this I have co-authored a few other publications during my PhD, as part of a Doctoral Group Workshop in the Department of Education, Community and Leisure, Liverpool John Moores University. These workshops were organised and run by Professor Ian Stronach. The workshops and papers formed (Appendix K, L and M) the base of the 'grounded theory' that I have tried to use in analysing my data. These publications are relevant to my research initiation in this thesis.

- Frankham, J., Stronach, I., Bibi-Nawaz, S., Cahill, G., Cui, V., Dymoke, K., Dung, M.T.T., Lungka, P., Mat-Som, H. and Khir, M.M. (2014) De-skilling data analysis: the virtues of dancing in the dark. *International Journal of Research and Method in Education*, 37(1), pp. 87-100

- Stronach, I., Frankham, J., Bibi-Nawaz, S., Cahill, G., Cui, V., Dymoke, K. and Khir, M.M. (2013) 'The X-Factor: Performing Reflexivity as Indeterminate Praxis'. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 19(4), pp. 288-297
- Stronach, I., Frankham, J., Bibi-Nawaz, S., Cahill, G., Cui, V., Dymoke, K., Dung, M.T.T., Lungka, P., Mat-Som, H., Khalid, K., Alshareif, O. and Abrawi, N. (2014) 'Deconstructing the Intercultural Learning of a Doctoral Group Undertaking Qualitative Research – Or How Not to Do a 'White PhD'. *International Review of Qualitative Research*, 7: 4, pp. 387-400.

Structure of the Thesis

This thesis consists of six chapters plus this introductory chapter. The chapters are briefly explained in the paragraphs below.

The Introduction is a brief outline of the thesis's structure. It also highlights some of the published journal articles.

The purpose of Chapter One is two-fold. Firstly, it sets the background and also presents literature in which lone motherhood is mainly discussed as a phenomenon but it also looks at poverty and employment issues which put it in context. The chapter also highlights some of the significant historical background of lone motherhood, unpacking lone mothers' existence and the United Kingdom government, policy makers' and media rhetoric surrounding 'lone mothers'. It conducts an in-depth exploration of the literature surrounding women in Further and Higher Education, addressing issues linked to commodification, individualism, risk and care-giving.

Chapter Two discusses some of the methodological approaches that could have been chosen to undertake this study and the journey towards the epistemological and ontological stance of this research. It outlines the rationale for 'Reflexive Interactive Interviews', a method that was used to conduct interviews between myself and the two supervisors (Phase 1 of the study), and all the procedures that were used throughout the study from Phase 1 to the final phase are explained in this chapter. The second half

of the chapter outlines the requirements that were necessary to undertake this study, such as ethical considerations. There is also a discussion on choosing ethnography as a methodological approach in the study of lone mothers in Higher Education, and the use of ‘grounded theory’ in analysing data.

Chapter Three is about ‘Reflexivity’. It contains findings from the study conducted at the very preliminary stage of my research. It begins by giving reasons for the choice of methods used at that stage. It also marks the initial, apparent differences between the two supervisors and the student (myself). It contains an in-depth discussion on ‘learning to be a lone mother’, addressing metaphors of purity/impurity and contamination, family and support network and the dilemmas of writing in a mode of reciprocal reflexivity. Throughout the chapter there are excerpts from my diary notes. These are called ‘vignettes’ as they offer insights into the story of being a lone mother and put it into a much wider context.

Chapter Four offers four extended cases of lone mothers from the study. The chapter is titled ‘Analysis and Findings’ because analysis of all the interview data happened before these cases were selected to form a chapter. These cases are the ‘real’ lives of women and it is hoped that they bring out the diversity in the group of lone mothers in this study. These four cases were selected from the total of 13 cases as they mirror the reality and the importance of giving ‘lone motherhood’ a full story and a context. The approach used in this chapter is to include the women’s detailed speech so that their story remains open to the reader. I invite the reader in this way to read the cases ‘over my shoulder’. The four extended cases included in this chapter are LMH, LMT, LMTs and LMJW. General themes began to emerge from these stories and these themes were carried forward to the next chapter, which pulls together the major themes running across all 13 participants in the research study. These themes from the data are ‘emerging’ concepts and theories.

Chapter Five is an extension of the analysis and findings but, since Chapter Four was long and extensively addressed four cases, hence the general themes running across the interview data formed a new chapter. It provides empirical findings of seven major themes about the business of being a lone mother. They comprise: the lone mother,

role of father, children, Higher Education, motivations and issues, support network, boundaries and financial issues, and they are discussed at some length. This findings chapter also brings into consideration the role of culture and the specific backgrounds of lone mothers in relation to their being a lone mother and in regard to the support that they receive in Higher Education.

Chapter Six focuses on conclusions and major contributions of this research study in the area of lone motherhood and lone mothers in Higher Education. It contains specific empirical knowledge about the various minority groups living as lone mothers and the 'horizontal' definition of lone mothers' relationship to Higher Education. Recommendations and limitations are also discussed in the chapter.

CHAPTER ONE: LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I offer the ‘lone mother’ context in the following manner:

1. A brief sketch of the historical background of lone motherhood, focusing on changes in demography.
2. Views of theorists such as Malthus, Marxist, Max Weber, Murray and more specialist sociologists.
3. Valorisation of the Nuclear Family.
4. Lifelong Learning.
5. Higher Education in relation to consumerism, care-giving, risk and individualisation.
6. Lone mothers in relation to poverty, policy and childcare.

In this chapter, I am not striving to produce a scientific definition or explanation of lone motherhood. Lone motherhood is not fixed; it is performative in nature. It is a notion suspended between poverty, childcare, employment, education, policies and state benefits. Hence, I am trying to unpack and elaborate all the various available suspensions or lines, which may help to ‘cradle’ the context of lone motherhood.

1.2 Historical Perspectives

There are two million lone parents in Britain, which makes up a quarter of all families (ONS (Office for National Statistics), 2014). Of these two million lone-parent families, 91% are headed by women (ONS, 2014).

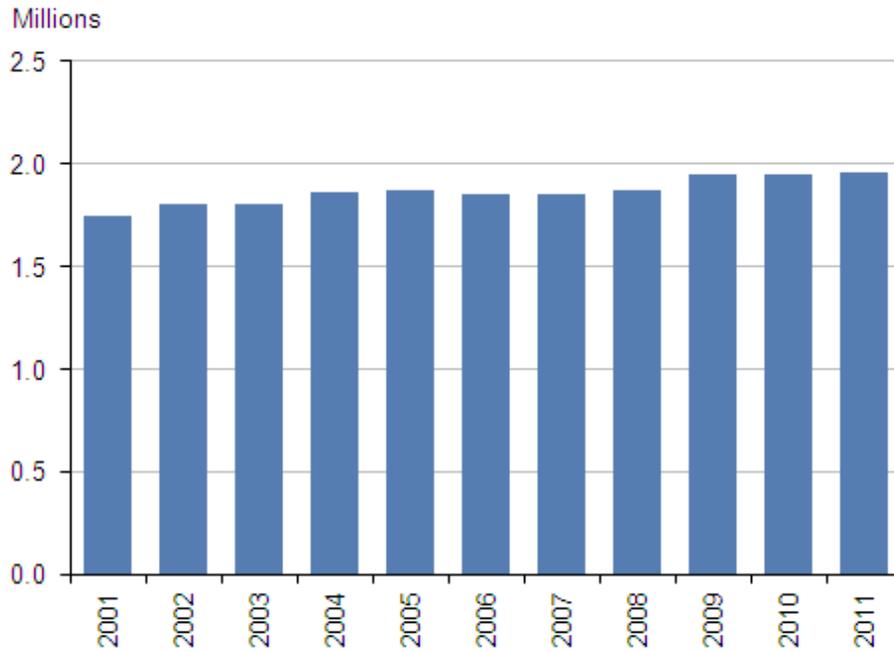


Figure 1.1: Lone parents with dependent children, 2001-2011

Source: Office for National Statistics (2012)

It was the second half of the 20th century that saw family structures changing throughout Western societies and lone parenthood becoming a recognised feature of these societies (Millar and Ridge, 2001). However, according to Morris (1990) and Kiernan, Land and Lewis (2004), lone motherhood was not a new phenomenon. Lone mothers existed at the beginning of the 1980s but were ‘hidden away’ (Kiernan, Land and Lewis, 2004, p. 5).

The press also used to report the odd case of an unmarried mother emerging from an institution to which she been sent in the early part of the 20th century when pregnancy in unmarried women was regarded by many as a mark of deviance so profound that it could only be explained by mental instability (Kiernan, Land and Lewis, 2004). From the point of view of the state, mother and child remained ‘invisible’ (Kiernan, Land and Lewis, 2004, p. 5). Until the 1970s, there was no single term to describe unmarried, divorced and widowed women with children. The social organisation of the UK was built around full-time employment in a capitalist system of production, with a specific role for the nuclear family household through the generational reproduction of the workforce (McDonald, 2000). This arrangement was predicated upon a gendered

division of labour in which the man was the principal earner and the woman had the main responsibility for domestic life (Morris, 1990; McDonald, 2000).

1.2.1 The ‘Lone Mother’: Emerging from the Chrysalis

According to Morris (1990), lone mothers became visible due to their rising numbers and due to the changes in the nature of lone motherhood – especially the increase in single mothers. The changes in the demography of family forms were a result of increasing divorces, declining first marriages, increasing numbers of people cohabiting, growing numbers of step-families and relatively high rates of teenage motherhood (Rowlingson, 2001). Since the 1970s lone-parent families have grown continuously, with accelerated growth in the 1990s but a levelling out in the most recent period. In 1971 only 8% of families with children were lone-parent families (ONS, 2009), whereas in 1998 this figure was 24% (ONS, 2011), and in 2011 it was 26%, a statistic which has remained steady for almost a decade now (DWP, 2015). According to Kiernan, Land and Lewis (1998), the rise in the number of lone mothers in the 1970s was due to the rise in divorce, whereas the increase from the 1980s onwards is associated with the growth in childbearing outside legal marriage (p. 21).

1.2.2 Changes in Demography and Sociological Perspectives

The debate surrounding the lone mother is not a new one, and it keeps appearing in new guises/forms. Kiernan, Land and Lewis (1998) trace its route from the early 1850s, where a child born outside wedlock was termed ‘illegitimate’ for statistical purposes (p. 26). However, the rise in the number of children raised by lone mothers increased between 1961-1994. The numbers increased from 5% of families headed by lone mothers in 1961 to more than 20% in the year 1994, which was considered to be a fourfold rise. According to Kiernan, Land and Lewis (1998) the increase in the number of lone-mother families during the 1970s was due to the rise in the divorce rate. However, it is believed that, from the 1980s, the increase has been due to the rise in children born outside marriage. There have been concerns surrounding the increase in the proportion of single-mother households, unemployed males, rising population and increase in poverty.

For theorists at the time, the 1980s was seen as a culture of increasing dependency but, from the early 1990s, the literature was based on refuting arguments surrounding lone mothers as primarily politically based. Murray (2003) looks back to the time of Malthus, who believed that the underserving poor threatened the stability and prosperity of society. For Malthus the poor were the 'redundant population', for Murray they were the dysfunctional 'under class', and for Marx they were 'the residuum of decent society' or 'reserve army of labour' (Baldock et al., 2007 and 2011). These theorists were concerned about the changes that were happening and what they meant for the future organisation of society. They were also concerned about the models of 'lone motherhood' on which sociologists constructed their understanding of the social world: were these models themselves time-bound and inadequate to accommodate change? (Morris, 2003, p. 3).

Concern about the rising population and the poverty people would face made many researchers think about and locate the reasons for the rising population, and this in turn resulted in many theorists presenting their views on the phenomenon.

1.2.2.1 Malthus and Morality

At the turn of the 18th century, T. R. Malthus expressed concern about the excess of births over deaths, and for him there were three causes for this rise in 'redundant population' (Malthus, 1806; reprinted 1989, p. 11): excessive marriages, rise in early marriages compared to life expectancy and the rise in the number of people who lived to marry (Morris, 1994). Malthus believed that the problems of the poor are a direct result of their giving in to their natural desires and passions, and thus the key to the eradication of poverty and disease might lie in the management and containment of these desires (Morris, 1994).

For Malthus it was important that the poor be made to recognise and accept responsibility for their circumstances and be educated out of their habit of attributing distress to the failure of society's rulers. He proposed that an ideal situation would be one in which a man retained his desire to get married but refrained from it until he was able to support both himself and his wife. He went on to recommend restrictions on support for the poor to minimise the 'inequality of circumstances' between a married and a single man, and to do nothing which might encourage a poor single man to marry (Malthus, 1989, p. 112).

According to Morris (1994), Malthus places morality as the basis of good society and thus moral failure as the cause of poverty and distress. A proper check on population size is a moral restraint specifically for the poor to stop them from going on and giving birth to their own misery:

Educated in workhouses where every vice is propagated, or bred up at home in filth and rags, and with an utter ignorance of every moral obligation (Murray, 1989, p. 112).

Morris (1994) argues that society has pushed the burden of moral failure on to an underprivileged or vulnerable population of lone mothers. They are blamed for immorality, for the rise in population and for their dependence on state benefits. Lone mothers' position in the household and society raises a number of problems for conceptions of social inclusion (Morris, 1994).

What this sketch shows is that the division between the 'deserving' and the 'underserving' poor has long been a political concern in the UK. In current debates on 'lone mothers' it surfaces still in government announcements and especially in the mainly right-wing media. For Malthus as for the *Daily Mail*, there are underserving poor who are to be regarded as 'benefit scroungers' – an accusation that turned up frequently in the empirical work in this thesis.

1.2.2.2 Marxism

By the turn of the 18th century, in England, the lower classes were seen to be outbreeding their social and moral superiors and this was considered to have harmful effects on society (Morris, 1994). By the latter half of the 19th century, Marx issued his counter-argument to the Malthusian explanation of poverty and, in doing so, he offered an account which more or less contained its own moral message (Morris, 1994):

The mechanism of capitalist production and accumulation continually adapts the number of the workers to capital's need for self-expansion. The first word of this adaptation is the creation of relative surplus population, or an industrial reserve army; the last word is the poverty of continually increasing strata of the active labour army, and the dead weight of pauperism. (Marx, 1930, p. 713)

Marx sees the excess population as playing a vital function in a capitalist society. Elasticity of capital, the availability of credit, the increase in social wealth, and the technologically enhanced productivity of labour all contribute to a fund of capital

‘urgently seeking investment’, and this is dependent on ‘great masses’ of available labour forming an industrial reserve army, so this population ‘becomes a lever promoting capital accumulation’ (Morris, 1994, p. 10).

Marxist theory does not consider poverty, unemployment and underemployment as a matter of individual morality, rather it views it in terms of the dynamics of capitalism. For Marx the moral condemnation is reserved for the treatment of the ‘lumpenproletariat’¹ (Morris, 1994, p. 10; Marx and Engels, 1975, p. 217).

Whilst Malthus looks at over-population through the lens of morality and places the stress on the poor for reproducing the poverty, Marx sees it as a capitalist benefit. However, there is a recurrent tone of morality written into Marx’s concept of childbirth and child-rearing. The Marxist view of an industrialised society’s social activity is divided into production, which is labour work in factory or farm, and reproduction, which is childbirth and household chores. Production shapes the human environment, converting raw materials into machines and finished products; reproduction is considered as the repetition of giving birth to the biological human species (Held, 1993). However, Social Feminists have rejected his polarising concept of production and reproduction (Ferguson and Folbre, 1981; Held, 1993). Held (1993) argue that ‘procreation and nurturing are production in the broadest Marxist sense, of being necessary to human life and they are increasingly productive in the capitalist sense of falling within the market’ (p. 131). Hence child-rearing is ‘just as fully form[s] of human labour’ as the production of material in factory or farm (ibid). For Held (1993) it is not necessary to place the nurturing or material reproduction as a form of labour because not everything that we humans do could be justified in terms of labour. There is a need to work on developing the conceptualisation of childbirth and child-rearing in a way that would reflect the experience of mothers or lone mothers in particular (Held, 1993).

¹ A German word, which means ‘rogue’ as well as ‘rag’. It was coined by Karl Marx to describe that layer of working class which would never achieve a sense of their ‘class consciousness’, lost to socially useful production, and therefore of no use in revolutionary struggle or an actual impediment to the realisation of a classless society.

Just as Malthus raised the individual ‘moral’ problem of overpopulation and its relationship to poverty, so too did Marx turn that idea upside down, arguing that capitalism was responsible both for the production of labour and its reproduction. The feminist critique preferred to subsume both these processes in the notion of ‘labour’ and the data in this thesis would support that – the ‘job’ of mother as well as the ‘job’ of student was prominent in the data, as we shall see.

1.2.2.3 Max Weber (1864-1920): Capitalism and Religion

Weber is often said to be in a continuous dialogue with the ghost of Karl Marx. He was very respectful of Marx’s contribution towards understanding society, agreeing with Marx that economic factors were necessary to understand the social system. However, Weber places greater emphasis on how ideas and ‘agencies’ interacted, and had consequences for the evolution of socio-cultural values (Elwell, 2005).

According to Gerth and Mills (1946), Weber’s writing can be read in the light of the protestant work ethic and the spirit of capitalism. Weber explained the relationship between ideas and material conditions as follows:

There is no pre-established correspondence between the context of an idea and the interests of those who follow from the first hour. But, in time, ideas are discredited in the face of history unless they point in the direction of conduct that various interests promote. Ideas, selected and reinterpreted from the original doctrine, do gain an affinity with the interests of certain member of special strata; if they do not gain such an affinity, they are abandoned. (Gerth and Mills, 1946, p. 63).

Weber’s work draws heavily from Marx and his theory surrounding capitalism and the Protestant ethic. It is considered to fit easily into a Marxian Scheme by some (Giddens, 1970). For Weber the Protestant ethic provided religious sanctions that fostered a spirit of rigorous discipline, encouraging men to apply themselves rationally to acquire wealth (Elwell, 2005, p. 64). Weber’s ideas, also known as theories, affect politics and policymaking. We could see how a cultural influence embedded in religion is considered a rational way of acquiring wealth. Weber’s work concentrated on the individual’s ability to achieve success in society. He argued that those who are more close to religion, particularly Protestants, could achieve wealth. As per Elwell (2005), Weber believed that we are the creators and creatures of a socio-cultural system ‘that increasingly institutionalises and rewards goal-oriented rational behaviour in pursuit

of wealth and material symbols of status' (p. 71). It means that poverty stems from people's individual deficiency, which means that Weber reiterates some of Malthus's ideas (see page 9). There is an underlying tone of morality enjoined with capitalism; it is the individual's fault for not producing enough wealth. Elwell (2005) states that Weber's morality is hidden under the cloak of religion. His view was that Protestants are considered more able to stick to the ethics of work and hence produce wealth, which makes them better than the others who are deficient. Hence, the rise of Britain, Northern Europe and United States of America in the 19th century. (This view is generally rejected these days.)

1.2.2.4 Murray – Moral Underclass

Towards the end of the 20th century, Charles Murray, a US citizen, visited the UK and made this observation:

I arrived in Britain earlier this year, a visitor from a plague area come to see whether the disease is spreading. (Murray, 1990, p. 6).

He argued that welfare dependency had encouraged the break-up of the nuclear family and established a counter-culture which devalued work and encouraged dependence and criminality. Murray applied the term 'underclass' to the poor whose behaviours were undesirable, such as illegitimacy². He went on to call illegitimacy a 'problem', concluding that 'there is a single parent from day one and the child has not been the first consideration of the parents and may indeed be regarded as a mere encumbrance' (Brown, 1990, p. 19).

He has been criticised by many British theorists for his approach and for creating a 'blame theory' (Murray et al., 1990; Walker, 1990). It is also seen by many as a feminisation of poverty. For Brown (1990), Murray may have exaggerated the rise of an 'underclass' in Britain. However, in doing so, he made single mothers scapegoats for society's ills, which failed to help sociologists or policy makers approach the

² Illegitimacy: As it happens, the legal concept of illegitimacy was abolished by the Family Law Reform Act, 1987. At least half of the children born outside marriage in 1986 had parents who were living together. In other words, the union may not have been sanctified by marriage but the children were living within a stable family, with a father (Kiernan, Land and Lewis, 2004).

serious issues raised by the growing number of one-parent families. This growth may perhaps need to be seen in the context of changes in social attitudes across wider society. For example, during the 1980s divorce was increasing and cohabitation was becoming more acceptable at almost all levels of society (Brown, 1990). The British Social Attitude Survey for 1983 shows that 23% of people considered pre-marital sex to be particularly wrong, whereas, the British Social Attitude Survey for 2012 highlights that only 11% of people were then of that opinion (Pearce, 2013).

The argument is that Murray and his like have pushed the burden of poverty on to a vulnerable population of lone mothers and, by doing so, have diverted attention from real problems surrounding UK policy that creates divisions such as social segregation by misleading people into believing that poverty is a personal, family or neighbourhood issue rather than a widespread and structural phenomenon (Walker, 1993; Royce, 2015).

Marxist and New Marxist approaches have offered a 'collectivist' approach in locating lone mothers. The Collectivist approach believes in the interests and wills of collective individuals: the interests of individuals are not the focus of this approach (Miller and Pekka, 2005). Earlier, I suggested 'trying to unpack' lone motherhood and identify the various 'suspensions' that 'cradle' it. This suspension is a line that runs on the one hand from the individual and 'moral' responsibility (e.g. Malthus, Murray) through to a more collectivist and social approach (e.g. Marx, Weber). As we have seen, this line passes through the notion of the 'lone mother' in a range of political, moral and ideological ways.

1.2.3 Valorisation of the Nuclear Family

During the 1990s lone mothers and families were increasing yet British economic social policy continued to be based on the model of the nuclear family of two parents (Lewis, 1992). The Conservative party promoted themselves as the 'party of the family', hence the traditional family was aligned with 'morality in society' and the lone-parent family was considered to be an aspect of 'moral decay' (Kember, 1997, p. 142). Based on this model, women were thought to be the primary carers as wives and men the primary earners as husbands and, even if women did work, they were broadly assumed to prefer part-time work (Lewis, 2003). At that time, functional sociologists and neo-classical economists generally favoured this model of the nuclear family as

one which addressed the needs of 'women who wanted children, biology and differential earning power' and thought that it would help to maximise the utilities of both men as husbands and women as wives (Lewis, 2003, p.109).

Researchers in the 1990s increasingly questioned this model, raising questions which involved re-thinking the concept of 'family' and asking whether there was such a thing as 'the family, either in terms of the single family form or in terms of a single experience and understanding on the part of the different family members' (Shaw, 1976, cited in Lewis, 2003 p. 109). However, policy makers largely ignored this re-thinking of 'the family', assuming that women were better off in the nuclear model and that the money entering the family was shared between the two adults.

The problem has been posited, as we have seen, in four very different ways. Perhaps the contemporary history of the 'lone mother' in relation to 'the family' will show us more.

In Western culture the 'family' is largely based around the prototype consisting of two parents and their biological children and other groups including lone-parent families, step-families, adoptive families, and, in some subcultures, 'friends as family' (May, 2010, p. 430). However, Smart (2007) and Pahl and Spencer (2004) argue that, although the boundaries between the different categories, such as family and friends, were clear at one time, they have since become cloudy due to the on-going fluid exchange of 'intimates and personal communities' (May, 2010, p. 431).

In the last 30 years, society has seen a shift both in demography and in ideology in relation to lone motherhood. However, it could be argued that governments have failed to keep pace with these changes and instead have continued to assert strongly their belief in the values of 'the family' with regard to policies (Phoenix, 1996). Literature suggests that policy makers have been unsure how to treat lone mothers, whether as workers or as mothers, reflecting the historical ambiguity of the state in the face of the increasing numbers of lone mothers in society (Lewis, 2003). Both Conservative and Labour governments struggled to accept lone parents as an important and positive family type (Millar, 2008). The increase in lone-mother families has been persistently associated with the breaking down of the traditional family form, and has tended to generate moral panic.

Lone parents were portrayed in official discourse as ‘clients, paid and unpaid providers and agents’ (Lewis, 2000, p. 37) and are still seen as ‘benefit scroungers’ (McIntosh, 1996, p. 148; Hughes and Nativel, 2005, p. 36; Dermott and Pomati, 2015, p. 7). Lone mothers are frequently constructed by society as people who ought to feel ‘bad’ for burdening taxpayers and for lacking discipline and moral fibre (Longhurst, Hodgetts and Stolte, 2012, p. 296). In addition, they are often judged negatively by other people such as ‘respectable’ middle-class mothers who live seemingly happy lives with partners/husbands (Longhurst, Hodgetts and Stolte, 2012, p. 296).

Thus, the media and policy makers have sought to depict lone-mother families in the same way as Murray has portrayed them, as a ‘disease’ and ‘plague’ (Murray, 1990 p.3) plotting to gain access to housing and other benefits (Phoenix, 1996, p. 179). On the other hand, we have researchers (Phoenix, 1996; May, 2004) who are working on understanding the family construction of lone motherhood (Hinton-Smith, 2012). They are countering the notion of ‘lone mothers as deviant and problematic’ (Phoenix, 1996 p. 176).

In the context of the UK, Sayer (2005) argues that class has been seen as an ‘obsolete category’ (p. 227). However, according to Fox (2014), popular culture often remains firmly rooted upon class stereotypes and prejudices, expressed in sentiment and morality – what people sense as ‘right’ or ‘good’ – in relation to class. Lone mothers are often regarded not just as cultural outsiders but also as members of an ‘underclass’, not just because they lack financial resources, but because of the moral sentiments they provoke, as in Murray’s term ‘illegitimacy’ is an example of the ‘underclass’. He supports his argument by highlighting that raising a family alone without the father from the very start (unmarried lone mother) is an ‘undesirable behaviour’, which creates a ‘social problem’ (Murray, 1990, p. 45).

Thus, stripped to its bare essentials, this argument states that the poor are to blame for their poverty because they choose to act in certain deviant ways or are conditioned to do so (Walker, 1990). May (2004) argues that the acts of categorisation and the labels that we attribute to things have consequences and these are real, especially in the lives of individuals. These labels can create relations of domination and are made visible in the dominant discourses. Labels also have the power of positioning people into categories and these categories can then serve the purpose of creating or recreating

‘social inequalities and boundaries between different groups of people’ (van Dijk, 1998, cited in May, 2012 p. 36). For example, the lone mother category has been derived from the ideologies of family breakdown (Bradshaw, 2003) or gender, for raising children without a live-in father (Longhurst, Hodgettes and Stolte, 2012), and also changing notions of sexuality (Phoenix, 1996; Kiernan, Land and Lewis, 1998). Leaving aside the various ideological invocations of the label, we may thus define a lone parent in the UK as ‘a parent who is not living as a married or cohabiting couple, (who) may or may not be living with others (friends or parents) and living with at least one of her or his children under 16 years or under 19 years and in full-time education’ (Bradshaw, 2003, p. 320).

Research by May (2004) on the life stories of lone mothers highlights that they construct their families in many complex ways and that their families are not necessarily best characterised by the lack of a male partner. Lone motherhood derives its meaning from a variety of relationships and contexts. The interview data from this study supports that claim.

The life stories illustrated the varying ways in which lone mothers can position themselves, consequently creating a kaleidoscope of images of lone motherhood. A lone mother can appear as a daughter doing her best to avoid the mistakes her parents made with her, as a heart-broken woman learning to live without the father of her children, as a member of a large family network who falls upon difficult times when this network shrinks, or as a woman in a male-dominated society whose lone motherhood highlights existing gender inequalities (May, 2004, p. 401).

It is easier to place lone mothers and lone motherhood under the ‘problematic’ label (McIntosh, 1996; Phoenix, 1996) or class them as ‘unemployed’ rather than ‘care givers’ (Berrington and McGowan, 2014 p. 3). However, viewing them through a more contextual lens may help to address issues such as defects in family policy and inequalities surrounding their experiences (May, 2004; Berrington and McGowan, 2014).

Despite the increase in the numbers of one-parent families, many single mothers continue to be constructed as outsiders. According to Longhurst, Hodgetts and Stolte (2012), lone mothers respond to the sometimes unspoken and taken-for-granted accusations (but other times clearly articulated) about their character that come with being a lone mother. The women tended to rhetorically position themselves as

concerned parents but also as people who questioned societal expectations regarding what lone mothers should and should not be doing (ibid). One of the participants of Longhurst, Hodgetts and Stolte's research (2012) notes: 'They treat us like we are beggars' (p. 296). This kind of labelling is found extensively in my research.

As a member of the 'underclass' some lone mothers are often treated by others in a manner that prompts them to feel 'shame' and 'guilt' (Longhurst, Hodgetts and Stolte, 2012, p. 296). Women may have been born and/or socialised into middle-class positions, but as single mothers have experienced a decline in income or in status (Cheung, 2007; OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development), 2007), or may experience a relative disadvantage in terms of educational achievement (Cotterel, von Randow and Wheldon, 2008), poor health (Avison and Davies, 2005, p. 114) and a decline in 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 1984, cited in Longhurst, Hodgetts and Stolte, 2012). Again, the connections with the empirical data in this thesis is clear. Almost all the narratives are 'underdog stories'.

Longhurst et al. (2012) examined lone mothers' experiences of Higher Education at two universities in New Zealand. They looked at the feelings of guilt and pride experienced when facing the challenges of student life (Longhurst, Hodgetts and Stolte, 2012). The feelings of guilt are felt and lived through on a daily basis by lone mothers who feel that they have to juggle various demands. For some participants in their study, decisions to undertake further study were underpinned by the realisation that they had become the breadwinner. Yakaboski's (2010) research also highlighted that for participants, financial support from the UK government acted as strong motivation to gain Higher Education, it helped to restore participants self-esteem after breakdown of their relationship, it helped in accessing a particular career path, and also providing support to lone mothers to form a positive relationship with their children so that they could be a role model for their children and could also provide a better life to them (Yakaboski, 2010).

In the UK, along with most Western countries, since the last century the norms surrounding sexuality, marriage and childbearing have changed following the liberalisation of the divorce law (1969) coupled with the subsequent rise in the divorce rate, which has resulted in an increase in the proportion of lone-mother families (Berrington and McGowan, 2014). The focus then shifted from unmarried lone

mothers to divorced lone mothers (Kiernan, Land and Lewis, 1998), and they began to be accepted as an 'alternative' family form viewed as having a 'technical problem' rather than being attached to the 'morally repugnant' label (May, 2004, p. 431).

Yet, despite the ensuing four and a half decades, this new family form of lone-parent family continues to be the group most at risk of poverty (Jenkins, 2003; Berrington and McGowan, 2014): the numbers of lone-parent families in poverty have doubled in the last 20 years (Jenkins, 2003; McKay and Gillespie, 2005; Scott, Mooney and Brown, 2005; Berrington and McGowan, 2014).

1.3 Lifelong Learning

Lifelong learning refers to the fact that education is no longer fixed to the early years of one's life but rather it is a lifelong process (Field, 2000; Harper and Hamblin, 2014). It has been highlighted as important in raising employment by policy makers (Cedefop, 2004; OECD, 2003). Women, however, are still considered those whose major responsibility is to care for children and for other dependants in the family (OECD, 2002). Due to caring responsibilities, they have to frequently take time out of paid work. Taking long breaks from paid work, or missing out on initial education can result in skill deprivation for women. As current research suggests, the effects on career and salary are very considerable (Lovejoy and Stone, 2015). It is therefore plausible to suppose that if these women wish to enter work they may require lifelong learning in order to maintain and enhance their skills (Jenkins, 2006). However, there is little evidence on lifelong learning's long-term effects on employment (Jenkins, 2004), a lack that is of considerable relevance to this cohort of 'lone mothers'.

Jenkins's research (2004) examined the effect of lifelong learning on transitions back into employment. She found that among 1,443 women around 72% made a transition into employment between 1991 and 2000. Her research added to the evidence-base on the economic effects of lifelong learning. She explained that prior education could influence women's move to work. Her sample largely consisted of mothers, and single mothers in her sample were poorly qualified. However, she also noted that respondents who engaged in learning leading to a qualification between 1991 and 2000 tended to make more rapid transitions into employment compared to those who did not achieve

a qualification in that time-span. There was no evidence in her research that higher-level qualifications (National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) equivalent levels four or five) increased the probability of obtaining work in comparison with those with other lower-level qualifications – rather, there appears to be a threshold effect of some qualifications versus none.

The rhetoric from organisations such as the OECD stressed the importance of lifelong learning in developing and regenerating the stock of human capital. There was a concern that excluded groups would not benefit from lifelong learning initiatives. Research in Scotland suggested that lifelong learning opportunities were mainly taken up by those who have had good access to education throughout their lives and that poverty remained a major barrier to participation (Scottish Office, 1998).

Even for years after the launch of the Scottish lifelong learning initiatives the Equal Opportunities Commission found that the barriers of finance, ignorance of learning provision, geography, lifestyle constraints, lack of flexibility of time and cultural prejudices continued to prevent wider participation in lifelong learning in Scotland (Powney et al., 2000).

1.4 Higher Education

This section looks at a number of factors that are related to Higher Education in general and women's accessing of it and experience in it in particular. The various sections consider issues such as consumerism, individualisation and its opposite, and the idea of the 'rational economic man', who puts 'his' needs above those of 'his' family.

1.4.1 Higher Education and Consumerism

The emergence of the UK government's lifelong learning and widening participation agenda in the 21st century has definitely resulted in an expansion of the scope of Higher Education. These policies have increased the number of students in university by providing new routes to enter Higher Education such as Access courses. The shift from the once-held notion of an elite group has been transformed to a massification of the education system (OECD, 1998; Moore et al., 2013). The rise in the numbers of students now entering university also marks an increase in the diversity of the student

population. The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) (2013) report suggests that the number of mature students has increased significantly. This change is evident in the structure, purpose and social and economic role of Higher Education (Moore et al., 2013).

UK government recruitment policy has focused on women with dependent children, also known as non-traditional students (Marandet and Wainwright, 2009; Marandet and Wainwright, 2010; Reay et al., 2002). The group is usually referred to as 'socially or educationally disadvantaged sections of the population' (Schuetze and Slowey, 2000 p. 312). It includes people from the working class, from ethnic minorities, women with children and mature students (aged over 23 or 25), who do not tend to form a uniform group compared to their younger and more traditional counterparts (Rautopuro and Vaisanen, 2001; Schuetze and Slowey, 2000). It is estimated that in 2003 around one-in-two students in Higher Education were over the age of 25 (DfES, 2003). Once placed under this group the difficulties faced as student and carer multiply, in terms of finance, childcare, etc. (Callender and Kemp, 2000; Reay et al., 2002).

Research also suggests that the rise in the non-traditional student entry in Higher Education or the massification, marketisation and corporatisation has its origin in neo-liberalism (Marandet and Wainwright, 2009). Neo-liberal politics is based on the assumption that the market could and should replace the state, and become the primary developer of value and cultural logic (Lynch, 2006). In this new kind of market, individuals are to be responsible for their own wellbeing and the role of state is to facilitate and enable both the market-led citizen and the consumer (Rutherford, 2005). The focus of this neo-liberal movement is to produce citizens who care for themselves.

Neo-liberalism has redefined elements of politics, education and public services as commercial commodities (Angus, 2004; Bonal, 2003; Rutherford, 2005, Stevenson, 1999; Marandet and Wainwright, 2009). There are two sides to that shift – one side narrates the UK government's rhetoric of broadening and expanding access to HE (Gorard et al., 2006) where it has been seen as opening-up opportunities (Beck, and Beck-Gersheim, 2002). According to Alsop and Gonzalez-Arnal (2006), there was an overall emphasis on lifelong learning in order to address the challenges of globalisation and also to increase the skilled workforce. In other words, the Labour government's agenda was to make Higher Education (HE) more inclusive and to

create a more diverse population of students (Alsop, Gonzalez-Arnal and Kilkey, 2008). On the other hand, the onus is left on individuals to:

Take them [learning opportunities] up, to aspire to greater things, to develop their own potential, to strive for economic and other benefits for themselves whilst contributing to the good of society and the economy (Leathwood and O'Connell, 2003, p. 599).

Research suggests that the rise in the number of students in university has brought along some qualitative changes which are linked to the increased commodification and marketisation of the education sector (Tett, 2006, cited in Marandet and Wainwright, 2009). A shift has been seen in university life such as the reduction in taught components and an increasing push towards self-learning as part of the curriculum. Leathwood and O'Connell (2003) highlighted the 'lexical change' from 'student' to 'learner' where the latter is considered as an active consumer of Higher Education (p. 599).

According to Slaughter and Leslie (2001) and Giroux (2002), Higher Education is being targeted for commercialisation and there is a rapid growth seen in the discourse of shifting Higher Education into enterprises that would more serve the market. It has also become normal in the international policy narratives to define education as a 'market commodity' (Grummell, Devine and Lynch, 2009, p. 10).

The above context has provided an overview of the policy background against which to begin to discuss the feminist perspectives of the impact of neo-liberal policies on women in Higher Education.

If part of our role as feminist academics is to challenge academic conventions which exclude and marginalise less powerful groups, how can we hope to do this if we continue to "play by the rules"? This is a dilemma for feminist researchers questioning and challenging dominant representations of less powerful women's lives if part of the aim of the research is to use knowledge in a way that challenges oppressions and inequalities (Standing, 1998, p. 197).

1.4.1.1 Introduction of Fees

According to Douglas et al. (2014), the rise in fees in the United Kingdom in the 21st century is similar to the rise that the USA experienced at the end of the 20th century. According to the Office for National Statistics, by the end of 2009 the USA had increased fees at public universities by 32% (Baker, 2009). In the UK the fee rise was

accompanied by a quality assurance system that gave importance to student experience. Douglas et al. (2014) found critical areas which either satisfied or dissatisfied students and these areas were based under 'teaching & learning and support services'. He earmarked critical areas as 'access', 'attentiveness', 'communication' and 'availability' (Douglas et al., 2014 p. 19). However, the results did not highlight the cultural backgrounds of the students. A critique of such 'customer satisfaction' surveys has recently been made by Frankham (2015), who argues that validity is lacking and the resulting league tables have serious unintended consequences.

1.4.2 Culture of Higher Education

Existing research on mature students is broadly divided into two with regard to why students choose to enter Higher Education. On the one hand, Osborne (2007) and suggest that, for the majority of women, the main reason to enrol in Higher Education is for 'personal development' and interest in education, while men are more likely to give instrumental reasons for returning to education. However, the research of Reay et al. (2002) identifies 'love of learning' for both men and women as being the reason for undertaking a degree (Reay et al., 2002; Reay, 2003). Alternatively, Parr's work (2000), based on a fairly small sample of mature women students, found a wide range of socially acceptable, instrumental and personal reasons behind the women's decisions to attend university. The women had remained motivated throughout to complete the course, despite facing several barriers to their progress. Similarly, Murphy and Roopchand's (2003) study, based on mature female students, found that the motivation scores of participants were high throughout their studies and the results thus suggested this was a key factor in maintaining retention amongst this group. In this thesis, the notion is developed as 'vertical' and 'horizontal' trajectories (see Chapters Five and Six).

We have seen that the constraints lie not only in the circumstances of non-traditional applicants but also in the ethos and culture of Higher Education institutions, especially those in the pre-1992 sector³. It is Higher Education's ability to deal with difference, in particular, class difference, that is problematic (Reay, 2003).

³ The binary system of HE that developed in the UK in the late 1960s today comprises 'old universities' on the one side and, on the other side, are 'new universities' dating

A perception of post-1992 universities as places that offered a chance to ‘belong’ and ‘fit in’ is also seen in the women’s accounts (Archer and Leathwood, 2003). It is thus important that the institutional culture is examined to locate the reproduction of inequalities in both participation and access of students from different social classes. Archer’s account (2003) also echoes that it might be the case that non-traditional female students have been facing disadvantage in universities where the culture of the ‘institution positions them as mothers in contrast to dominant assumptions of student learners, as young, white, middle class and male’ (2003, p. 15).

Ball, Reay and colleagues have examined how the concepts of ‘habitus’ and ‘cultural capital’ are integral to students and their families’ classed choices of school (Ball et al., 1998). Habitus has been described as ‘*the practical mastery which people possess of their situations*’ (Robins 1999, p. 1, cited in Ball et al., 2000, p. 7). Archer (2003) describes cultural capital as ‘the knowledge, language and culture, differentially accessed and processed, that guides the decision made and actions taken’ (p. 17).

According to Maguire et al. (2000, cited in Archer, 2003) middle-class students possess more social and economic knowledge resources than students from lower middle class. They argue that ‘choice is presented as natural, orderly, clear-cut, almost beyond question, very unlike the chancy, uncertain process of many working-class students’ (p. 19). In contrast, they experience greater risks and constraints framing their decision-making. For working-class applicants, the importance of ‘fitting in’ and ‘feeling comfortable’ within an institution may mean that they are discouraged from applying to ‘prestigious’ universities, which transmits a message that such places are ‘not for the likes of us’ through an institutional habitus that alienates the ‘other’ (that is, working-class) students (Archer, 2003, p.17).

The women in Reay’s research (2003) generally conveyed a powerful sense of being unimportant and marginalised in the schooling context, ‘of slipping through’ and being

from 1992 and comprising the former polytechnics, which were created in the late 1960s. Polytechnics offered more vocationally oriented courses and, compared with the universities, attract a broader base of students, including mature female returnees (Gonzalez-Arnal, 2009, p. 96).

‘unwelcome’. According to Reay (2003), they were positioned as irrelevant within schooling.

The aim of increasing access to Higher Education was that ‘everyone who has the ability to participate in Higher Education is able to do so’. Then does this mean that non-traditional students (mostly women with caring responsibilities) are not able to participate or is it that the institutions are unable to understand the needs of such disadvantaged groups? Or is it that, as Gonzalez-Arnal and Kilkey (2009) argue, that widening participation agenda has been based around the theory of ‘rational economic man’, which in other words echoes the consumer thought-process based around a masculine rationale.

Moss’s research on women in Higher Education (2004; 2006) focuses on their ‘everyday experiences’. For her, ‘material conditions’ and ‘social positions’ shape a woman’s experience in Higher Education (2004, p. 284). These are formed in everyday events where a woman comes across the daily challenges of learning in Higher Education. Her research included women from different cultural backgrounds. However, what interested her was that:

Spatial/temporal concepts highlight differences in social and spatial position, experience and personal history. Age, mother status, residence, dis/ability, colour, religion, geographical heritage, class and sexuality intersect differently with dominant normative expectations. Individual women's feelings and experiences arise in relation to their specific position and cannot readily be generalized to other women (Moss, 2004, p. 299).

With regard to Muslim women undertaking undergraduate or graduate courses, there is a dearth of research focusing on their experiences, identity and motivation in Higher Education. Research undertaken by Ahmad (2007) on Muslim women in university highlights that Higher Education has been perceived as a personal benefit in which they have not found themselves as ‘dis-locating’ from their culture and religion. The Muslim women have expressed their experience of university as helping ‘to rationalise their thoughts on their religion and culture in a positive sense’ (Ahmad, 2007, p. 65).

1.4.3 Care-giving and Higher Education Policy

The policy makers seem to neglect the difficulties of students from diverse groups, such as non-traditional students (Marandet and Wainwright, 2010). There is evidence in the research (Alsop et al., 2008) that there is a mismatch between the needs of

students with care-giving responsibilities and the ways in which care is framed within HE policy. Therefore, there is a need for the policy makers to recognise care in a way that better reflects how students experience it.

Alsop et al. (2008) suggest that, although there is some recognition of students' care-giving responsibilities, this is only in relation to the financial costs associated with such responsibilities. For example, New Labour's policy aims were driven largely by a desire to help and raise social mobility amongst women, especially those with caring commitments. As a result, policies sought to help families reconcile the temporal, as well as the financial, challenges of combining paid work and care. For many mothers, though, HE is a gateway (back in to) to the labour market, and/or a better position within it.

Feminist researchers understand the issues around the responsibilities involved in care-giving that students' lives are challenging. However, in contrast, the policy makers' 'policy lens' on care is 'narrow and economic', especially if viewed from a feminist conceptualisation of care. For feminists, care-giving is multi-dimensional, requiring an understanding of how care-giving is practised and the cost that it entails (Lewis, 2003). This will be illustrated in the case studies (see Chapters Four and Five).

According to Datta et al. (2006) care is feminised work, associated with ideals attributed to femininity. Their care-giving responsibilities position women as individuals-in-relation to the moral and emotional context in which women's agency is located (Duncan and Edwards, 1997; England 2003). Although care is considered central to feminism, however, it is still regarded as 'ambiguous and contested' (Lewis 2000, p. 284). For example, for Williams (2001) the meaning and scope of care has shifted over time. In the 1970s, it was considered as labour performed by women within the domestic sphere. In the 1980s there was a shift to an 'ethical or moral paradigm, which challenged the notion of care as women's exploited labour, emphasising women's capacity to care as a quality that marked out their (for some, essential) difference and to be celebrated' (Alsop et al., 2008).

Research undertaken by Marandet and Wainwright (2010) on the experiences of mature student carers demonstrates how decisions around whether or not to enter and remain in HE are influenced by the demands of their caring role. For these mature student carers, both the financial aspect and the time required for studies were

necessary elements to consider before a decision was made to embark on studies or not.

Kilkey and Page (2001) and Alsop and Gonzalez-Arnal (2006) outlined the need for these students to know timetables and other details about their courses. They also highlighted problems of accessibility to certain courses and student services in terms of geography and timing (Reay, 2003; Davies and Williams, 2001; Davies et al., 2002; Sperling, 1997; Edwards, 1997).

Care-giving responsibilities for child and adult are recognised somewhat within the student financing system. However, the childcare grant could only be used against 'prescribed' childcare (Callender and Kemp, 2000). Informal care, which is widely used by most students with children, is not recognised by policy makers and hence the costs paid to family and friends by the parents are considered ineligible (Callender and Kemp, 2000; Alsop and Gonzalez-Arnal, 2006). In addition, part-time students are not eligible for financial support for care. Finally, the support is either means-tested or discretionary.

1.4.4 Risk

Some research has been undertaken on the lives of women currently undertaking Higher Education. In particular this has focused on mature women students (Reay, 2003; Lister, 2003; Reay et al., 2002; Murphy and Roopchand, 2003; Parr, 2000; Archer et al., 2003). The studies on mature women students found that, for many working-class groups and low socio-economic groups, the participation in and transition to Higher Education was expensive. Mature women faced multiple difficulties in meeting their financial and personal costs (Archer et al., 2002). Reay's study (2002) on working-class women accessing Higher Education from Further Education identified the risks and costs involved in their transition into this Higher Education. More than 50% of her participants could not complete this transition, reporting that they could not manage due to the limited resources and support available to them. Archer et al. (2003) also suggested that 'risk', 'cost' and 'benefits' are not equal for all social groups. Across social classes the balance between risk and cost, when set against the potential benefits, were not equally distributed. This often results in working-class women facing greater risks and costs when compared to the rewards achieved. For example, the balance between the cost benefits of undertaking Higher

Education has not been as lucrative for working-class students compared to those from higher social classes (Archer et al., 2003).

Research suggests that students base their decision on whether to participate in Higher Education or not on debt aversion, choice of institution and course. Students who are found to be most in debt are women, students with family responsibilities, lone mothers, mature students and those from a working-class background. The students from a higher social class and from the independent education sector are the least likely to be in debt (Callender, 2003).

Research findings differ on the success of the recent widening participation agenda and its success in widening inclusion of lower economic groups. Callender (2002) and Archer et al. (2003) suggested that the 1998 student loans' provision did not anticipate the effect that student loans would have on poorer groups. Callender's (2002) research, based on a major survey of students' income and expenditure, also explored the effects of student loans. She found lone parents to be the most financially vulnerable group at university, with nearly all of them taking out student loans, while only three-quarters of the other students took out loans. The negative effects of taking out a student loan led to one in three students thinking about dropping-out of university, with many also stating the need to cut back on most of the basics of life (Callender, 2002).

Hutchings (2015) concludes that 1998 changes to the funding system had very negative effects on students from lower social-class groups, who were more likely to take term-time employment, which negatively affected their studies.

Callender argues that student funding in the past largely benefited the middle classes, in that they were the main people to enter Higher Education. The new arrangements can then be seen as progressive in that the public subsidy to those who are better off is reduced. However, she points out that, despite the increased numbers in Higher Education, the proportion from lower social-class groups has hardly increased. As a result, the proportion of funding going to the middle classes remains high, even though more of the costs have been shifted from the government to the student. Crucially, the effect of the Labour government's policy is that 'the financial burden is far greater for low-income students than for high-income students' (Callender, 2001, p. 9).

1.4.5 Individualisation

Currently there are over two million students participating in Higher Education in the UK (Piachaud, 2012). The key feature of this ‘massification’ of education in universities enabled an increase in the participation of women. According to Langa, Rosado and David (2006; see also NUS, 2009), women now constitute 53% of all undergraduates in Higher Education. These women represent various categories of all social-class groupings entering Higher Education and thus also include those women who have been described as socially excluded in terms of employment, such as lone mothers and older women. Unfortunately, information on the exact number of student parents is unknown, as universities and relevant national bodies in the UK are not required to collect this information (Ross et al., 2002; NUS, 2009).

I now look at the macro discourse surrounding globalisation, marketisation and consumerism and consider what it means at micro level for ‘learners’, especially women with caring responsibilities. According to Gonzalez-Arnal (2009), this current discourse means ‘individualisation’. For Beck and Beck-Gersheim (2002), individualisation implies that individuals are motivated by the satisfaction of their own interest, and for Reay (2003) it is the responsibility of the individual to deal with change and to transform themselves. For Lewis and Bennett (2003, p. 123), it is ‘the duty of all adults to provide more for themselves’.

Gonzalez-Arnal and Kilkey (2009) explain policy contradiction between the desire on the one hand to make HE accessible to lower social-class groups and on the other to shift the burden for paying for Higher Education from government to the individual. They explain that based on the 2006-2007 rates (fees plus maintenance) a degree has become very expensive. If a student lived at home and paid maximum fees and also took out a maximum maintenance loan, then he or she ended up with £18,915 worth of debt and if that student received a grant covering her/his full maintenance, then the student was expected to pay back £15,315 of that debt (Gonzalez-Arnal and Kilkey, 2009).

The fee increase in 2012 accompanied by a system of student loans meant that students would end up with greater liabilities than earlier, hence the Coalition government seems to have changed the goal from ‘asset-based welfare’ to ‘asset-based liability’ (Piachaud, 2012, p. 98).

1.4.5.1 Opposite of Individualisation

Researchers (Reay, 2003; Archer and Leathwood, 2003) have suggested that for women students in their research 'I' was combined with other concerns such as motherhood, instead of individualistic reasons for opting for a degree. In response to pressures, Archer and Leathwood's (2003) women students drew on a motivational discourse which justified participation in terms of doing it for their family. As we will see, 'doing it for the family' was a major aspect of the 'vertical' motivation. It is considered as a kind of altruistic 'modelling'.

According to Bauman (2002, p. xviii), 'the other side of individualisation seems to be the corrosion and slow disintegration of citizenship'. However, in Reay's research (2003), working-class women were not caught up in a 'solitary confinement of the ego'; they were committed to the collective 'economic good' (p. 306).

Similar results were found in Reay's (2003) sample, where women in her study dealt with the feelings of guilt and being selfish by positioning them within a discourse of responsibility. Their discourse articulated the responsibility of good parents who are positively engaged in studies that would help their children achieve Higher Education. They saw themselves as passing on their education to their children in a variety of ways (Reay, 2003). In particular they saw themselves as role models for their children. For these women, going back to their studies is combined with helping children become 'better'. This motivational discourse of 'doing it for the family' also needs to be contextualised within wider educational policy initiatives (Reay, 2003).

Giddens (1991) sees individualism as a shift to diversification of lifestyle, which for Beck (1992) has led to a 'loosening of attachment to social-class identities' (p. 5). In response to the increase in new uncertainties, risks and opportunities of late modernity, collective identities have weakened (Giddens, 1991). Thus, Giddens (1991) and Beck (1992) both suggest individualisation is replacing older traditional social relationships. An example of this can be found in Reay's research (2003) where five women from the sample failed to make the transition to Higher Education as they found the move too risky to take. Thus, the problems of the society are lessened politically by making them the individual's failure, and the blame for a social crisis appears to have an individual origin (Beck, 1992, cited in Reay, 2003).

1.4.5.2 Rational Economic Man

The Rational Economic Man model is based around the assumption that ‘individuals, as separate economic agents whose “preferences” or “tastes” are already given and do not change, make cost-benefit type analyses in order to maximise their utility’ (Duncan and Edwards, 1997, p. 32-33). This model has its roots in individualism, which means that a person’s self-needs and interests are the main motives behind her/his actions and her/his social, familial and relational networks are invisible or are in abstraction (Duncan and Edwards, 1997).

According to Gonzalez-Arnal (2009), the economic rationale underpinning the model, where the individual makes a decision surrounding the economic outcomes fits in well with student funding policies. Students are to see and gain Higher Education as an economic advantage and thus wear instrumental goggles and cap whilst entering Higher Education. DfES (2003c) statistics highlight that:

Graduates are more likely to be in work and less likely to be unemployed. On average, they earn 50 per cent more than non-graduates and over a lifetime, graduates earn £120,000 more than someone who gets out to work having got two A-Levels (DfES, 2003c, p. 7, cited in Gonzalez-Arnal and Kilkey, 2009).

Such a prediction, however, looks backwards, rather than forwards. The value of a degree in conditions of HE massification and troubled economic circumstances, not to mention student debt repayments, is likely to be very different than it has been in the past. The model is criticised for not taking into account the experiences of women, as they have not been considered relevant for that model of economics. It ignores the realm of the feminine sphere, household work, children and other dependants, and constructs the economic individual as an independent being without dependants.

The Rational Economic Man of neo-liberal economics, often referred to as the Standard Model, especially since the Great Recession, had Economics unable to explain what went wrong. It is now replaced, rhetorically at least, by a Behavioural Economics, in a belated attempt to take account of how human beings actually behave (Stronach et al., 2014).

1.5 Lone Mother: Poverty, Policy and Prejudice

Statistics for 2013-2014 reveal that 3.7 million children live in poverty; that is, about nine children out of a class of 30 children are living in poverty, or around 28% of children (DWP, 2015). According to Millar and Ridge (2001), the proportion of children in poverty varies substantially depending on circumstances – whether in a two- or one-parent family, whether the parent(s) is/are in employment, by size of family, by ethnic group, and by type of housing.

Poverty plays a major role in a capitalist society, as commentators since Malthus and Marx have noted. Even the definition has metamorphosed in a manner which renders the calculation of a poverty line – below which people are poor and above which people are not poor – both inconclusive and unattainable. Poverty has not been measured in relation to human needs, but against a background of a limitless potential to produce and sell (Stitt, 1994). According to Seabrook (1985), it was the product of the relationship between money and both social and psychological structures in a capitalist sphere. Karl Marx reinforced this argument through his definition of needs (1946, cited in Stitt, 1994, p. 78):

A noticeable increase in wages presupposes a rapid growth of productive capital... [this] being about an equally rapid growth of wealth, luxury, social needs and social enjoyments. Thus, in comparison with the state of development of society in general, although the enjoyments of the worker have risen, the social satisfaction that they give has fallen in comparison with the increased enjoyments of the capitalists, which are inaccessible to the worker (the law of increasing misery). Our needs and enjoyments spring from society; we measure them therefore by society and not by the objects of their satisfaction. Because they are of a social nature, they are of a relative nature...

Current controversy (2015) continues with political parties adopting different criteria and making contradictory claims. However, there are proxy indicators of such poverty, such as the great rise in the number of food banks.

Trussell Trust statistics show that use of their food banks has grown each year since 2003/04 – the earliest year for which we have data. However, the number of food banks also increased during this period: the Trust operated two foodbanks in 2003/04, compared with 445 in 2014/15. This means more people now have a local food bank, while there's greater public awareness of the help on offer. (BBC News, 22.04.2015).

The Trussell Trust (2015) has an online data collection system, and food banks enter their data into it. The updated statistics on the Trust's website show that, in 2011, 128,697 people received three days' emergency food whereas the numbers are currently (2015) 1,084,604.

The first research-based attempt to define poverty in the UK was made in 1901 in a study by Rowntree in York which managed to define poverty (Rowntree, 2001), estimate the numbers of people living in poverty and also conclude that larger families were more likely to be poorer in terms of income, as well as at increased risk of living in poor conditions (Stitt, 1994; Piachaud, 2012). Research conducted by Booth on London (1897) and Rowntree on York (1899) found that the fundamental cause behind the rise in poverty was not based on individual laziness and wasteful expenditure, which was considered to be the cause at the time, it was instead located within the 'socio-economic system' - including the insufficient income levels (cited in Stitt, 1994). Thus, it was realised that it was a social problem, which required political action (Stitt, 1994). Rowntree's survey became '...the driving force(s) of the Liberal reforms' (Bruce 1961, p. 146).

Between 1908 and 1911, the Old Age Pension Act, National Insurance Act and the National Health Insurance Act were introduced as an attempt to abolish the concept of a blind individualism which blamed the poor for their poverty. However, as stressed by Winston Churchill in 1909:

Nothing in our plans will relieve people from the need of making every exertion to help themselves, but, on the contrary, we consider that we shall greatly stimulate their effort by giving them for the first time, a practical assurance that those efforts will be crowned with success (De Schweinitz, 1943, p. 208, cited in Stitt, 1994, p. 109).

The picture changed drastically and the entire system (social security) almost fell apart after the First World War, caused by rising unemployment and the many people who were unemployed for more than a year, which forced the cabinet in 1934 to launch the Unemployment Assistance Act, which organised the first structured system of relief. It argued that 15s (shillings) was not adequate for the living standard of a man with a family. It was followed by the National Assistance Act in 1948, very much based on the rise in inflation since 1938 and hence suggesting a need to raise benefit levels. Throughout the early 1950s not much change was seen in raising benefits for the poor,

nor was there ‘any open analysis of the appropriateness of the existing scale rates’ (Stitt, 1994, p. 109). Up until the 1970s, not much change was seen in the poverty-line benefits, and assessment rates remained based on the 1930s and 1940s system of poverty-line benefits. However, during Margaret Thatcher’s period of government (1979-90), it grew worse. The number of children in poverty rose from 13% to 27% (Piachaud, 2012). The rise was due to a sharp increase in unemployment during a period when the numbers of children living with lone parents were rising, income distribution was becoming more unequal and social benefits for children were in decline (Piachaud, 2012). The Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) (2004) suggested that lone parents had been and still were associated with larger families, people with disabilities and ethnic minorities, all of which predispose poverty. From 1997 when the new Labour government was elected, eradicating child poverty became a major construct. In 1999, Tony Blair announced the goal of abolishing child poverty within a generation, a goal that was echoed in New Labour’s policy documents and reports. For example:

The Government believes that everyone should have the opportunity to achieve their potential... Our aim is to end the injustice which holds people back and prevents them from making the most of themselves, That means making sure that all children, whatever their background and wherever they live, get a first class education, giving them the tools they will need to succeed in the adult world. And it means making sure that children can live and play in clean, safe environments, and that the community in which they live is thriving and supportive. Put simply, our goal is to end child poverty in 20 years (DWP, 1999, p. 1).

Poverty among children did fall from 28% to 11% between 1997 and 2010 (Piachaud, 2012). For lone-parent families the poverty rates fell from 28% in 1997 to 11% in 2008/09 and the after-housing poverty rate fell from 61% to 49% (Piachaud, 2012). However, the target of reducing poverty by half was not met. Recent evidence suggests that poverty among children fell by one-quarter only, which was not in accord with New Labour policy objectives (IFS, 2011). What we do now know is that children with single parents are at severe risk of poverty and more than half (55%) are poor after taking into account the housing cost while 30% are poor regardless of housing costs (Millar and Ridge, 2001). The risk of poverty is measured on the bases of household income before and after housing costs (which uses 60% of median income) (Gardiner and Millar, 2006). On this reading, current policy (2010-15) makes it likely that child poverty will continue to rise.

The Labour government adopted a multi-dimensional approach to tackle child poverty by bringing in measures to try to ensure a decent family income. It also developed schemes to promote employment as the primary way out of poverty for families with children, and they wanted to provide a high-quality education system for all children and young people. They developed special interventions to support the shift from school into work and to support young mothers. Finally, they pursued framing strategic partnerships with the voluntary and community sectors, which would support innovation and good practice (Piachaud, 2012).

Research findings have suggested that moving into paid work is not an easy or straightforward route out of poverty for lone-mother families (Millar and Ridge, 2001 and 2008). Millar and Ridge argued that, if placed in the context of wider practical impacts of lone mothers engaging in paid employment outside the home, the financial gains compared to being on income support were relatively low, and even from the perceptions of the family members there was no clear agreement that work actually made them better off financially than remaining on income support. Jenkins and Rigg (2001) argued that lone parents and their children, along with pensioners, were more likely to experience long spells of poverty compared to working-age-couple households. Stitt (1994) also found that single mothers in poverty are much more visible. Lone mothers' general standards of living are unfavourable compared to the two-parent family. They experience a higher risk of poverty, are less likely to have their own house, are more likely to be living in inferior accommodation, and their children are more likely to be taken into statutory care and to experience educational problems. (Stitt 1994). Whilst examining the risks of poverty and the exit and re-entry into poverty, Jenkins and Rigg also found that lone parents are more likely to have a 'low poverty exit' and 'relatively high poverty re-entry rates' (Jenkins and Rigg, 2001 p. 52). In short, they are more likely to stay poor for a longer period and they may be in poverty more often than the average working-age couple (Jenkins and Rigg, 2001; Jenkins, 2011). Jenkins (2008, p. 2) has used a 'rubber band' metaphor to describe the changes that income and poverty bring to a household, as evidenced by household surveys:

Each person's income fluctuates about a relatively stable long-term average. This value is tethered on the income scale to which people are attached by a rubber band. They may move away from this tether from one year to the next, but not too far because of the band holding them. And they

tend to rebound towards and around the tether over a period of several years (Jenkins, 2008, p. 2).

Much evidence through contemporary research on lone-mother families and their susceptibility to take the risk of poverty suggests that lone-mother families have a relatively high chance of experiencing persistent and severe poverty (Scott, Mooney and Brown, 2005; Jenkins and Riggs, 2001; Rowlingson and May, 2005; Vincent, Braun and Ball, 2010). For Ridge and Millar (2011), lone mothers are on the low-income tether in the UK. They are at a high risk of poverty compared to other families with children (Ridge and Millar, 2011). They are more likely to re-enter poverty and less likely to exit poverty (Jenkins and Rigg, 2001). Thus, the evidence suggests that there are fewer chances to achieve upward social mobility across the income distribution and hence the families and individuals who are overall the most poor people have less chance to improve themselves and vice versa. However, Jenkins goes on to argue that this could change dramatically over time, since ‘rubber bands will break if stretched too far by “shocks”, leading to significant changes in relative income position’ (Jenkins, 2008, p. 3).

As a sub-group, young unmarried lone mothers are more likely to be already living in poverty, or near poverty, at the time of becoming lone mothers (Rowlingson and McKay, 2005). The majority of women become lone mothers either due to the breakdown of marriage or cohabitation and thus they not only lose the earnings of their partners but also lose their own income due to traumatic family change (Ridge and Millar, 2011). Gardiner and Millar’s (2006) research on people who manage to avoid poverty used data from 2000/1 family households. They found out that of 23% of UK employees who are low paid only 14% are poor and so the other 86% somehow manage to avoid poverty. For their research purposes, they included the income of other adults in the household, which had been previously ignored in the literature (Gardiner and Millar, 2006). Lone mothers who make up 6% of all low-paid women are at high risk of poverty due to their short work hours. However, they avoid poverty because of tax credits and means-tested benefits (Gardiner and Millar, 2006). In research by Ridge and Millar (2011) on lone mothers in employment they found a great reliance on tax credits (brought in by New Labour), which were a necessity to make up their low wages, which was seen as ‘double-edged’ (Ridge and Millar, 2006, p. 95). Tax credits were ‘unreliable and insecure’ and the women were not clear about

the situation themselves (Jenkins, 2008, p. 2). Even child-support payments were not reliable, and for these women life resembled the 'rubber band' of poverty dynamics, where income was not enough to stretch very far and thus these lone mothers received small shocks in their income and their families were thus made vulnerable (Ridge and Millar, 2005, p. 95). Then, during the coalition government's tenure, many families had their tax credit entitlement withdrawn. That diversity and uncertainty of financial support is reflected in the case studies in this thesis.

As noted, research suggests that New Labour was only one-quarter of the way to achieving its goal of eradicating child poverty. However, there is clear evidence that the resources channelled to lower-income families have been largely spent on children and have reduced financial stress (Stewart, 2009). Research by the Institute for Fiscal Studies (2011) suggested that child poverty would increase by around 300,000 by 2013-2014, driven largely by cuts in benefits and tax credits by the coalition government. The Child Poverty Action Group (2015) suggests that in 2013-2014 3.7 million children were living in poverty. The prospects for child poverty look bleak.

1.6 New Deal for Lone Parents

The 'New Deal' was a government programme introduced in 1997 regulated through the DWP (Department of Work and Pensions) and it became a key part of the New Labour agenda to encourage lone mothers out of the 'stay at home and care for their children' mentality by highlighting the alternative of work as a means of providing for themselves (Millar, 2000). The New Deal for lone parents was initially introduced as a prototype in a few areas across Britain. In 1998, it was spread throughout the UK (Hales et al., 2000). It was seen as the first time, post-war, that lone mothers were actively encouraged to take up work and were being offered advice and support to access it, and, as such, the New Deal for lone parents was clearly located in the overall welfare reform policy of New Labour (Millar, 2000). It was part of a range of the government's New Scheme, initially targeted at four key groups: young people, people with disabilities, long-term unemployed people, and lone parents with school-age children (Smith and Sparkes, 2008). What became evident in the scheme was that lone parents as a group received less financial support compared to other groups in the

scheme, especially less than the New Deal for 18-24 year olds, although lone parents were a much larger group (MacLeavy, 2007).

The New Deal offered lone parents advice on benefits and work opportunities and if required they were placed on Employment Service training schemes. It provided help for childcare costs whilst they were looking for employment or on a short course. The role of the personal adviser was to provide mentoring, support, and provide information on employment services. However, feminists (Millar, 2000; Smith and Sparkes, 2008) considered that the New Deal for lone parents had not been well resourced and that it offered very few options. Firstly, as mentioned above, the funding allocation did not match the numbers in the group, and, secondly, the scheme was voluntary. Thirdly, there were no explicit training options available to make lone mothers work-ready, as was done for other groups like young unemployed and long-term unemployed. Finally, there were no subsidies offered to employers to encourage them to take on a lone parent (Millar, 2000, p. 337).

As is clear, studies have shown that, whilst lone parents had positive attitudes towards attending the scheme, they were however very fearful and sceptical about the possibility of taking up a job after the scheme (Finch et al., 1999). Lone parents displayed a negative attitude towards the possibility of taking up work after the scheme (Millar, 2000). They thought that either it would not be appropriate for their needs or that they would be forced to take any job, even though they might not want to. In addition, based on past strong negative images of lone-parent families by the 'think tanks', lone parents were found to be wary of getting involved in the scheme (Millar, 2000, p. 339).

Research undertaken by Ray et al. (2010) suggested that moving into work did not mean the disappearance of financial strain. The respondents typically described 'struggling to get by', or just 'keeping their head above water' (Ray et al., 2010, p. 2). Millar and Ridge's research (2009) on lone mothers moving out of income support and joining paid work found that in general lone mothers take-up of employment had a positive effect on their financial situation compared to being on income support. However, for most of the lone mothers, the income from being in work was still relatively low and there was no clear agreement by the lone mothers' family members that they were actually 'better off' in work. Research from Millar and Ridge (2006,

2007, 2008) disputed the claim that paid work was the solution to lone-parent family poverty, finding that financial gains were often limited, especially when placed in the context of the wider practical impacts of lone mothers engaging in paid employment outside the home (Millar, 2006; Ridge, 2007; Millar and Ridge, 2008).

Between 1991 and 2000 it was more likely for lone mothers with children aged four years plus to return to work compared to those with very young children (aged two or under). The presence of younger children, according to Millar and Ridge (2008) appeared to slow down lone mothers' return to work, while larger numbers of children were also usually associated with a lower probability of being in work. Millar and Ridge's research concluded that 'work and care are two sides of the same coin' (2009, p. 109) and hence they suggested that with the help of social relationships both sides of the coin could be managed. For example, social relationships at work might help lone mothers to negotiate some flexibility in working arrangements when this was required, for example if children were ill, or during the school holidays (ibid.). Similarly, there were cases where lone mothers were bullied at work or where the working environment was not very flexible and the lack of practical support or empathy from colleagues prompted them to leave that job. Ridge's (2007) research also found that children's experiences of care were not static – they changed over time, as did their needs, especially their social needs. However, for the children, the central relationship of care was with the mother. Within the lone-mother households children tended to develop quite close relationships with their mothers, in terms of support and care (Ridge, 2007). It was also noteworthy that where mothers were in employment this led to a reduction in family time. Thus, despite the perceived material benefits, being employed could also have a negative impact on a child's experience. In Millar and Ridge's research on working mothers (2009), children often complained and were 'resistant' towards the 'formal childcare provision' which involved extended hours of after-school clubs or morning clubs for children (p. 113). They preferred 'being at home and held the view that clubs were boring and unsuitable for them' (p. 113). Land (2002) also found that respondents in her research preferred informal care, offered by family and friends, established on trust, compared to having to use formal care. Thus, the extent to which a lone mother was able to achieve flexibility at work depended on the informal social relationships at and outside work (Millar and Ridge, 2009). All these themes will appear in this research.

The work of Yeandle et al. (2006) emphasised that employers needed to be more care-friendly (p. 5) in practice and for this to happen required cultural change, as well as good communications and flexibility within the organisation. If lone mothers were pushed into employment before they and their families were ready, the result was more likely to be repeated moves between unsuitable jobs and benefits rather than sustainable employment and wellbeing in work (Millar and Ridge, 2009).

Recent debates around the ‘problem’ of welfare dependency and the government’s plan for tackling it, through making receipt of welfare benefits conditional, on a (non-negotiable circumstance) that recipients were actively seeking work or taking steps to improve their employment prospects, have been the subject of research. Standing (2001) viewed it as ‘behavioural conditionality’ being attached to welfare benefits on services which are given on condition that the recipient behaves in a particular way and/or adheres to predefined rules (Standing, 2001, p. 27). In later research, Standing claims that the ‘image of unemployment as one of a struggle for dignity against the trials of involuntary unemployment has shifted towards a rhetoric of voluntary unemployment, dependency and scrounging’ (Standing, 2002, p. 156). Orloff (2006) sees the shift in policies from providing support to lone mothers to compelling them to obtain paid work as a goodbye to maternalism.

Research suggests (Millar, 2008) that the Labour government came under attack for its ‘liberal’ welfare state (p. 3). The relationship between the labour market and social security established by the government was seen as ‘too passive, too generous and too encouraging of long-term dependency’ (Millar, 2008, p. 3). Commenting on the Labour government’s enforcement of work-focused welfare reforms during recession, the Women’s Budget Group (2010) remarked that it remains problematic, and for lone parents these problems may be compounded by other factors in their labour market disadvantage and the disproportionate impact on women of government spending cuts.

1.7 Lone Parent and Childcare

Lone parents are increasingly conceptualised by both the Conservative and Labour parties as workless or unemployed rather than legitimately standing outside of the paid labour market because of their caring responsibilities (Davies, 2012). There are 57.2%

of lone parents already in paid work, which is an increase of 13% since 1997 (Gingerbread, 2012). Over 90% or 1318 out of 1443 women who participated in Jenkins' research (2004) classified themselves as 'looking after home/family', whilst 49 said they were unemployed/seeking work, 71 stated that they were permanently sick/disabled, and five, rather implausibly for people in their 30s, reported that they were 'wholly retired' (ibid, p. 3). What is worth noting here is that her sample largely consisted of mothers and the main reason for opting out of work was 'family care responsibilities' (ibid, p. 3).

1.8 Chapter Summary

The purposes of this literature review have been multiple. The first of these was historical and offered vignettes from important figures who have framed the debate at the broadest level. Malthus stood for the social and moral tendency to explain the 'poor' as either 'deserving' or 'undeserving'. He is posited in this debate sort of as 'the father of stereotyping' in the matter of the poor. The 'benefit scrounger' was, if I can joke about it, his great-great-grandson. Marx was next. He defended the poor as the victims of capitalism, and offered a kind of new concept of poverty as an inevitable consequence of both 'production' and 'reproduction'. Current authors draw on aspects of his Marxian theories, and can therefore claim to be part of that family tree of ideas, as can Weber. Finally, I looked at Murray, whose work exemplified the Malthusian dread of the improvident and feckless poor. These sorts of position, admittedly in a schematic fashion, point to the kind of moral-political debates that frame the epistemologies of poverty.

The rest of the review made a tour through the literature on lone motherhood, government policy, poverty, and notions of family and motherhood itself. That last category took a critical feminist viewpoint. Finally, issues of resources, benefits and access were reviewed. The intention was firstly to use theory to understand the data. The second intention was to use data to illuminate the theory, a dialectic that is tried out in the thesis's final 'Conclusion' but which also turns up in amongst the case studies, where 'grounded theory' is developed from the data.

If we now look at ‘lone motherhood’ in relation to the broad literature, I have already identified a ‘line’ from individual ‘moral’ responsibility for that condition to a much more collective view that the position is structurally held in position by causes such as poverty. ‘Lone motherhood’ is constructed at various points on that continuum. Now I can complicate that conceptualisation, bringing in issues of gender and exploitation, the former showing how early radicals like Marx constructed a polarity between production (mainly male) and reproduction (exclusively women), such a notion, made into a broader notion of both of these as forms of labour, and to consider ‘exploitation’ as not just between capitalist and labourer, but also as exploitation within the family – a sexist possibility that, as we saw, radical feminists stressed later in the 20th century.

A further ‘line’ or ‘suspension’ through ‘lone motherhood’ runs through educational norms that regarded education as a mainly male preserve, and then as a matter of stages of development of the young. A sexist ageism could be said to apply here. ‘Lone mothers’ were not the business of education. Their role in a welfare society was care-giving and for this they received support, although it was often meagre and given grudgingly. The crossovers between poverty and morality were involved in demonising the ‘lone mother’.

A further and even more severe criticism of the ‘lone mother’ care, as again we saw, emanated from a collection of views that are often called neo-liberalism. If the market was the ‘solution’ and the state the ‘problem’, then lone motherhood was suspended between the need for lone mothers to get a job, and to resist (or be helped to resist) living on state benefits. The pressure currently (from a Conservative government) is to emphasise jobs also against educational futures that are more indirect qualifications, skills, potential etc. The case studies illustrate this, and also the possible rewarding career the lone mothers might achieve. It follows that the notion and practice of ‘lone motherhood’ is cut through by the ‘education/work’ agenda and its various neo=conservative, liberal and radical versions. In particular both literature and empirical data (as I later explore) contest the possible transition from education to work, pointing to the difficulties for women, for their family, and for the ‘rubber band’ effects of work and poverty.

The boundaries of this literature study were partly decided by themes arising from the data. In this paradoxical sense, the literature review is not the precursor and foundation for data gathering. Rather, they developed together, in a more dialectical way. The thesis now turns to the nature of ‘grounded’ theories emerging from the data and in forming the ‘lines’ and ‘suspensions’ that ‘cradle’ the notion of lone motherhood.

CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter my plan is to outline the rationale for undertaking the research methodology to study lone mothers' experiences in Higher Education. In order to study lone mothers, various research methodological approaches have been used by many researchers. In this chapter I will highlight a few of these methodologies and also provide an explanation for choosing Ethnography as a methodological approach for my study. In my understanding, choosing a research methodology is not as organised a procedure as it may seem. I also do not agree with the notion of a researcher's objectivity and detachment from the research process. I find the process to be more of a dialogue between the researcher and the research process and have come to view conducting research as a social process. If I may say, I found it comfortable to consider the subjects of the study not as mere objects but as subjects from the social world, and hence the usage of 'I' in this thesis signifies the acceptance of such social practice in social research. Such a hermeneutic interpretation of the researcher/subject relationship has characterised aspects of qualitative research since the 1980s, and has become a familiar approach, especially in anthropology, as Geertz's early studies indicate (1973). In this study the hermeneutic approach was based on the work of Ricoeur (1981) and Gadamer (2004). In simple words hermeneutics is the process of interpretation where the focus is on the experiences of people in social settings rather than locating any 'singular truth'. This process of interpretation is not fixed, it is evolving and circular. For Brown (2011) the 'hermeneutic circle' is involved in understanding 'how does language shape the life it seeks to describe and how does life shape language?' (p. 295). Also, one's understanding never stays 'fixed' as one keeps evolving thus one does not arrive at locating truth. However, the understanding can become 'fixed' for an interpretation or explanation for a certain time but 'such fixity is always contingent' (ibid). This evolving understanding is justified in terms of Gell (1998) and Stronach (2010).

For example in my study I began with a concept that opposed instrumental and personal reasons for joining higher and further education. It remained fixed for the

time being till I collected further data which evolved my understanding of Lone mothers' instrumental and personal reasoning for gaining Education to Horizontal and Vertical concepts of gaining education. Horizontal and Vertical notions offered a richer and non-grounded interpretation of the factors that intrinsically and extrinsically motivated Lone mother students. It also brought out the concept of the 'student as a job'. These concepts are formed as a result of re-reading the data which draws on the circularity 'between explanation and understanding' (p. 296). It is important to think through my theoretical research framework and it is also suggested by Ribbens and Edwards (1998) that research is 'an intensely practical exercise' which constantly reminds us 'to make detailed, concrete decisions' (1998, p. 1). These decisions are not easily formed and they also do not occur in chronological order. However, these decisions are intertwined with the whole research process.

My research journey in this chapter can be summarised thus:

1. Philosophical Standpoint
2. Journey towards the formation of an Epistemological and Ontological stance
3. Phase One: Reflexive Interactive Interview
4. Phase Two: Pilot Study with Lone-Mother Students
 - a. Aim and Objectives of the Pilot study
 - b. Data Analysis of the Pilot Study
5. Phase Three: Main Study
 - a. Recruitment of participants
 - b. Lone-mother students' profiles
 - c. Semi-structured Interviews
 - d. Feminist Ethnography: Is there such a thing?
 - e. Data Analysis and Interpretation
6. Ethical Considerations

In view of the fact that the chosen methodology would affect my methods of collecting data, as well as interpreting and analysing it, it seemed sensible for me to first unpack the philosophical standpoints of the various methodological approaches that could have been taken to undertake this research and also to lay down the reasons for choosing a pragmatic interactive social route as my methodological approach. Later on I will further elaborate on the techniques used for data collection and analysis.

2.2 Philosophical Standpoint

There are considered to be three dominant philosophical perspectives that guide a research approach. These are ontological, epistemological and methodological. Their orienting questions are:

Ontology: What is the presuppositional knowledge about the fundamental character of being? Therefore, what could be studied?

Epistemology: What principles will guide us to achieve knowledge?

Methodology: How can this knowledge be established and validated? (Punch, 2005).

According to Bateson (1972), the researcher is 'bound within a net of epistemological and ontological premises which - regardless of ultimate truth or falsity - become partially self-validating' (p. 314). For a researcher like me to decide on any one methodological approach he/she has to consider the ontological and epistemological assumptions which act as the basis for the methodological approach. Put simply, ontological assumptions question what is real, whereas epistemology questions ask: How do we know that it is real? (Walker, 2007). The contrast, put even more simply, is between Being and Knowing (Somekh and Lewin, 2004).

Based on ontological and epistemological reasoning, various methodological approaches can be derived. These approaches branch out of two major paradigms which belong to opposite schools of thought. It is clear that positivist and interpretivist (or humanistic) paradigms adopt different epistemological and ontological positions. To each of these, I briefly turn.

2.2.1 Positivism

Positivism is based on a philosophy that reality can be more or less scientifically tested and verified through hypotheses. It assumes that reality exists in an objective world, is stable and can be studied, observed, measured and described independently, without the interference of researchers (May, 1993). Positivists believe in a controlled and structured approach for testing hypotheses, that laws/reality exist independently of the researcher and that these laws can be understood through constant usage of rational and logical approaches. They adhere to especially designed statistical and mathematical techniques for data gathering and measurement (May, 1993). It is

important to recognise that positivism and post-positivism embody a range of different approaches. They are orientations rather than definitions. Generally, quantitative research falls mainly into this broad category, but it is the case that some of the earlier qualitative approaches were also firmly positivist. Glaser and Strauss (1967) set out to elaborate a precise methodology and claimed – a significant metaphor – to have ‘discovered’ grounded theory. This is an obviously ‘objective’ claim, much criticised since (Stronach & MacLure, 1997; Frankham et al., 2014).

According to Hammersley and Atkinson (1983), at the heart of positivism is the concept of ‘scientific method’. The purpose of the scientific method is to test hypotheses and the testing of theories involves comparison of facts against ‘what the theory says should occur under certain circumstances with what actually does occur’ (p 5). The methods used to test theories are standard experiments or interviews, designed and developed to allow replication so that reliability, objectivity and validity of the findings can be made (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983).

2.2.2 Post-Positivism

According to O’Leary (2007), post-positivism rejects the assertions made by positivists that the social or natural world can be understood through scientific method. For post-positivists, the world is not so predictable. Rather, it is complex and any claims are made in terms of probability, as ‘how things actually are’ (Gephart, 1999). Unlike the positivists’ focus on quantitative and experimental methods to test hypotheses, post-positivists make use of qualitative methods to acquire information (Gephart, 1999).

Post-positivists have rejected the idea that it is possible or that it may be required to have complete separation between the investigator or researcher and the phenomenon that is being studied. For post-positivists there is a difference between human and material phenomenon and thus human emotions can be measured with a degree of validity but not to the same extent as material objects. Nevertheless, the ‘post’ signifies a continuity of method rather than a different philosophy. On its own, post-positivism is not a fully interpretive and interactional approach to knowledge construction.

2.2.3 Interpretivism

The term interpretivism refers to epistemologies or theories about how we can gain knowledge of the world that broadly rely on interpreting or understanding the meanings that humans attach to their actions. It ‘constructs’ knowledge rather than ‘discovering’ it (Flick, 2002).

Researchers have used the positivist paradigm to bring forth the statistics on ‘lone mothers’ in society or when counting the number of ‘lone parents’ in work or in poverty (see, for example, Bradshaw and Millar, 1991). Such research is largely deductive in nature and concerns testing hypotheses suggested by already formed theories. In this study my purpose is also to define terms and concepts relating to ‘lone motherhood’ and ‘education’, whereby there are difficulties within positivist-based approaches of defining concepts. The positivist approach believes that there is a ‘truth’ somewhere out there that could be found. However, the aim of this study is not the pursuit of ‘objectivity’, ‘fact’ or ‘truth’ in that manner; it is to bring forth the lived experiences of lone mothers. In doing so the researcher cannot claim to stand completely ‘detached’ from the data (Fisher, 2009 and Stronach et al., 2013). This is particularly true in this case where the researcher (me) is also a ‘lone mother’ and has deliberately set out to be a reflexive addressee of the data, including my own. Defining concepts and not looking for ‘one truth’ already results in subjective interpretation. I would agree with Walker (2007) that a ‘research topic concerned with examining the perceptions of an individual’s experiences... must lend itself to more interpretive methods of inquiry’ (p 51). Furthermore, one of the objectives of this study is to study lone mothers in their social and cultural context, hence there is a need for a methodology that ‘would be able to analyse the meaning of social process and social interaction’, according to Blumer (1969 cited in Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983, p 6):

Reality exists in the empirical world and not in the methods used to study that world; it is to be discovered in the examination of that world... Methods are mere instruments designed to identify and analyse the obdurate character of the empirical world, and as such their value exists only in their suitability in enabling this task to be done. In this fundamental sense the procedures employed in each part of the act of scientific inquiry should and must be assessed in terms of whether they respect the nature of the empirical world under study – whether what they signify or imply to be the nature of the empirical world is actually the case.

I adapted the methodological frame from Walker to develop this summary of paradigm positions.

Table 2.1: Methodological Paradigms (Walker, 2007 p. 69)

	Positivism	Post-positivism	Interpretivism
Basic assumption	Objective truth/reality exists and it could be traced.	Objective truth exists but there is a difference between ‘human and material phenomenon’.	Truth is subjective and the realities are multiple.
Type of research	Explanatory	Explanatory	Exploratory
Nature/approach	Deductive (tests theory against hypotheses)	Deductive	Inductive (generates theory from data)
Method	Experiments, surveys and tests. Might take less time to conduct.	Mostly quantitative methods are used but sometimes qualitative methods are used.	Unstructured interviews, observation and analysis. Takes a lot of time to conduct.
Contribution	Explanations can be ‘certain’ and ‘true’.	Explanations are limited to probability.	Explanations are indicated by the data, but not unindicated.
Problem	It does not include discovery besides the usual scientific explanation.	It fails to acknowledge ‘subjective meaning’ (Walker, 2007).	It is specific to a culture.

It is worth noting in passing that all such ‘tables’ of research approaches offer (but hide) a covert positivist epistemology. They provide neat categories, and clear differences, constructing a map of the research world that is always too clear and too definite. So I am reading this table not as a ‘map’ but as a preliminary ‘sketch’.

2.3 Journey towards the Formation of an Epistemological and Ontological stance

The purpose of this chapter is pivotal as it connects both the literature review and the findings section. In this, I attempt to explain the following: 1. My epistemological stance and its relation to the data collection. 2. An explanation of my approach towards forming the research questions. 3. The procedures that I have used to collect, analyse and interpret the data. 4. A critical discussion of the methodological issues faced throughout the research process.

Initially, I was not sure as to which methodology would work best for my research topic. I did not have much prior knowledge of conducting research, as most of my early qualifications had been exam-based. I, as a novice researcher, wanted to undertake research that would answer questions involving childcare needs for lone mothers in Higher Education. Initially I was looking for answers to questions like: how do these lone mothers manage childcare with their university life? Do they get support from their university? If yes, what type of support do they get? How do they juggle responsibilities between university and family life? The impetus for studying lone mothers was formed from my own personal experiences as a lone mother. I was not fully aware of the process of conducting research. However, I was aware of a skeleton of methods on how to conduct research, such as research questions, methodology, interviews and findings.

This study involves an investigation by an international student from Pakistan into the experiences of ‘lone mothers’ in Higher Education in the UK. The culture under investigation is unfamiliar to me (see the reflexive chapter) and, as Spradley (1979) claims:

...when ethnographers study unfamiliar cultures, this unfamiliarity keeps them from taking things for granted. It makes them sensitive to things that have become so commonplace to informants that they ignore them. For this reason, many ethnographers begin their ethnographic studies on

cultures very different from their own. The most productive relationship occurs between a thoroughly enculturated informant and a thoroughly unenculturated ethnographer (p 50).

I came across ethnography and found it fitted with my initial research perspective by attending a session on it. Until that time I did not know which methodology would work best for my research topic. According to Sperber (1985), ‘ethnography aims at interpretation (p 7)’. For Geertz (1973), this interpretation is a search for meaning. It answers questions like ‘What it is like to belong to another culture, to be Nuer, Tibetan, or French?’ (p 10), hence it is centrally about experience not ‘facts’ as such (ibid). For me, this study is about searching for meaning through the lived experiences of lone-mother students. This seemed an ontologically appropriate starting-point, because my ‘being’ (as a Pakistani diaspora member) meant that I was unfamiliar with much of the British/English/‘Western’ cultural assumptions. These reflexive issues are addressed in Chapter Three and are more fully addressed in an article (see Appendix L) about to be published in the *International Review of Qualitative Research*.

An ethnographic approach was initially adopted and developed, to enable a holistic understanding of the lone mothers’ experience in Higher Education and specifically in relation to their cultural backgrounds. ‘Ethnography is the work of describing a culture. The essential core of this activity aims to understand another(s) way of life from the native point of view’ (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). The goal of ethnography, as Malinowski put it, is, ‘to grasp the native’s point of view, his relation to life, to realise his vision of his world’ (Malinowski, 1922, p 25). Rather than studying people, ethnography means learning from them. According to Spradley (1979), understanding the meaning of actions and events is the essential core of ethnography. As Denzin (1989) suggests, there is a need for the researcher or ethnographer to first merge themselves into the life of their subject and, after a deep understanding, contextualise these lives.

Ethnography has both ontological and epistemological dimensions. It is not just a method, it is a study of cultures and cultural systems using a holistic approach, and it is a study of meanings, contexts and processes existing in a cultural system (Hasse, 2014; Spradley, 1979 and Sanday, 1979; Whitehead, 2004). It is an iterative process of discovery, inquiries and learning to acquire ‘emic validity’ (Whitehead, 2004 p. 5). It is also an interpretive, constructive and reflexive process. This iterative process is

reflected in the reflexive chapter and the article in Appendix K, L and M. In conjunction with my supervisors, I developed a kind of reciprocal reflexivity with fellow researchers from different backgrounds in order to illuminate and understand our differences. This process was extended to interactions in the field, although it was an ambition and an orientation that was bound to be partial and incomplete, in comparison to the more extensive reflexivity in the supervision process.

Meadows (2003) and Walker (2007) both used Lincoln and Guba's criteria to decide upon the interpretivist paradigm for their studies. Meadows (2003) previously used the paradigm to study 'effects of intervention strategies on the experiences of Lone parents'. For him, the interpretivist paradigm was required as lone parents were found to experience their 'lone parenthood' in various ways and these experiences were reliant on their reciprocal relationship with the environment. In Walker's (2007) research, she argued that older people also share their experiences with the social world. Both Meadows and Walker used the paradigm to acknowledge that experiences are socially constructed and also have shared meaning to some degree. This study also fits well within such criteria, since lone mothers' experiences are socially constructed and their experiences are also reliant on their relationship with the environment in which these experiences exist. An in-depth understanding of informants' construction of meaning is therefore required, and this can be gained through the use of different methods and stages, and by being open to adapting them should the need arise.

This research uses three interwoven stages to do this, as detailed in the Methodology chapter: the reflexivity stage, the pilot study and the main data collection. These stages occurred at first in chronological order, and hence are discussed below in that order. However, as time went on, they became increasingly iterative as themes emerged and new interpretations formed. Such a process is illustrated in Frankham et al.'s (2014) article, to which I contributed (see Appendix L). These shifts take us back to the initial notions of ontology, epistemology and methodology. In the first case, changes of 'being' reflect the learning and reorienting of the research self. In the second, changes in 'knowing' alter the frames of that knowing. And in the third case, progressive focussing and emergent themes through the hermeneutic processes of 'excursion' and 'return' (Gadamer, 2004) alter the 'findings'. It is worth adding that the notion of 'findings' is in itself tricky – only a positivist claims to 'find' or 'discover'.

2.4 Phase One: Reflexive Interactive Interview

Whilst I was carrying out the literature review and reading through the possible methods to adopt in conducting my research, I was also made aware of my reflexive self as a lone mother by my supervisors through reflexive interviews between the three of us. I would like to call them 'reflexive interactive interviews'. The interviews were based on questions related to my (interviewee) 'being a lone mother' from a Pakistani culture. The purpose was to unearth some of the hidden uncertainties of such supervised researching, thinking and writing, as well as making more explicit the relations that accompany such knowledge construction. Thus, the aim was to develop a focused kind of intercultural understanding that brings issues of 'difference' into play in a more extensive way and where openness and reflexivity come into play from both parties in order to form successful supervision relationships (Robinson-Pant, 2005). In that sense, the 'layers' of the emerging text try to enable a kind of emergent and iterative interpretation, whereby successive readings, misreadings and re-readings allow data to be re-interpreted and put in a broader, deeper and more reciprocal context. In doing this, we are shifting away from the 'orthodox model of distance and separation' on behalf of the researcher, to the disclosure model of interactive interviews (Ellis and Berger, 2003 p. 159).

The dangers of contaminating subjectivity, self-indulgence and narcissism are never very far away in a reflexive approach (Etherington, 2004). And this kind of triple reflexivity (2 supervisors + 1 doctoral student) perhaps multiplies these risks. On the other hand, we could claim a kind of perverse 'objectivity' from these processes. The unspoken or implicit becomes expressed and recorded in 'text', where it is an object of inquiry, available for discussion, revision and critique.

Many researchers have stressed the need for moving away from the orthodox model of distance and separation between the researcher and the participant (Reinharz and Chase, 2003; Ellis and Berger, 2003; Holstein and Gubrium, 2003; Roulston, 2010). Feminist researchers such as Oakley (1981), Reinhartz and Chase (2003), Ellis and Berger (2003), and Eder and Fingerson (2003), as well as Lather (1991), suggest that reciprocity or self-disclosure during interviewing encourages the participant to feel at ease, breaks the hierarchical gap and enables the researcher to gather personal knowledge from the participant. It also moves away from 'dominating' forms of

interviewing to understand and acknowledge respondents' ways of organising meaning in their lives (Reinharz and Chase, 2003; Reissman, 2008). However, according to Reinhartz and Chase (2003), there is a danger that the information gleaned from research interviewing may be quite different from the natural world of social interaction and conversation due to the power relationship between participant and researcher. Research may thus not bring a holistic understanding, but rather isolated bits of information and only a strategic disclosure by respondents (see the Conclusion chapter). As Spradley (1979, p. 5) notes, 'meanings are sometimes expressed and sometimes not expressed'. Thus, reciprocity acts as a catalyst providing the researcher and interviewee with an opportunity to more fully explore meaning, without promising any final disclosure.

Atkinson et al. (2003), Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) and Gubrium and Holstein (1997) stress that the methods used in research construct different kinds of representation of the social world. Thus, each representation presents a systematic and methodical exploration of a given social method; they are not private fantasies nor are they objective certainties (Roulston, 2010).

'The concept of reflexivity acknowledges that the orientations of researchers will be shaped by their socio-historical locations, including the values and interests that these locations confer upon them' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 15). On the other hand, reciprocity 'implies give and take, a mutual negotiation of meaning and power' (Lather, 1991). For the purpose of these interviews, reciprocal reflexivity gave me an opportunity to contribute to theorising about my experiences through shared meaning or products, which in turn has helped to develop a significant understanding of the lone mother in Higher Education.

The interactive and reflexive interview sessions discussed above were transcribed and the initial themes from the interviews were made part of the questions for the pilot stage. Further interactive and reflexive interviews were formed into a separate chapter (Chapter Three) which later became part of a journal paper (to be published in Winter, 2015).

2.5 Phase Two: Pilot Study with Lone-Mother Students

I adopted ethnography as a research method to conduct my research and hence opted for in-depth, semi-structured interviews as my method. The questions for the pilot study were formed from the 'reflective interactive interviews' between the supervisors.

Naturally, the literature on 'lone mothers' also suggested questions and themes for the research process.

The pilot study comprised six in-depth interviews with lone-mother students. Initially the aim was of a general nature, designed to examine the experiences of lone mothers in Higher Education. Interview questions for the pilot stage were formed to help build some initial concepts, develop further research questions and enhance and revise research objectives. At this stage of the research it was crucial for me to explore the research topic through the pilot study, as the theory base and variables of this research were largely unknown to me. Hence, the pilot stage was conducted with the aim of locating some themes that could feed into the main data collection stage. Thus, the overall aim of the preliminary stage was to identify important emergent themes that could be later explored.

2.5.1 Aim of the Pilot Study

The main aim of my initial study was to investigate barriers and constraints in provision of support for lone mothers wishing to study in Higher Education in NW England.

2.5.2 Objectives

1. To examine lone mothers' experiences in undertaking Higher Education, paying particular attention to the relationship between personal circumstances and educational attainment.
2. To explore current provision of support for lone mothers within Higher Education.
3. To evaluate the efficacy of government policies in relation to widening participation for lone mothers.

The purpose of the pilot study had several dimensions. It was designed to introduce me to the qualitative approach of conducting face-to-face, semi-structured in-depth

interviews. As an outsider approaching sensitive issues I needed to know if the framing of questions was sensitive enough or not. In order to conduct interviews I initially developed a research interview schedule, an 'interview guide' consisting of questions for the respondents (Cohen and Crabtree, 2006). The pilot stage provided some form of 'pre-testing' of the interview questions and also enabled further development (Van Tiejlingen & Hundley, 2001).

Initial participant recruitment for group interviews did not achieve much success, with some lone mothers not turning up at the last minute. Group participation calls were then sent out to much larger groups (6-7) in order to achieve a minimum of four participants willing to attend a group interview. However, that did not work out well either. It was difficult to group them together on a specific day and time. In the end only one group interview was conducted. It was conducted informally, prompting interesting discussion, and giving each individual her chance to speak. Wilkinson (1999) emphasised the 'natural' element of focus groups by presenting them as a 'contextual method'. In this way participants are members of a social group simply interacting with one another. One group interview and six one-to-one interviews were conducted. Interviews lasted between 50 minutes and 1 hour 20 minutes. The topic and purpose of the research was explained to the participants prior to the start of each interview.

The initial sample was based within the university at which I was studying. Undertaking research in one's own university has its advantages and disadvantages. Advantages: since I am also a student I was thus considered an 'insider' by the respondents and I am also familiar with the setting, which made for a relaxed, informal ethos for interviewing. As a student and since I have automatic access to university resources such as library, meeting rooms, cafes and so on, that put the interviewees at ease – I was one of them. However, there were disadvantages too. According to Spradley and McCurdy (1972), an ethnographer may have a special advantage if her research site and work place are the same. I would agree that it worked partly for me, but only to the extent that I was partly seen as an 'insider', as I was obviously a foreign, Muslim, Asian woman with a Pakistani-English accent.

2.5.3 Data Analysis of the Pilot Study

Techniques for analysing the data were developed during the first stage – the reflexivity stage. Grounded theory was used for data analysis throughout the three phases. Grounded theory helped me read for meaning in an inductive rather than a deductive way, a kind of ‘inside-out’ search for respondents’ meanings and contexts. It is the most empirical way of reading data. It offered me the flexibility and space to bring themes out of the data. It provided a basis to code and group themes together, on the basis of conceptual similarity, and suggested further exploration into more abstract themes and patterns. Latterly each theme was explained within the context of the research.

My first step was to analyse transcripts based upon the ideas of ‘Grounded Theory’ developed in the 1960s (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). However, instead of following the mechanistic approach of grounded theory, a more conceptual approach was used which many recent researchers have been following (Thomas and James, 2006; Thomas, 2009; Stronach et al., 2013; Frankham et al., 2014). Grounded theory offers the first systematic account of the process by which qualitative research can yield theory. Codes help to identify issues and ideas that extend beyond the specific case shown by the data, providing a bridge between descriptive and theoretical accounts. The code is a necessary tool to help to identify the individual characteristics which constitute the particular interactions observed. Through the method of reduction, the interview transcripts were summarised into major themes by looking for key words, phrases or examples within transcripts (please refer to Chapter Four). Coding clearly described the data and although some of the richness and detail of the data was inevitably lost, the essence remained and was used to generate further analyses.

Lone mothers provided insights into their lives in Higher Education. The major themes emerging from the pilot study were: meanings attached to ‘lone motherhood’, reasons for joining Higher Education and the need for a support network. However, the research up to this point had yet to take into account the wider social, cultural and contextual factors across the experiences.

2.6 Phase Three: Main Study

The findings from the pilot study fed into the aims and objectives of the larger piece of doctoral study. The overall aim of the study remained the same, to investigate barriers and constraints in provision of support for lone mothers wishing to study in Higher Education.

The **Objectives** developed into the following:

1. To examine lone mothers' experiences in undertaking Higher Education, paying particular attention to the relationship between personal circumstances and educational attainment.
2. To explore current provision for socio-economic support within Higher Education.
3. To evaluate the efficacy of the UK government policies in relation to widening participation for lone mothers.

As the reader will see later in the thesis, objectives 1 and 2 expanded to include the cultural as well as the socio-economic contexts. In contrast, themes relevant to Objective 3 became part of the experiential accounts in the case studies. 'Evaluation' became a more reflexive and subject-centred inquiry: How do respondents perceive government and other external policies and practices? How do these impinge on their lives?

2.6.1 Recruitment of Participants

Lone mothers were contacted through different means. A research flyer, which advertised details of the study, was circulated and organisations (Students Union and Guild of Students) were asked to display it and make students aware of the study in the hope that lone mothers would be willing to come forward. Research flyers were also distributed to students at Learning Resource Centres at Universities. In addition, details of the study were sent out to all lecturers based at university with the hope of recruiting participants. The lecturers' role was to introduce the students to the study by word of mouth and give them the information sheet. Students who were interested in the study were requested to contact the researcher directly by email.

Initially those 'sociologically acceptable' methods, as mentioned above, were used to contact female students but they did not yield any replies. This could be due to the language register, as researchers such as Glucksman (1994) established that working-class women do not respond well to formal requests for interview, either due to the official statement of the interview request or most probably due to the language and style in which the letter has been written. Therefore, the main form of recruitment was then undertaken informally, through snowballing techniques (Glucksman, 1994). Snowballing involves participating interviewees' assistance in the identification and recruitment of future interviewees to the study. In addition, various events organised by Students Union for mature students were attended in an attempt to recruit participants. Lone mothers were asked to volunteer themselves for participation. Initially a demographic questionnaire and consent form were sent out to the participants, giving them the opportunity to provide their details and consent to taking part in the interview. The sampling thus constituted an 'opportunity sample' (Jupp, 2006).

The aim of the interviews that then took place was to explore the rationale for making a decision to embark on Higher Education, by asking questions such as: How would this affect their future life? What support network did they have? The aim was also to establish a holistic understanding of what being a lone mother in Higher Education entails, so for this reason they were invited to discuss the wider context of their lives. This holistic approach meant that the women's accounts revealed much more than a personal response to the specific research focus. It was this contextualising strategy that deepened and altered Objectives 1 and 2, and led to a re-prioritising of Objective 3.

By the time of the main data collection I had learnt that, in order to recruit a larger and more varied sample, reaching out further into the community was required and that the snowballing method would perhaps gain better coverage, not just in local universities but also other universities and colleges. In addition to this, leaflets were distributed to further education colleges. Course co-ordinators were emailed and they then snowballed the email to other staff members. Thus, the sampling happened in the form of an 'opportunistic sample'. When I contacted course co-ordinators or faculty members I learned that health and nursing courses had more females and thus offered a better chance of accessing lone mothers. International women's events were attended,

in the hope of recruiting more participants. The Guild of Students and Students Union were visited on a regular basis in the hope that someone had registered their name at the reception desk. In addition, mature student society meetings were attended on a quarterly basis to meet new participants. I found that lone mothers were more positive about attending an interview if they had either met me or had been contacted through someone who knew me. Hence, social engagement with the participants was becoming crucial in recruitment. Amidst all this, emails were also sent to academic staff based at University. Most participants were recruited through the mature student society.

Table 2.2 Brief Demographic Profile of Lone-Mother Students

No of participants	13
No of interviews	27
Mode of attendance	15 full time, 2 part time
Age range	20 years – 50 years
Course	Nursing, Paramedics, Business, Accounting and Finance, Sociology, Legislative Law, History, literature, Leisure and Tourism.
Ethnicity	1 Pakistani, 2 Africans, 1 Egyptian, 8 English and 1 did not want to register her ethnicity
Age of dependents	Between 2 and 30 years
Range of time at University	Between 4 months to 4 years

Table 2.3 Participants' Background and their Codes (for anonymity)

Participants	Codes used in Thesis
Somalian British, doing a course at College, refugee, asylum seeker	LMH
English British, mother with special needs doing an undergraduate course.	LMJ
Egyptian British, doing a postgraduate course, origin: Egypt	LMN
English British, doing an undergraduate course, later on completed a Master's degree and then applied for a PhD	LMF
English British, student doing an undergraduate course, later on completed a Master's in Research and applied for a PhD	LMC
English British, student doing an undergraduate course.	LMK
Mixed race (did not want to reveal it) doing an undergraduate course.	LMM
English British, student doing an access course at the Community College and had applied to university.	LMT
African British, asylum seeker, doing an LLB, origin: Africa.	LMTs
English British, LM doing an undergraduate course in Health Sciences.	LMV
English British, doing an ACCA.	LMA
Pakistani, doing a PhD.	LMS
LM, English British, doing an undergraduate course.	LMP

2.6.2 Semi-structured Interviews

My role in the interviews was to develop an ‘interactive’ and ‘collaborative’ manner to promote dialogue rather than interrogation (Ellis and Berger, 2003; Lather, 1991). Researchers including Larson (1997), Tillman-Healy and Kiesinger (2000) shared their experiences as an interviewee in their research and found that they were unable to unfold their ‘authentic’ experiences to the interviewer, although they wanted to, due to the unreal nature of the interview. Larson (1997 p. 461) suggests that the interactive interview approach provides the participant with the opportunity to *‘reflect on, elaborate, and build on the stories they have told before, as well as to respond and change what gets reported’*. The interviews that I conducted for the purpose of this research were long and formed layers of information and discussion with each emerging text. This helped me to develop a kind of emergent and iterative interpretation. Through this experience I developed a more holistic reflexive approach to this ethnography, the approach termed ‘reciprocal reflexivity’, in order to distinguish it from more individualised models of interviewing (Stronach et al., 2007; Lather, 1991).

2.6.3 Feminist Ethnography: Is there such a thing?

As the study unfolded I came to hold a somewhat more complicated view of the research process, one that was in greater agreement with some of the poststructuralist and feminist researchers, such as Lather (1991), Frankham (2012), Reissman (2002 and 2008) and Skeggs (1995 & 2001). There did seem to be a kind of feminist ‘turn’ or ‘moment’ involved which resonated with my experience of the research process and indeed of the kind of inductive, empirical inquiry that can only loosely be called ‘grounded theory’. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) described various ‘moments’ of qualitative research inquiry which covered the latter part of the last century. They pointed out a possible sixth ‘moment’ in qualitative research, which is reflexive in nature and experientially based, where the texts are ‘messy, subjective, open-ended, conflictual and feminist influenced’ (Denzin and Lincoln 1994, p. 559). I found my experience of research to be similar to Denzin and Lincoln’s description.

Ethnography is used as a methodology in education, event management, cultural studies, sociology and many other disciplines. How to conduct ethnography depends

upon the theoretical position of the researcher. Reinharz (1992) states that a feminist ethnographic research is based on three goals (p.51):

1. Based on women's lived experiences.
2. To develop understanding of women participants' expertise from their viewpoint.
3. 'To conceptualise women's behaviour as an expression of social contexts' (p. 51)

The above-mentioned aims sit comfortably with my research's theoretical position; however, 'ethnography means different things when it emerges in different disciplinary spaces', hence it is not possible to have 'one water-tight definition' (Skeggs, 2001, p. 247).

2.6.4 Data Analysis and Interpretation

QSR Nvivo version 8.0 was used during the first stage and partly during the main study. The package facilitated managing and organising the data in the initial stages. It helped in developing preliminary codes by identifying codes which were similar thematically across the transcripts. These similar codes were then placed in their designated codes. According to Stake (2004), 'Coding is a technical name for sorting or grading data to be aggregated or filed, it a procedure that pulls the story together' (p. 130). During this stage I used line-by-line coding techniques adopted from Charmaz (2006). The technique helped in reducing the data as all related themes were placed under codes which were similar. The QSR Nvivo software package allowed me to manage and to some extent analyse part of the data as at this stage I was only using an inductive approach in analysing the data. I was coding the transcripts to form some initial understanding of the data and to help me re-read the data later on for further in-depth analysis. The open coding known as axial coding used by me was descriptive and thus it did not provide analytical coding. I needed to proceed to the next stage of analysis where I could locate more significant themes and could cross-read the transcripts for subtle difference in meaning. Thus I moved away from QSR Nvivo software and re-read the transcripts interpretively to form themes which were data driven and grounded in emerging concepts. While at the same drawing on broader contexts afforded by both the context and by relevant theories of the respondents' situation.

I began my study with a theoretical exploration of grounded theory. As I have recorded, at first I tried to follow the prescriptions of Glaser and Strauss's seminal text of 1967. However, as I came to conduct the actual work of interpretation I became convinced that Glaser and Strauss's approach was too reductive, and even mechanical. I found myself sceptical of following the 'manual' of grounded theory as discussed by many of the methodological texts (e.g. Basit, 2010; Cohen and Manion, 1986). Like many current qualitative researchers, I became convinced that hermeneutic approaches were more productive, and I became involved in publishing those sorts of accounts (Frankham et al., 2014; Stronach et al., 2013). The doctoral group at Education, Community and Leisure Faculty was influential in developing these kinds of approaches for me, drawing on the deconstructive, the hermeneutic and the reflexive orientations of some current qualitative approaches (Stronach, 2010, especially Chapters Three and Four).

As Frankham et al. (2013) describe, there are no 'straight lines' in analysing data:

And no certain answers (like method, procedure and analysis). So no possible definition of how to do 'good' research. Good research is good thinking – creative, recursive, comprehensive, purposeful, evidence-based, theory-related and useful. The only rule, therefore is at the same time challenging and ironic: 'Think!!' (p. 12).

In this study I did use an inductive approach, as grounded theorists suggest:

As Eisner reminds us, there is in much scientific and social scientific endeavour the highly problematic assumption that procedural objectivity (that is, the attempt to eliminate the scope for judgement) will lead us to ontological objectivity (that is, seeing things the way they really are (Thomas and James, 2006 p. 778).

My method of data analysis became more reflexive, as I was looking increasingly for inductive interpretation of the data but using the self as a communicative tool to interpret data and to locate themes. Thus, it was inductively interpreting data through 'deductively generated ideas we bring to that thinking' (Frankham et al., 2013 p. 4). Goffman's (1986) notion of 'stigma' is an example. For Glaser and Straus (1967), particular procedures for following grounded theory are to focus on the 'data', read it carefully, closely and repeatedly. In analysing my data, I have hung onto the notion of 'groundedness', but as an orientation rather than a technique. An example of an

inductively generated notion which appeared in my research is, most notably, ‘juggling’.

The steps followed for analysis were: transcription of data, reading the data, identifying the emerging themes. The themes then led to the formation of ‘emerging theory’ and also guided selective reading around these themes. The selective reading such as Douglas (1996) on purity and Lather (1991) on reflexivity guided the themes to provoke ‘emerging theory’. The theories then helped conceptualise the data, as the theories and emerging themes were then applied back onto the rest of the data. Thus, it was iterative and dialectical in nature. Themes led to selective reading, which helped conceptualise and contextualise the data, and then the concepts were applied back onto the data.

For example, the theme of ‘vertical movement’ in Higher Education rather than ‘horizontal movement’ was developed after an in-depth reading of LMF and LMC data. The ‘emerging theme’ provoked reading of Reay (2002) and Parr (2000). Furthermore, once the concept was grabbed it was applied to the rest of the data, thus resulting in an ‘inside-out’ approach to data analysis rather than an ‘outside in’. These inductive processes were different in nature. For example, the first ‘grounded’ notion to emerge from the data was ‘juggling’. It was directly expressed by many respondents, and confirmed itself through repetition and the ways in which respondents expressed the dilemmas of their experiences of combining roles that contradicted each other. A further concept from the data was ‘balancing’, which seemed to imply participants were more in control than ‘juggling’.

A second process was deductive rather than inductive, and subsequently a bit of both. For example, the literature on mature student experiences – often citing ‘juggling’ – also offered a dichotomy between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations (e.g. Hinton-Smith 2012; Murphy and Roopchand, 2003; Parr 2000; Osborne, Marks and Turner, 2004). However, as the data on ‘juggling’ accumulated, I realised that the polarity grew more uncertain. People offered different stories at different times, or contradicted themselves in a single interview. It was through these emerging complexities that I developed notions of ‘vertical’ and ‘horizontal’ orientations, seeing the stories as part of a vector. Within ‘vertical’ accounts there was ‘modelling’ going on, as respondents used their own HE attendance to encourage family to do likewise in relation to their

own studies. This play between concepts offered a more dynamic account of why people might say what they said, and do what they did. This dynamic constituted a version of what was called a ‘deconstructively inflected ‘grounded’ approach’ (Stronach and Piper, 2008 p.8), where boundaries are not treated as the end product but are taken as the start or beginning; thus, it is deconstructive in nature rather than analytical. Stronach and Piper (2008) employed such an approach in interpreting the famous progressive school, Summerhill. Their central notions were different, but came from the data and the literature in a similar way – ‘working dystopia’, ‘learning swarm’, ‘passion combined with neutrality’, ‘benign panopticon’, etc. (2008 p.9).

In terms of what Denzin (1970) called theoretical triangulation, the thesis drew extensively on literature addressing reflexivity (brings in the Pakistani self), grounded theory (plays with reasoning) and feminism (the principal discourse in the research).

2.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations played an important part in the research and the issues related to ethics were addressed. The research complied with ethical regulations and I adhered to these regulations (Economic and Social Research Council, 2013). Information was gathered for the purpose of research only, and all participants were assured of their anonymity. I informed the participants about the focus of the research, what their involvement entailed, and obtained their consent to participation, stressing its voluntary nature and the length of time their information will be kept for, from the date of completion of the study. Risk assessment procedures were followed where in-depth interviews were carried out at a time and place convenient to the participants.

The research came to be guided by an increasingly feminist perspective that attempted to make ‘visible’ the structural features of the world as it appeared to the women at the heart of this research. In that sense, the study moved more towards Marx rather than Malthus and Murray. This study became guided by an emergent feminist methodology with regard to an awareness of power relations between the researcher and participant, the importance of reflexivity and social interaction, the prospects of emancipation and indeed the various forms of oppression. Standing’s research on lone mothers (1988) found that recruitment of participants was not as easy as she initially

thought, and a similar problem was experienced in this study. However, once recruited, participants were made as comfortable as possible by letting them choose a location that suited them best in order to conduct interviews. I carried out interviews in a variety of places, from coffee houses, the library and even at participants' residences. It was also recognised that participants may retell stories which are painful, sad or uncomfortable so special care was put into place whilst drafting the questions and conducting the interview sessions (Reinharz and Chase, 2003; Reissman, 1993, 2002 and 2008). As mentioned earlier, being an international student I could find myself 'out of place' whilst carrying out the recruitment and interviews, so I recognised that conducting interviews with native speakers can be a sensitive and emotive issue. As Skeggs (1995) suggests 'Feminist ethnographers enter into a culture of indebtedness, always grateful that people will actually speak and spend time with you' (p.197). According to Stacey (1988), in ethnography participants can be subjected to a greater risk of exploitation as in the field work the relationships between the researcher and the participant are instrumental although they may appear expressive to participants and thus 'inherently deceptive'. Thus, researchers like me, undertaking ethnographic research, share similar ethical boundaries and need to ask the following questions in the field of research: Would any of the questions be harmful to the participants? Have I obtained consent? Would I be invading any privacy? And, finally: Is any deception involved? (Diener and Crandalls, 1978).

CHAPTER THREE: REFLEXIVITY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to work towards a more reciprocal reflexivity (Lather, 1991) which does not assume that all the learning in doctoral study is on the student's side, and recognises that I, the student, have personal knowledge and experience of the substantive subject (lone motherhood) that my supervisors may lack, as well as an acknowledged reservoir of cultural knowledge as an insider. A collaborative approach has been used which includes myself and two of my supervisors (Ian and former supervisor). Therefore, this notion of insider/outsider not only distinguishes between my supervisors and myself but also marks further distinguishing complications within my status of 'insider', thus fragmenting the notion of 'inside'. As an insider, I (Sajida) am a 'lone mother', one who is solely responsible for a child under the age of 16 without a spouse or a cohabitant (Kiernan et al., 2004) (I will discuss the complicated terminology of lone motherhood at a later stage in this chapter). Along with other lone-mother students in the UK, I face similar problems in bringing up my child relating to caring issues, financial constraints and poverty of time. However, lone motherhood is not a cultural category with which I am familiar (Pakistani culture does not really recognise this category) and my present status as an international student also places me outside some of the norms of this (UK) society. There are, therefore, different shades and intensities to the notion of 'loneness'.

In this chapter I hope to unearth some of the hidden uncertainties of such supervised researching, thinking and writing, as well as making more explicit the relations that accompany such knowledge construction.

3.2 Preliminary Methodology

Exploratory dialogue is necessary and is irreducible to any 'separated' notion of data and interpretation: the approach is consequently hermeneutic (Gadamer, 2004). The aim is to recognise the interplay of ethnic, religious, cultural and gender differences in my various perspectives and those of the supervisory team. The strategy adopted

was as follows: (1) Interview myself (sajida) in order to tap into my own experiences of 'lone' parenthood, and the ways these connect with my cultural heritage and personal and family circumstances, (2) then transcribe and interrogate the data with a view to unearthing interpretations of the values and concepts that wittingly or unwittingly inform such beliefs, (3) thereby developing a critical and self-critical perspective that informs my doctoral thinking, feeding forward into additional interviews, (4) acknowledge that my experiences are in some elements quite different from those of UK-based lone mothers, (5) and recognise that the supervisory team need to understand some of those cultural and experiential differences (gender, age, status, circumstance, etc.) if they are not to make culturally-insensitive judgements. Hence, there was a need for: (6), a more holistic reflexive approach to this ethnography. We call this 'reciprocal reflexivity' in order to distinguish it from more individualised models (Stronach et al., 2006). Finally, (7), we intended to develop a series of layered reflections, as an ongoing deepening of understanding. For example, collection of data through interactive interviews, interpretation of the data by the supervisors and myself and, in later stages, my reflections on interpretations, bringing in literature to illuminate those developing understandings.

Reflexivity is usually held to be an obligation on the doctoral student (Robinson-Pant, 2005). 'The concept of reflexivity acknowledges that the orientations of researchers will be shaped by their socio-historical locations, including the values and interests that these locations confer upon them.' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p 15). All research aims to produce knowledge (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2009; Hammersley, 1983; Holstein and Gubrium, 2003). Yet, especially in cases where the supervisors and the student come from disparate cultures, any ignorance or prejudice on the part of the supervisors' can be glossed over (Robinson-Pant, 2005). There is no single method that guarantees true results (Polkinghorne, 1983 cited in Lather, 1991). Methods are utilised to correct guesses and are attempts made to understand various possibilities that constitute human life experience (Lather, 1991). This research is thus an attempt to move towards a deeper understanding of my cultural and social background which places me differently in the UK culture (lone motherhood and research culture). Yanagisako (1979, p.98) argued that anthropological accounts are a social process which works 'from outside in' (meaning they are not descriptive and are conceptualised on the basis of authority or public realm). Knowledge of what lies

in-between different experiences and values is hard to come by, and easy to miss (Rosaldo, 1980). In order to develop a better understanding of the complexity of the lone motherhood category and its existence in UK culture there was a need for the supervisors also to be reflexive. These reflections raised 'self awareness' (Jupp, 2010). The ongoing interactions called for Lather's 'reciprocal reflexivity and critique' (Lather, 1991, p. 59). In the case that I present here, a preliminary inventory was made of what seemed to be obvious differences that were likely to structure misunderstanding:

female/male: In this scenario there may be gendered power relations or cultural differences regarding the roles of males and females in the cultural backgrounds of the researchers.

young/old: Here, assumptions may hold true for me that the 'older' supervisors perhaps can offer a more knowledgeable background to researching.

Muslim/agnostic: The fear of exhibiting ignorance of the other's religion may prevail and this may prevent open debate or the holding back of views in case they may offend.

Pakistani culture/UK culture: Ignorance of cultures creates misunderstandings of norms within a given society. Language terms one culture uses may translate very differently in another.

novice/expert: There is a structured imbalance in any 'apprentice'/teacher relationship that distributes authority and deference in ways that contradict attempts at 'equality', 'empathy' or 'valid interpretation' and so on.

inexperienced/experienced: Mismatches in experience may likewise distort or impede emergent understandings, especially where life experiences are so different.

extended family/nuclear family: The workings of extended and nuclear families are another ripe field for misunderstandings, especially in relation to the location and status of the 'lone' or 'single' mother.

insider/outsider: I am of course in one sense the 'insider' (it is my story) yet in terms of methodology and interpretation it is the supervisors who are the insiders (it is their 'academy' and qualification to which I aspire).

Such was – more or less – the first checklist against prejudice and ignorance.

3.3 Backgrounding the Self of the Researcher

Before I move on, I must illustrate my background and that of my family members. I am a Pakistani and have six sisters and one brother. My dad and mum brought us up in Dubai. My son is five years old and we live in Liverpool with my sister, Nori, who is undertaking her PhD in Science. Abi (sister) and Taab (brother) reside in London [this was the case until 2012]. The rest of my family along with my mum and dad are now in Pakistan.

In 2004, I was the first one in my family to get married. It was arranged by my parents and uncle. To me the forthcoming wedding was more of a great chance to shop and buy lots of new glittering stuff, getting dressed up as a bride and so on. Getting married to someone who was not my cousin also pleased me. It seemed an ‘adventure’. I was focusing on the shopping and also planning to enjoy getting to know him, his family and so on. Additionally, since he was approved by my parents and uncle, it never occurred to me to peep into my future and think realistically about what if he is not the right one. Or what if things did not work out between the families? I was 23 and I must say that I was naïve enough to not ask myself ‘what if?’. The basis of the marriage was on trust between the heads of families, my dad and uncle and his brothers and mum. After the marriage everything went well for the first couple of months, but then it did not seem to work out, as my in-laws had started to back off from their previous agreement. I can recall the words ‘All that we said was just BY THE WAY’ [without true intentions] uttered by my brother-in-law in response to my dad inquiring of him, ‘What about your promise to let my daughter continue with her Master’s degree?’ My innocence was apparent as I had not looked beneath the wedding’s glitz and glamour, which subsequently came at a higher price than I could ever have imagined.

My father had always been very progressive about our education, and all my sisters and brother were born and brought up in Dubai. Although we belonged to a village in Pakistan, Mohaal, we had never lived there. On the other hand, he (ex-husband) was living in Spain while his family remained in rural Pakistan. The women in his family

used to work in the fields and were mothers rather than waged workers. In contrast, our upbringing was very different. We were kept 'like a hair in butter' as the Urdu expression goes (wrapped in cotton wool).

My initial interview was conducted by my former supervisor and Ian Stronach. I assumed that my interview would be based on my experience as a lone-mother student but it was not just about my recent experience, it was more than that. I seemed also to be learning about me and about me being a lone mother. My interview opened me to my supervisors as I narrated my past, present and anticipated future. It was emotional: there were tears. As I now realise, it may be difficult for a researcher to understand part of her experiences as, in my case, a lone-mother- student, without revealing a lot more than she originally intended to. Indeed, it is part of the hermeneutic approach that there should be an ongoing 'dialectical tacking' (Geertz, 1973, p.69) between the details of local circumstances and more global understandings which give the local its meaning. Reissman realises this during her research on infertility and its consequences for women in South India (Reissman, 2002, 2008): her participants resisted fragmenting their stories into 'thematic (codable) categories' and so would 'digress'. For example, she notes that one of her participants, Gita, would not give a clear answer and went 'on and on' and always used to drag the talk back to politics – which she enjoyed talking about as she had been an active politician. Later in her conversation, the participant referred to her niece and nephews as her 'big family', challenging Reissman's 'bipolar notions of parenthood' (Reissman, 2002). A new dimension of relational understanding opened up. Hence, it can be useful to allow a 'long story' in response to an interview question for which the researcher expects a 'long list', just as in the case of Gita. Thus, the need may be to 'give up communicative power and follow participants down the trails'. This also points to the danger of constructing two worlds apart – a world of research interviewing and the natural world of social interaction/conversation (Reissman, 2008). Research may thus not bring a holistic understanding, but rather isolated bits of information. However, feminist researchers have worked to move away from more 'dominating' forms of interviewing in pursuit of more relational forms which understand and acknowledge respondents' ways of organising meaning in their lives (Reinharz and Chase, 2003). For instance, during my meetings with my supervisors they were surprised as each meeting brought new

stories, which Ian named as ‘little vignettes’. Ian writes ‘Just when I’m thinking that I’ve begun to understand what kind of story she presents, I get a further surprise’ (email 29.03.10). To be specific, at that point Ian is surprised to find out that a sister, whom he previously understood as a more Western-oriented individualist – who places great importance to her job/career/qualification and seems to put a stress on ‘me’ rather than ‘us’, being apparently reluctant to help Sajida with the upbringing of her son – had also made a kind of rescue attempt to protect Shah (Sajida’s son) in telling him that a ‘princess’ will be waiting for him in Pakistan ‘if he’s really good’.

3.4 Learning to be a Lone Mother

The term ‘lone mother’ is mostly used in British academic writing and is intended as an ‘inclusive’ marker referring to all mothers whether divorced, separated, widowed as well as single, never-married, mothers (Standing, 1998; Kiernan et al., 2004). In the United States the term widely in use is ‘single mother’, which has replaced the term ‘unwed mother’, which was in turn considered as a better term than ‘illegitimate mother’ (Winkler, 2002). However, a limited number of feminist scholars also used the term ‘solo mother’; among them is Winkler, who uses it on the advice of her students (Winkler, 2002). Standing (1998) abandons the use of the term ‘single mother’ in favour of ‘lone mother’ in order to gain a wider definition (or academic credibility), whereas, to me, the term lone mother strikes a pejorative note, and implies loneliness, or the ‘lone ranger’, while ‘single’ is a much more neutral term. This is especially the case when coming from a culture where ‘lone motherhood’ does not exist as a cultural category, making it difficult for me to overcome the connotations of overwhelming loneliness in the term lone-motherhood. Standing’s (1998) term may be technically more inclusive, but I find it rather excluding in my case, shutting it in a more affective and negative register. May (2010) also finds the category ‘lone mother’ diverse, based on the variety of social positions, such as class, culture and ethnicity. Hence, it is difficult to ‘homogenise’ or ‘totalise’ the diverse group into one category, which often does not share common elements (May, 2010).

It would not be an exaggeration to call it an irony of fate that I had to travel thousands of miles to meet and fully experience the loneliness of my motherhood. Ian’s first question in our first interview is: ‘Is there an expression in Urdu for single

mum... lone mother? Does it translate at all?' I respond, 'No, not... I have never even thought about it. To be honest with you it did not come to my mind that there is...that if there is any expression...' Hence, this suggested that, although I was technically a single or lone mother at the time when I was in Pakistan, I lived within an extended family. I was a mother to my son, daughter to my parents and sister to my brother and sisters and so the thought of being alone never occurred to me. I was never a 'lone' or even in many senses a 'single' mother. The extended nature of Pakistani family life made sure of that. Later, I moved to London in 2007 and started living with my brother and sister and so came across the term 'single mum' and was fine with it. However, I then embarked on research on 'lone mothers' and so began to feel the 'loneliness' of the term. It is interesting that I had to cross all those cultural and geographic distances in order to become a 'lone mother' in terms of both the concept and its emotional loading.

Such an in-depth background brings forth my life story, and my supervisors' struggle to locate my 'lone motherhood' culturally. This struggle carries on as I together with my supervisors try to unearth other assumptions. Ian senses an element of 'fate' in my account – 'something unreparable has happened', 'she does not feel that new relations are possible' – and that 'sense of fate is carried over into pessimism about other relationships'. It is unlike many such accounts in the UK. My former supervisor, on the other hand, cites similarities in UK household experiences, drawing on her own family. The 'absence of father' has a parallel in the death of a missing relative (grandfather):

'in my childhood, death or a disappearance was dealt with by not talking about the person ... when my children experienced this we tried to answer these questions in a way which would give them some truth, but satisfy their curiosity on why they were now gone'. To sum up this process of early interaction, the stories that I had so far introduced were based on a period of almost 20 years and were not shaped in chronological order. These stories were formed as social narration. In fact, they were either responses to questions, additional stories to form connection, placement and relevance with previously told stories. It felt more like building than telling. Hence, the supervisors who were not familiar with my culture were trying to understand that culture and particular predicament, examining the location of lone motherhood in my culture, providing an insight into UK culture, and were also exchanging reflections on their parallel experiences, insofar as they had any.

3.5 Floating metaphors: Purity/Impurity/Contamination

There we were in my former supervisor's office instead of Ian's as it was more convenient for me to mind my son – who was in my office in the same building, playing computer games. We had gathered to discuss progress on the draft and as usual we ended up bringing more data into the reflective chapter. In the first interactive interview, my story involved an ex-husband living in Spain, and returning not 'pure', as I put it at the time. It would be useful to note here that our notions of 'purity' and 'impurity' have two dimensions, one anthropological and one moral, and we do not mean to imply the moral notion here. 'Purity' triggered Ian to recall Mary Douglas's *Purity and Danger* (1996). In the second discussion, the story was added to in ways that say much more about a different but not entirely unrelated clash between 'traditional' and 'modern' cultural mores. Thus, the second discussion led to the notion of contamination, in the Mary Douglas sense – my inability to accept village life and to live a traditional married woman's role is no doubt caused by my Dubai education and experience of different family values. In addition, Ian wondered if I, in turn, could not fulfil the role of 'pure' Pakistani woman because I perhaps have different values about the role of women. Thus, this could be seen as two sides of the same coin – with the ex-husband living in Spain, in a Western culture, thus in my eyes he is impure, yet I am not willing to live a village life as a 'proper' Pakistani women, so is this making me impure in the villagers' eyes? ¹. As for the former supervisor's concept of purity, these 'issues would not attribute the title or description of pure... and the impurity meaning that these actors are in various ways (educated Pakistani women, husband in Spain, father working in Dubai) evolving and moving towards a transition, probably influenced by their habitat and knowledge of other cultures and they are stretching tenuous ties (physically and emotional) to their traditions and background'. I had in mind at first 'purity', and 'contamination' as only a notion of moral 'purity', but I subsequently found myself close to Mary Douglas's sense of purity as contamination since I do not fit into a 'pure' version of a Pakistani woman's life.

Douglas (1996) notes that impurity means different things to different groups of

¹ Purity/ impurity/contamination are metaphors that set up a useful but exaggerated distinction, useful in pointing to anthropological distinction but less helpful in its moral implications: 'contamination' can be valuable, educative, emancipatory.

people, cultures or societies. Purity essentially refers to moral symbols, based on people's concept of what should be the case and what should not be the case. In defining what is polluted, people classify their social life into opposing categories of what is acceptable and what is unacceptable. Thus, our notions of 'purity' and 'impurity' are not isolated notions but are products of our social life, as Murray suggests: 'Narratives do not, as it were, spring from minds of individuals but are social creations. We are born into culture which has a ready stock of narratives which we appropriate and apply in our everyday social interaction' (Murray, 1999, p.53).

Douglas (1966) also proposes that there is no absolute version of a thing that can be pure or impure in relation to the other; thus, in a particular part of India contact with cow dung will pollute a god but remove pollution from a human, so this sense of purity or impurity is not absolute: in relation to different things and beliefs, the sense of purity and impurity changes.

Thus, supervisors' interpretation of the initial version of my story was as a clash between the 'traditional' and 'modern' cultural norms and a further explanation that, 'At one end I resist living a village life and the acceptance of a traditional married woman's role, probably as I have been accustomed to life in Dubai and am highly educated. I also came to realise that I am the first highly qualified woman [Master's degree] in my ex-husband's village and in addition to that I am also more qualified than him [Bachelor's degree]'. Initially I was given much prestige by his family members across the village. They offered me the best chair, which during my interview I call the 'sweet chair', which can be interpreted as an expression of 'great reverence and kindness'. However, I would also like to take former supervisor's point, in her account of feelings of betrayal in village life: 'The story of the divorce unfolds with the added dimension of Sajida facing a future that she had not agreed to, with the other family reneging on a past promise, one which she was not happy with'. I had started with a life planned out by my parents in the form of my wedding and then had to abandon it, because of 'the fear of being trapped in the village bearing children year after year, alone and putting my qualifications in a box' former supervisor, and for which my father had kindly supported me and stood by me. If not, I would have become a very different kind of 'lone mother'. A critical evaluation of my wedding would be that it was in itself a clash of at least two cultures. On the one hand, we have a village culture embedded in the groom's

family, as opposed to the more modern Spanish cultural context of the groom's working environment. On the other hand, I presented the values and mores of a modern city, and of a socialisation based on Dubai. The diaspora offers clashes in values, shifts in meaning and crucially, in this instance, a marriage conceived by a woman in 'modern' terms, but reconceived by the equally 'modern' husband as a proper incorporation into 'traditional' customs. This latter split divides the husband, as well as the couple and the families.

3.6 Being a Lone Mother: Is It Just Another Lifestyle Choice?

Lone mothers are blamed for the dissolution of family values and for taking the decision to become lone mothers (Juffer, 2006). For some policy makers, lone mother is 'just another life style choice' (Juffer, 2006, p.99). However, for many women in the UK like me, it is not a lifestyle choice, but it is what we have become after a relationship break-up. My own experience is a story of ending up as a 'lone mother in voluntary exile' after separation but never being able to contemplate filing for divorce for the fear of custody problems, which constitutes a kind of 'chaos narrative'. Such a concept refers to those stories that are never meant to have an audience because it is culturally and personally 'not tellable' (Smith and Sparkes, 2008, p.218). Smith and Sparkes write of the 'two-sided notion' of tellability. One is the lower bounding side, which comes with the guarantee of being heard/listened to by the listener, while the other is upper bounding, which is not perceived as possible as a narrative, perhaps because they are not 'success' stories but rather are 'failure narratives' (Stronach, 2009, p.149) and are 'too personal, too embarrassing, or too frightening' (Smith and Sparkes, 2008, p.218). Exile refers to diaspora, which means 'displaced communities of people who have been dislocated from their native homeland through the movements of migration, immigration or exile.' (Braziel and Mannur, 2003, p.1). The definition explains diaspora but the emotions involved are not listed. In the case of the researcher, this migration/exile is complex. Radhakrishan (2003) points to the two selves. In this case, one self is the Pakistani self and the other self is the UK self (lone motherhood), although there is certainly no simple polarity.

On the other hand, as a 'failure narrative', Stronach's exit speech is located both on

the upper bounding and the lower bounding. For the insiders it is located on the upper bounding, and hence it is a 'failure narrative' and not suitable to be told, while for outsiders it is a 'welcome guest' and remains 'tellable' and offers 'restitution'. With Stronach's (2009) 'failure narrative' and Smith and Sparkes' (2008) 'chaos narrative' in mind, I come back to our lone motherhood narratives and try to locate them alongside. Firstly, there is a need to justify the elements of chaos – a story of divorce is not welcome in either Eastern or Western culture and so does not have a receptive cultural audience, does not bring forth 'solace' or 'restitution' for future settlement, 'a sense of fate is carried over into pessimism about other relationships' (Ian). As a 'failure narrative', the story remains 'tellable' for the insiders (within the extended family) and is not taken as 'failure' perhaps due to 'restitution' notions of undertaking progressive doctoral studies, thus looking forward to an independent life, while it is not 'tellable' for the outsiders – who note the unacceptable nature of the event in Pakistani culture. A UNHCR (2007) report suggests that the return of a divorced daughter to the family home creates the potential of stigma for both parents and family and is 'tantamount to being a social pariah, while husband's ill conduct is not questioned generally'. In this scenario women face social criticism within society, thus ensuring that single women often have to forego any support. As for Smith and Sparkes' (2008) notion of 'tellability', being a divorced lone mother is a 'chaos' story which lacks a willing audience. If so, then as Smith and Sparkes (2008) suggest:

As such, telling, hearing and honouring chaos stories can be an extremely difficult, risky, complex, delicate, and precarious process for all involved. But, if they are not honoured, then the spectre of deprivation of opportunity and infiltrated consciousness looms large and there is a real danger that these become normalised as a way of dealing with people chaos. (p. 26)

Thus, the upper bounding of 'tellability' needs to be increased. Therefore, in the preliminary analysis of my story of lone motherhood, both anthropology and autoethnography could explain some of its 'untellable' features. However, perhaps such theory cannot do justice to the harsh realities of the experience. Such stories are far from involving any 'lifestyle choice'. They are of becoming a juggler, and managing between work and home, and for some that even includes studies. We are forced to have sleepless nights, thinking, 'What if something goes wrong in my child's upbringing? Am I ready to face any further serious blows, am I strong enough to wrap my son under my blanket as a mother and also to be hard as a wall in

protecting him and be there for him as a dad when he is having a fight or needs a male role model?’ In the light of these dilemmas we have to provide the best living for our children, covering the roles of both father and mother (Juffer, 2006).

Sparkes introduced the notion of ‘restitution’ and of course this kind of doctoral study has elements of what we might call ‘self-rescue’. However, my son also had his version – using the cultural resources of the fairy tale to fashion a kind of resolution for his problems.

March 04, 2010 (research diary)

Last week when I was putting my son to bed and was pulling out the story books to read to him he asked me, ‘Mama, Abu jee [Urdu: meaning father, he is referring to my father] is not my dad and Taab [my brother in London] is not my dad. Where is my dad?’ I did not know what to say and went quiet. After a minute or so when my son did not hear a voice he said, ‘Mama, it’s your time to talk,’ which he often does when I take a pause before answering him. I do that to make sure that what I tell him is actually correct in its complete sense. So there I was silent and tears started rolling out of my eyes. My son suddenly comes up with a response: ‘Mama I know, my dad is up in the sky and I need a magic carpet to fly up in the sky and bring my dad, but you do not have to come with me, you can stay here and I’ll bring him all by myself’.

For the last few weeks we have been watching ‘Aladdin’ episodes, the idea was introduced by my sister Abi when we visited her in London during Shah’s half-term break, and I would like to mention here that we [my own brother and sisters] have grown up watching Aladdin, Ghostbusters, Popeye the Sailor Man, Donald Duck, Duck Tales, etc., and so I thought to introduce the beauty of ‘our time’ cartoons [I meant the sorts of cartoon I watched]. So just a day or two before he inquired of me [about his dad] we were watching ‘Aladdin and the King of the Thieves’. In this episode Aladdin’s wedding with Jasmine [the princess] is being planned and Al. misses his dad... later on he flies on the magic carpet to rescue his dad. My son is 5 years and 4 months old and I always had that thing in my mind that the questions about his dad will come to me around his 7th birthday or so and that by 7 he will be old enough to understand it all by himself and so would never ask me in such straight, plain words. Maybe I never want to reveal the truth to him because I am afraid that he may end up saying that it’s my fault, maybe because I never want him to ask me about his dad and believe in me of taking both the roles ‘mum and dad’, which I did say to him but he refused to take that as a possible fact.

My former supervisor sympathises with me on hearing this account and wants to advise me but does not comment at the time. Later she writes:

The issue for me is that, what if I say something or advise on something that may be constructed as culturally insensitive? In this situation my response would be to give some motherly advice, but because we are in this supervision mode I hesitated and instead reflected that similar situations can be found in most households.

My former supervisor later reciprocates, reflecting on my decision about not moving to the village and to the situation I was facing with my son, who had been questioning me about his father, as creating an ‘inner turmoil of conflict’ within me.

On the other hand, Ian tries to unfold the connections between the ‘troubling absence of father’ and the complicating business of a ‘double divorce’. ‘The ‘father’ becomes a troubling absence for both of them – not as ‘real’ father but as an absence that lacks explanation or resolution’. For me, the absence of his father is not a loss to cry about, but my son asking me about his dad and finding no answer did bring tears. Thus, I would agree with Ian that my sadness is not associated with the actual loss of a husband because it was not taken as a personal loss on my behalf. However, it was a shock for my family and I must state that it was and still is considered as a personal loss with regard to my family breakdown. Later Ian states:

Maybe...even...and pushing it a bit, we could even say that she has emancipated herself from her fate as a married Pakistani woman stuck in a rural village. So is it possible to see some of that as a ‘gain’ of sorts?

Ian looks back to the first interview:

I assumed he had deserted her Spain/bright lights/girlfriends. It fits UK cultural norms well enough. The second story does not deny that interpretation so much as it deepens it, in relation to values and gender issues. They are both caught between discrepant things... It’s not ‘personal’ in the Western way (if there is such a thing); it’s just something that should never have happened, to paraphrase the data from the first interview.

He adds that, ‘The circumstances of Sajida also lead her to feel a great kind of estrangement from the certainties and close ties of family – she is in a sort of exile in the UK’. In my understanding, the term ‘exile’ is introduced by Ian from the concepts of ‘shame, taboo and stigma’ written into my data such as ‘my mum and dad were trying not reveal it to other people (in Pakistan)’, ‘are the other sisters to be trusted as successful wives?’ Hence, the need is to explore stigma and whether I should see myself or my family as being stigmatised. Goffman (1986) states that when a person comes into our presence we tend to ‘anticipate’ her category and

‘attribute’ her ‘social identity’, which is a ‘virtual social identity’, and if the person does not fit into the category of people with which she is supposed to then we consider her less desirable (in its mildest form) and in the more extreme form a ‘handicap’, ‘dangerous’, ‘weak’ and ‘thoroughly bad’, and such an attribute is called stigma (Goffman, 1986). For me, moving out to the United Kingdom was my choice for a better life for my son and also to be tucked ‘out of sight out of mind’ (former supervisor), so this whole affair does not pose any further challenge to my family’s reputation.

3.7 Family and Support

A family gives the support needed for lone parents – that they are there for you – and the security – that they will offer support – which as a lone mother I may be unable to provide. According to MacMurray (1961, p. 56), ‘There are few things that I desire to do which do not depend upon the active co-operation of others. I need you in order to be myself’. In my case my son has enjoyed staying with my family, mum, dad, brother and sisters, and I must say that we were pampered by them (which I did not realise as much as I do now). I used to study and even started teaching while my son used to stay with them. I remember returning from work and asking if Shah had had his dinner. Sometimes I would be sitting on the couch, having dinner, watching TV shows while Shah was either sleeping or playing with my family members. Those were the days when I was too naïve to realise that I was a lone mother, and so being in an extended family my functional isolation was very minimal as my family was there to help me with the everyday chores and to provide a strong sense of solidarity.

In my very first interview by supervisors the key construct marked by Ian was ‘family’ and a strong dependence on it. It is unusual for a UK-born white woman aged 29 to say: ‘even today if my mom and dad say something, I would just blindly follow...’, ‘they are going to think right for me’. This reminds me of Matthew McConaughey in the movie, ‘Failure to Launch’ where Matthew’s parents hire a woman to take their 35-year-old son out of their house, which is not exactly the same example for me, but it may indicate that children who stay with and rely on their parents beyond a certain age need a push to be independent. And it was a lot harder

for me as I could not envisage it: it was not a cultural possibility. As I saw it, ‘lone’, ‘alone’, ‘single’ are not culturally ‘tellable’ positions in female Pakistani culture.

During these interactive interviews when I was becoming comfortable in narrating my personal stories, supervisors were not only being patient enough to listen to my stories and try to understand my culture and particular predicament, they even started sharing their life stories with connections to my own, which they might have not done under regular supervision mode. For example, ‘For me the surprising thing was that I should end a session with an anecdote about two of my grandkids on a Liverpool train – that’s not really my style’ (Ian). Therefore, when I tell them about my sister and her engagements in her PhD research project and her not being available for me, telling me it is my responsibility, they take my side and in a later interpretation Ian put it, ‘I am struck by how differently I respond to Noreen. First, I start with certain dislike – feeling that she didn’t act very kindly’. Perhaps my first interview was based on my feeling of estrangement from the certainties and close ties of family, as I was going through a transitional period of relying on my family for their support to realising that it’s now all my responsibility. My former supervisor reflects, ‘she is struggling without the extended support of her family, which I can understand to be very difficult – for me the natural way to learn about how to deal with such issues was to ask my mother, who was also my friend that I could talk to about most things’. Later on, while we are unearthing assumptions/parallel stories/contradictions and I narrate my mother’s role as a first point of contact for various issues before father is addressed, former supervisor brings up her mother’s role as a mediator between the more authoritarian father and his daughter. At this point in time Ian keeps silent but responds later mentioning that ‘my mother was a lone mother for a good while...my father died when I was in my mid-teens so from then until I left home 7 years later, she was a lone mother’.

One sentence recurred for Juffer during her interviews with lone mothers with only slight variation: ‘I have to do this on my own’ (Juffer, 2006).

April 13, 2010 (Shah’s first fight and me):

It was another day off to the kids’ park and since the weather has been good for the last few days me and Shah [have] visited the park quite often. I was walking a few yards away from Shah and was watching him sliding down the slide. [A] few boys of age around 10-12 were also

playing there. Shah went to one of the boys and the boy [swore] at him 'F... Off', which I heard and stood and stared at Shah, after realising that I must say something, I went to the boy and said 'Did you just swear at my boy?' He was like 'Yes because he was going to throw [a] stone at me' and I responded 'No, he was not, he just came and stood next to you to have a go at the slide after you are done'. Another boy who was also standing there came to me and said 'Listen, you cannot tell him not to swear because he will, it's his life and you cannot stop him'. I very quickly responded, 'Yes, you are right he can swear anytime, anywhere but he cannot swear at my son'. Perhaps the boy did not like that and so he went on swearing at me and saying 'We do not care what you say so you can just shut up'. I said 'You can keep on swearing at me and I wouldn't mind because you are a kid. Well, I was not talking to you so how come you jump in the middle'. He said 'that boy [who swore at Shah] is my cousin so I am speaking for him'. I said 'My boy is small and we do not swear. If you swear at me I wouldn't mind that because I know you are kids and I can ignore it but a small child like him [my boy] will absorb it and I don't want that. We all are living in this country together just like a big family so we all need to take care of one another'. At this he aggressively responded 'Which country are you from?' I said 'Pakistan'. He quickly responded 'You are not our family [putting his arms around a black boy – his friend]. We English and black are family, not you'. Another English boy [from their group] responded 'Hey, you cheeky racist! You can't say that'. By this time this little incident gathered a crowd of 4 English boys², 1 black boy and 2 white [girls] and 1 black girl all between the ages of 8-12. I repeated my sentence that we should all try to take care of one another and 'since you are big so you should take care of small children at least not to swear'. They said 'sorry' and I called my son to shake hands with all of them and be friends. The boys left after a minute or so.

After 5 minutes or so we came back home. The thought of those boys going back and bringing bigger boys for the fight scared me and so I could not stay there any longer. This was the first fight and I just saw myself standing and defending Shah just like a dad. A flash of Shah's future passed through my eyes and I realised how strong I'll have to be.

3.8 Similarities and Differences in Interpretation and Approaches

Before I discuss the difference in approach between my two supervisors and myself, it would be useful to recollect the possible initial dimensions mentioned at the beginning of the chapter and identify each one. Ian – male, adult, atheist, UK culture, expert, experience of a nuclear family. Former supervisor – female, adult,

² It is taken from my personal diary, but it is interesting to reflect that I use 'English' to mean white.

agnostic, UK culture, expert, experience of a nuclear family. Sajida - female, young, Muslim, Pakistani culture, novice, experience of an extended family.

Firstly, the data was collected in the form of scheduled interviews and doctoral meetings. Secondly, it was interpreted and circulated among the three of us; in doing this we all put down our own reflections. However, while interpreting the data we all quoted one another and instead of just bringing out our personal reflections on the data we moved from 'I' to 'we' and:

Because it was intimate and emotional for S, I kind of think that it made me (and maybe [former supervisor] as well) get involved more personally ourselves, as a kind of reciprocal gesture...it just feels wrong that intimate disclosure should be so one-sided (Ian).

My former supervisor's approach has been pragmatic and empathetic: 'I feel close, closer than with other students I have supervised' and 'I feel she is too hard on herself'. She and I share intimacy on the following grounds: we both are female and mothers 'whilst she herself is struggling without the extended support of her family, which I can understand to be very difficult' (former supervisor), and she has personally experienced some of the stories that I narrate. 'I can feel some of the tensions Sajida feels. She feels that she may have let them down'. She later puts down her personal experience parallel to my stories 'My mother told my dad the day after I got married that I was pregnant. I was frightened of his reaction and ashamed that I had let him down'. On the other hand, Ian is silent and makes no personal connection and only later recollects that his 'own mother was a 'lone mother' for a good while...'. This could suggest a gendered approach where Ian resists bringing out a personal story, as males of that background might do. However, later when I talk of how my newly-made friendships with other couples seem to be falling away, he recollects his mother going through similar circumstances, 'She was friends with single or divorced women – not that we were cast away, but they (the couples who were old family friends) just stick to Christmas cards'.

We all belong to the academic world but are at different stages of our academic career and also at different levels in the academic hierarchy. We tried to break down the hierarchical structure and power relations between us to work collaboratively. For eight months in 2010-2011 we worked on collecting data through our interactive interviews, interpreting it and then reflecting back on it and so on and so forth.

However, when Ian started to read page 6 of my draft, he paused before stating that, although we are trying to work on a more reciprocal reflexivity:

Perhaps there is something missing...an element of challenge from S... the layers that we are trying to build are not being fully reflected... perhaps as academics we sound over-confident experts in interpreting your reality.

He was right to an extent that layers of reflection were not as obvious as they were envisaged to be. Perhaps I had to write myself into that space and it would be premature to expect that process to happen so quickly.

3.9 Dilemmas of Writing Reciprocal Reflexivity

As far as I have been able to ascertain, this is the first piece of academic writing based on ‘reciprocal reflexivity’ in doctoral supervision. Research has been conducted on doctoral supervision: supervisors’ dilemmas, doctoral supervision experience, cultural dilemma in doctoral research, etc., but our attempt is to work on reciprocal reflexivity in doctoral supervision, an aspect which has not been explored, even by those researchers who have researched doctoral supervision (such as Delamont et al., 1998, 2000; Pant-Robinson, 2005; Hutchings, 2015). Therefore, I must say that it became difficult for me to write and create a suitable narrative when the data was three-fold and was also changing as each account rewrote the previous one. It was a continuous process of creating data through interviews, reflecting on the data, and re-writing these reflections as more data was being generated. Each layer brought with it a deeper understanding and so it was changing and fluid, altering the previous account by adding further dimensions. This process produced a wealth of data which was complex and demanded a kind of three-handed knitting. I felt that my ability to write up such complex narratives was not strong enough to reflect the ways in which the interactive interviews were being conducted and then to express them, making sure that I could justify the element as a reciprocal reflexivity by ‘knitting’ and ‘weaving’ together all the layers and also bringing in relevant literature³.

³This issue was discussed after reading the initial drafts. It is perhaps the case that, despite attempting a case of reciprocal, reflexive and self-critical as supervisors, the relationship was more unequal than our ambition for it. Perhaps as a beginning doctoral student I could not form the layers of reciprocal reflexivity as well as I wanted to.

In undertaking such a triple reflexivity I did not put up any personal barriers or elements of censorship, but while producing this academic piece of writing for readers outside the room I have opted for some self-censorship. Hence, one dilemma of writing reciprocal reflexivity is also revisiting the piece of writing and asking oneself a question: Who is my audience? In this case it is not written for myself but for the general and academic readers.

3.10 Some Interim Conclusions

3.10.1 Conclusion A

In this attempt to bring to the surface the relationship between me and my supervisors, I explored the complexities involved in understanding meaning formation and its existence in culture. I realised that these experiences are complex and to understand experiences and perform the meaning formation task is complex as well. Although in this we managed to unearth the researcher's diaspora, uncertainty – role of missing father and dilemmas of divorce – creating certainty – the magic carpet story, I also came to realise that lone motherhood (in my case) was never fixed in emotional terms and had serious emotional swings. I also came across in a social context the positivist model of certainty – my wedding depicted the quantifiable economic model – and thus demonstrated that 'unpredictability and uncertainty' were not given a chance to exist (Stronach and Clarke, 2011).

3.10.2 Conclusion B

So what does 'reciprocal reflexivity' mean? First, we do not wish to fall into some kind of utopian or Habermasian 'free speech' resolution (1979). The easy language of 'collaboration', 'participation' and 'partnership' is to be avoided. No doubt there are still enduring problems of cultural confusion and misunderstanding between us, and issues of expertise and authority as well: '*Cultural translation, which is what ethnography is, never fully assimilates difference*' (Marcus, 1998, p. 186).

Nor does it dismiss the 'authority' of unequal power. In fact, 'authority' is an interesting concept in this context: power invested in the 'author', or in this case 'authors', whether they like it or want it, or not.

However, in trying to bring things to the surface, share understandings, and travel dialectically and recursively between data, theory, and interpretation, some progress has been made in this attempt to ‘breach the space between experience and analysis’ (Panourgia, 1995, p. xxii). These interactions are complex engagements across divisions of gender, ethnicity, age, experience, religion and culture. In this chapter I have managed to unearth cultural in-betweens resulting from the researcher’s diaspora, including the role of the missing father and dilemmas of divorce, as well as narratives of redemption, from the son’s magic carpet story, to the lone mother’s attempt at a doctoral rescue. It has also been realised that lone motherhood (in my case) was never fixed in emotional terms and had serious emotional swings. Nor is the journey simply an emotional, intellectual and hermeneutic one. As the ‘relation’ of supervisor/student changes towards a more socially defined ‘relationship’, it enables further reflection and deeper dialogue. It is not just a question of confession or disclosure. Forms of friendship begin to accrue. These dialogic acts free up both thinking and feeling, as well as the possibility of disagreeing. However, a danger is worth noting here. Some regard reflexive approaches as ‘dead-end self-indulgence’ (reported in Marcus, p.193) or outright ‘narcissism’ (reported in Davies, 1999, p.179), but we would want to leave such final judgements to the reader: it is not for us to say. Recently, Westbrook has called for a more conversational approach to ethnography. Academic ethnographers should, he says, ‘let go and be amateurs’, in an ethnographic approach that takes ‘the possibility of conversation as its premise’ (Westbrook, 2008, p. 149/150). This we have tried to do, and we hope that the chapter makes that case. Davies also notes that ethnography in its reflexive forms is always a business of ‘self and other’ (Davies 1999 p.183). Perhaps our interim conclusion should be that in the journeys between experience and analysis the supervisors travelled mainly in one direction – from analysis to experience – while the doctoral student travelled in the opposite direction – from experience to analysis. Did we meet in the middle? No, but we at least managed to wave to each other.

A first move in developing a reflexive approach was to identify the sorts of difference that separated two supervisors and a doctoral student – ethnicity, gender, age, experience, culture, etc. This done, the learning ‘triangle’ could draw on a growing knowledge of these dimensions at an empirical level – the status of ‘lone mother’ in Pakistan as opposed to the UK, the role of abu gee (father) in an extended

family, the extended role of the mother (e.g. as also ‘father and ‘family’ rolled into one) in relation to the child, the difficulties of relations with other parents, and so on. However, we also came to realise that such lone motherhood was never fixed in emotional terms and had serious emotional swings. Both of these are a conscious kind of learning but are accompanied by a more unconscious performative dimension. We are not filling the gaps in our knowledge of the Other so much as we are shifting the grounds from which we think (reflexively, we hope) and from which we are thought (reciprocally, or so we intend). Such differences, then, are not just facts to be learned: they also initiate ways of understanding and misunderstanding that are ongoing. The work of reflexivity is never done, always underway, and never complete. It is in all those senses always a question of failure, whose ‘success’ is a question of its recognition rather than correction. And it reflects a philosophy of difference and ‘becoming’ much more than any representational claims the research process may from time to time feel able to make.

CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction: Four extended cases

The aim of this chapter is to present four extended cases. It illustrates the complexity of interviewees' experiences, the importance of giving 'lone motherhood' a context in the 'real' lives of people. The four cases are highly divergent, and this reflects the reality across all 13 cases in this study. The intention, thus, is to let the 'cases' speak for themselves (acknowledging that this will always be mediated by my own presentation of them), and then to allow emerging themes to develop, leading to a more thematic analysis. My approach in this chapter is to include detailed speech from the participants so the story remains open to the reader, and then add my reflections to the story. Further in-depth analysis will be performed at the end of the four extended cases.

4.2 Thematic Analysis

The initial case study was based on a preliminary structure – *voice, reflection, analysis*. The prominence of 'voice' was based on two aims: to represent the views of the respondent as directly as possible (an emancipatory interest+ Reissman, 2002), and for the researcher to provide the reader with direct access to that 'voice'. This reflexive ambition reflected the general and collective approach of the doctoral group at that time. Reflexive issues were explored in a series of joint publications (Stronach, I., Frankham, J., Bibi-Nawaz, S., Cahill, G., Cui, V., Dymoke, K. and Mohd Khir, M., 2013; Frankham, J., Stronach, I., Bibi-Nawaz, S., Cahill, G., Cui, V., Dymoke, K., Dung, M.T.T., Lungka, P., Mat-Som, H. and Khir, M.M., 2014; Stronach, I., Frankham, J., Bibi-Nawaz, S., Cahill, G., Cui, V., Dymoke, K., Dung, M.T.T., Lungka, P., Mat-Som, H., Khalid, K., Alshareif, O. and Arawi, N., 2014). Each group member incorporated aspects of these reflexive explorations in their individual PhD thesis. (In my case see Chapter Three and also appendices J, K, L and M.)

Reading early drafts of that case and re-reading the data suggested to me the naivety of ‘voice’. Any re-representation makes covert narrative decisions: ordering, selecting, excluding, and prioritising. What looks like ‘voice’ disguises the ventriloquising of the case study researcher (Elliot, 1991). Similarly, the tidy and rational schema – *voice, reflection, analysis* – is a kind of ‘easy realism’ that has trouble separating reflection from analysis. And analysis leads to re-readings of ‘voice’. The linear logic becomes circular in a good sense, a hermeneutic refiguring of ‘excursion’ and ‘return’ (Gadamer, 2004; Elliot, 1991). In one of the doctoral group meetings someone referred to the difference between ‘conquering the data’, ‘I came, I saw, I conquered’ – (thinking of Julius Caesar’s conquest of Britain in 55 BCE) and ‘listening’ to the data. The latter seems to me to return a bit to the naivety of ‘voice’, but it does soften ‘analysis’ into a more dynamic ‘signature’ such as Deleuze, Guattari used in order to deconstruct Descartes’ ‘I think therefore I am’ (1994, p.24).

4.3 Case Number 1: LMH

LMH is an asylum seeker from Somalia who became a lone mother after giving birth to a son whilst in the UK. She is studying for a diploma at Community College.

What did I make of LMH’s data? The starting point was the category of ‘lone motherhood’. It was a thing in itself, and case study would give it depth, as well as the breadth of ‘context’, but re-reading the case made a difference. First, ‘lone motherhood’ hid other events and conditions:

- 1) Absence of father
- 2) Incident of rape
- 3) Condition of refugee status
- 4) Need for interpreter (language)
- 5) Fact of premature delivery
- 6) Circumstances of disability

The harder I looked, the more powerful the context sounded; the echo of the preliminary focus of the case got fainter and fainter. Nor were these all there was to LMH's narratives. There was much more.

In analysing the data I began to understand that there are a number of themes: the biography of the lone mother, her history, because it connects to the present and thus is always present. It is a poignant and idiosyncratic story, one filled with emotions. It all connects to being and becoming a lone mother. At the same time, lone motherhood became increasingly less central to LMH's story.

It was clear already that there was no 'average' status of 'lone motherhood' that could be boiled down to factors capable of aggregation or averaging. However, I did not believe that this meant there would be no 'emerging themes' – perhaps one of them would come from this piece of data (case study). Interestingly, it was data constructed by serendipity, a chance interruption:

LMH's tutor comes in and tells LMH that she has passed her Maths exam with 83%. LMH is very happy.

Researcher: Great! You passed.

LMH: Ohhh, I am happy.

The theme is a kind of astonishing resilience, positivity, and a belief that determination can lead to success and achievement in the new context of the UK.

A further reflection on the 'confessional' nature of the interview is that it seems LMH is unwilling to talk about various parts of her experience. Somalia seems at first to be out of bounds and I respect that and do not pursue it. Becoming a lone mother is another such topic, and later on in another sitting she did not want to talk about her religion or her son's religion.

R: Your son's name is Joseph and yours is Amina. Do you mind me asking about your faith? Are you Muslim, Christian?

LMH: We are practising both and I don't want to talk about it.

However, it is not a simple exclusion or taboo. As the conversation continues, she returns to these themes. New stories turn up – parents killed, husband killed.

No way, and if I go there, it will be a big problem. Although my husband was killed when I was sent here [but] I didn't come here to become what I have become. Although I know that this lady, my mother-in-law, she won't be very angry to me like in terms of punishing me but [in] the community and society she won't... her hands will be tied up to help me. So yeah, it will be a big problem and I won't be allowed to become a lone mother. It would be a big mistake of their life but I don't want it [to] drag me down. It would drag me down; I would have killed myself for it.

New trajectories turn up as apparent asides. I realise that as she begins to trust me, and as I reveal something of my own experience, this leads to new revelations based on trust. In our second chat but first formal recorded interview (location Seaside café bar around 11:30am), we have the following exchange:

LMH: So how are you going to cope with it if dad is not around?

R: I'll manage.

LMH: You'll manage?

R: I'll manage.

LMH: For how long has your daddy been here with you?

R: He's been here with me for around three months.

LMH: Three months.

R: Yes.

LMH: You have been managing anyways up to this stage....

(As the data suggests, this interview reflected a reciprocal reflexivity (Lather, 1991; Stronach et al., 2007). The respondent is aware that the researcher is also a lone mother, and has her own questions for me about my current situations.)

R: Tell me about yourself, H.... Start from the beginning, where you grew up and went to school?

LMH: Oh, you don't want to know where I grew up.

R: Why?

LMH: It is in a very village area.

R: OK.

LMH: Area with too much of trauma... situations.

R: Which country are you from?

LMH: I don't want relate it to the country but I will relate it to the island. It is in a Somali territory. Although it's a problem for myself to say that I am Somali, I am getting kind of being, like, discriminated as well, because it is an island that.... I don't know what I should call [...] these people who are like fighting against [the] government. Anyway, it's going to be government policy or whatever you call them so we end up [being] a minor tribe that is inferior to what the big ones... so our tribe is unknown. It's unknown to Somali people, so it's like these ones that we live nearby, they end up like harassing us. So at the end of the day, I managed it through my husband's mother, to leave the country, to come over [here].

LMH is studying at first for a Diploma in ICT at Seaside Community College. She grew up in a Somalian territory called Bajuni Islands'. The islands are situated in the Lower Cuba region of Somalia (Wightwick Haywood, 1935). She belongs to a small tribe called Bajuni, which is a 'minor tribe that is inferior to what the big ones are and thus the tribe is unknown'. She and her tribe members were harassed by members of a powerful tribe in Somalia. The words she chooses to describe her past in Somalia are filled with fear: 'we end up [being] a minor tribe that is inferior', 'we are discriminated [against] because [we are a small tribe]'. There are themes here of trauma, discrimination and harassment. The major theme later develops into a 'lone mother' situation based on what seems to be tragic violence.

R: Did you have your early education from there?

LMH: It's like you won't even have education. Education can be things to do with Quran or normal things in the house. And then, as we get opportunity to be in a country that you can be safe, you end up taking opportunities like being in the colleges like Adult Centres to learn, whether it is English, Maths... blah blah, until you reach in a certain stage that you can be recognised as a person again. Otherwise, back [in Somalia] where I came from I tended to be hesitant, and traumati[sed]. I wouldn't like to talk about too much of the things that happened there. Because here I am alone with my son.

LMH is not comfortable in talking about her past. However, she chooses positive words for gaining education: 'you can be recognised as a person again'. She connects education to the UK and thus gaining an education in the UK could result in being

recognised as a person. For her, education is ‘English, Maths...’. Religious education and probably home economics, which she calls ‘normal things in the house’, is like not even having education. It is interesting that she sees education as much more than instrumental (get a job, gain qualifications, and so on.). For her, it is ‘being recognised as a person’ – something she seems to have been denied in Somalia for ethnic reasons.

R: Do you have any family members here?

LMH: No.

R: Friends?

LMH: I've got friends. I've got support of community that supports me a lot. So, yeah I just find myself moving that way. Please, as I speak with you, I really want my things to be confidential.

R: Everything that you will say will stay confidential.

LMH: I don't want [...] because I turn to be very paranoid about my life.

R: I understand.

In this passage she talks about being ‘very paranoid about [my] life’ and thus stresses keeping her data confidential. LMH referred to the incident of rape but did not want to refer to this further but for ethical reasons I decided to discuss the matter with my supervisor and it was agreed that the matter should be left like that. She has faced incredible difficulties in her life and thus has become fearful. Later on she will reveal the reasons why she has such fears.

LMH: OK, so when I was in this country like four year ago, I relied a lot on interpreters, even to meet people in their houses, to talk to house officers or anything... I had to use interpreters and then all this it made me to be in a kind of being paranoid and never trust other people, because others later on used me even in [a] very bad way. So you come into this country and you feel you are safe but you may... I wasn't even safer, again. So, after this support that I was getting from different support groups... through my GP, which connected me to different projects of people. Up to now I attended to them anyways so that they can kind of help me on my wellbeing and forget about the stresses and try to move on and also try to care for my son, so it's like when they see me they just want to know what are my plans for future. They just encourage me and give me a... kind of... advice: ‘LMH, just focus and don't worry about what happened and just focus, forget about your past.’ It's hard to forget that's why I had it or...

LMH has already referred to ‘friends’ as part of a support network. Now she introduces

institutional support – GP, psychiatric help, etc. It is noticeable that she picked up on some of that remedial discourse – ‘move on’, ‘just focus’. It is here that she reveals that the UK, which she thought was safe, was not even safe for her: ‘I wasn’t even safer, again’. She discusses her past but then she also rounds off the discussion by stating that she is remaining positive.

R: How long have you been here? When did you move to this country?

LMH: Like 2008.

R: Not long ago [Interview took place in June 2011].

LMH Not long ago.

R: And your son?

LMH My son is a three-year-old boy. He was born here.

R: And...

LMH: And his father was a person who was interpreting for me.

R: OK.

LMH He ended up using me sexually, anyway.

R: OK.

Here we have the tragic origins of her ‘lone motherhood’. The flight she took to safety has brought more tragedy for her.

[B]ecause of the pressure, I developed very high blood pressure which was nearly about to kill me and my son as well, who was born prematurely... I think 24 weeks, less. At the end of the day he survived, to cut the story short. In and out from hospitals because he had to be in there.... after he was born for about five months and then after they discharged him to home. He had to be on oxygen for nearly a year, so all this time until now. This is the time I am using at least for myself to be out, not to be indoors any more. So far my plans... I would like to be a teacher but at the same time I think that ‘Will I manage to be a teacher?’ because I would really like to start with the young ones, to learn things and learn about them and learn how they are developing. My son has delays in like language, physical development, brain-wise, things that you cannot catch up onto him. So it’s like I have a bit kind of worries about him but at the same time I am here, doctors are checking on him, so it’s like, ‘Yeah!!’, I just assume that things will get better and better in future.

We can also see that in the beginning she was resistant to narrate her story and also at

times refused to answer about her past. However, when left to talk she responds to the question asked earlier on. Then she narrates her stressful pregnancy and her son's medical condition, which were very difficult for her, but she still is hopeful and has future plans and targets to achieve. Her narratives are all about keeping herself going.

R: Tell me about your son. You look after him or his father helps in any way?

LMH: His father is not an issue to him in any way. He doesn't know that whether I have a child and he doesn't care whether I live or my son lives. The time that I meet... was it Ramadan? I don't remember very well, but he doesn't care.

Thus far, her story has the triple trauma of a life of discrimination in Somalia, the flight to safety in the UK that proved unsafe, the difficulties of her son's disability – a tale of almost unimaginable woe. However, as we next see, she is not down and not out.

LMH's tutor comes in and tells LMH that she has passed her Maths exam with 83%. LMH is very happy.

R: Great! You passed.

LMH Ohhh, I am happy.

R: 83% LMH... [Laughs]. Let's have something sweet to eat.

As we noted earlier, this was good news, but LMH went on to say much more:

LMH [Laughs] [Silence for four seconds]. I think I can have confidence in myself that I can get better and better in life, so I tend not to trust people because I have been used a lot in this life. So, I am in [a] mess, but I don't want to keep on talking about mess. I want to be positive, positive, positive, positive. Hmmm, his father, he doesn't want to be

R: Should I get something sweet?

LMH Alright.

R: What do you like to have?

LMH Something sweet, anything sweet.

We went and got one slice of vanilla strawberry Swiss roll and a pear and almond tart, which we both enjoyed. (This shows reciprocal reflexivity, by mouth.)

LMH says 'Positive, positive, positive, positive' but she also fears the task of

supporting herself and her son that lone motherhood brings with it, in her case at least. It interests me that this ‘event’ in the interview is accidental, yet it provokes significant data and also helps the relationship between researcher and respondent become more mutual and friendly.

LMH: One thing that worries me is that if I become unwell. I have no one to leave my son with so I just pray all the time to live with my son. It is very hard and tough.’

‘R: OK, so where were we? He [the father] doesn’t know that you have a child?’

LMH: Of course, he knows.

R: OK, where is he from?’

LMH: He is from Uganda.

R: OK. You came here for refuge or ...?’

LMH: Oh, [I don’t] want to talk about that.

R: OK.

As we have already noted, she does not want to talk about her past in Somalia nor her most recent past as a refugee in the UK, yet she unpacks both throughout the interview. It seems that when I pick it up she puts it down and then later on brings it back up again.

R: Tell me a little bit about how you came on this course? What were you doing before taking this course?’

LMH: I was at Granby Adult Centre. How did I know about Granby? Because my son got development issues. So they wanted him to go to nursery earlier than other kids. You know children who are prioritised?’

R: Yes.

LMH: So he was prioritised because of his difficulties; he should go to nursery, so when he was about two years he got a chance to start in a nursery, so he was in a centre since he was two years. When I was dropping him there and meeting some different people who were meeting in these kind of groups, they said to me, ‘Oh, we are going to next door. And [I] asked them ‘What is going on in the next door?’ and they said ‘We are going for English classes’, so I just walked in there and I asked them.

R: What sort of classes were they?’

LMH: They were only English and Maths, like small levels until you manage yourself

R: So that was your first course or classes in the UK and then what happened?

LMH: I stayed there for about one year. Teachers were very helpful to me and were kind of trying to help me in the best way they can and they really put all the effort [for me] to be in this centre. As days [were] passing on, one lady asked me 'You, when you came here, you were not very well in English, but look at you now – why don't you look for something better, at least like a proper qualification? I said, 'I don't know what to do'. They were saying as time goes by, 'You should go out there and find something better'. One day ... you remember there was a group in the women's event who were saying that they are appealing against Syrian women [demonstrating for the rights of Syrian women]?

R: I don't remember that.

LMH: That group... part of the women from there advise[d] me that I should go to Community College because [here] they give this qualification. I only had an interview and then they give me a sheet to [write] about myself so I just [wrote] about myself and told that this is what I am and this is what I did, so from there she just said, 'I think you'd be good at this diploma level'. In this diploma level you have to do Maths and English. I never knew how to do Maths and English but they just [asked] us in the interview, 'Why do you want to do ICT course?' I just told her that I saved my money to buy a laptop but I just don't know how to use [one] but if I do I take the course I'll be able to choose my own laptop and do normal things from the computer, so then she said, 'Well, then if that's the course, then you do this course', then they just straight put me onto the course.

R: Great.'

LMH: I just needed the basic. I just wanted something that instead of just being at home when my son is out at nursery. I wanted also to have something good and better to do.

Again, the positive register is clear to the extent that she buys a laptop before she knows how to use it. Oddly, it seems that it is her son's disability that indirectly helps her get on to the educational ladder.

R: He is in nursery, now?

LMH: Yes, he is nursery right now. It's like when I am in the college, he is in nursery.

R: And two and a half days. How much do you pay for that?

LMH: Actually Community College pays for that.

R: Do they pay every time you are here? How about exams?

LMH: When you have exams? They try to put right hours for exams so that you could be here ... It's like Mondays 9:30 to 4:30 and Tuesdays 9:30 to 4:30 and Wednesday from 9:30 to 12:30.

R: And the nursery stays open till 5 or so.

LMH: Oh, yeah.

LMH: Time management. It's like very hard. I have issues health-wise. I tend to become nervous sometimes when I am rushing, so it's like hard and tough but [there's] nothing you can do. Sometimes you don't get time for yourself; you don't get time to eat. You make sure that your child has eaten... you are adult anyways. So like.... he comes first. Then I do try and make my time and to come on time in college, but sometimes it is hard. At least now it's getting better but before it was becoming lately... like 4 o'clock it's really dark. It's scary, you know, and I am nearly finishing my Diploma.

Here LMH shows something of the complexity of lone motherhood, like the difficult priorities of juggling between study and childcare. Again, it is interesting how she slips into the professional register of 'time management', just as she absorbed the language of 'moving on'.

R: What's after this Diploma?

LMH: I was talking to someone in my class [about] what I should be doing. I should be like out there, doing, like, access level because especially like Faheema is my good advisor... but I don't know yet. I don't want to put myself [through something] that will make my head block [hurt] because this Diploma – it was tough but then, like, I have this confidence. If I made it, then it means I can do something later.

R: When you go home do you study?

LMH: Yes, I do study. We have assignments. You need to go through what you have learned but at this time, I mean at the time when you do that, sometimes your child is crying or he doesn't want to sleep and there is this special age when they are demanding. They want more time of you and things like that. Yeah, so it's like I have to push myself to study. It's like you are trying to push yourself more and when you are here; you are not out there talking nonsense. It's like when you are here, you are learning. Who knows, maybe one day I will be a reception [teacher], who knows, maybe one day I will be a teacher, so it's like I've got focused and determined to achieve something better for my son.

R: In that case, what is education for you?

LMH: Education is future. It is really [about the] future and it is with education [that] you can generate it into generations and it's all about encouraging and convincing someone that, no matter what you are, you can achieve something. You can do it, so it's all about having confidence, you can be any one in this hall. In terms of achievement, though, it's like, to be someone, you can be a businessman having so much money but doing drugs. But I am talking in a positive way that you can be out there. Especially when I am looking on to this minority area, there are a lot of kids growing there, they need role models. They need adults to show them that they can become someone as well. So if I stand one day to teach these kids and to teach my kid it means I will be able to make a change in someone's life in later generations, who knows? At the end of the day you don't want.... I don't mean like I am trying to become racist. This area is multicultural, so anyone can be a teacher, anyone can be a doctor, anyone can be anything they want as long as you are positive and determined. In this country you can achieve it.

LMH's support network, educationally, involves fellow students as well as tutors, and she has tentative visions of becoming a teacher. The study/child tensions recur. Again, there is a language of effort, positivity, 'Education is [the] future' – a register of confidence, 'role' modelling, determination – and a belief that 'in this country you can achieve it'. She also says '...you can generate it into generations'. Education is therefore the future. This is an emerging theme. The role of education is seen as 'generational': the lone mother learner modelling education to herself and to others. Elsewhere I noted that official Higher Education discourses stressed the horizontal, linear nature of its aims: from Higher Education to employment, a heavy stress on what university called 'WOW' – their 'world of work'. However, for quite a few of the respondents, it was a vertical rather than a horizontal ladder, remaining in education and improving levels, as well as modelling educational success to their children, called here: 'generate it into generations.'

R: Do you have lone mothers there [on the Bajuni Islands], single mums?

LMH: No way, and if I go there, it will be a big problem. Although my husband was killed when I was sent here, I didn't come here to become what I have become. Although I know that this lady, my mother-in-law, she won't be very angry to me like in terms of punishing me but[in] the community and society she won't... her hands will be tied up to help me. So yeah, it will be a big problem and I won't be allowed to become a lone

mother. It would be [considered as] a big mistake of her [mother-in-law's] life but I don't want it to drag me down. It would drag me down; I would have killed myself for it.

R: So, it doesn't exist. No, when I say single or lone mother, I mean it could be one who became lone after divorce, separation or even after the death of her husband.

LMH: Oh, alright then, yes there is. For me, the lady who brought me up is a lone mother.

R: In Somalia?

LMH: Yes.

LMH: I am not gonna talk about parents. She just came in the house and found out that this is the situation and then she collected me. When I was about 16, she made me marry him, but I was young and I didn't know anything about love and also I had a child there who died there.

R: Oh, so you had a child.

LMH: Yes, he died when he was three months. I am trying to kill everything that happened, because if I am going to think about it all the time then it won't help me and my child.

R: So lone mother does exist.

LMH: Yes, it does exist. Husband being killed or wife being killed is very normal or they die of disease.

R: So women or men would bring the child up. It's normal?

LMH: It's like when a man's wife dies. In our culture a man would not survive without a wife, but a woman would have to wait for a person to ask for her hand in marriage, and if you don't get any you just have [to have] faith in yourself but it can be very tough, like raising-up children, looking after them. It's very hard.

In this more disjointed part of the story, and the interview, more of that first trauma appears: dead husband, a form of adoption, a child that died, the 'very normal' nature of killing. And her own status of child of a lone mother appears for the first time. It is notable that 'I am trying to kill everything that happened'. She tries to forget the past. I think that is a possible explanation for some of the disjointed dialogues, the 'no-go' areas that she nevertheless cannot avoid. She perhaps feels that a biographical case study is difficult for her emotionally, bringing back to 'life' what she is trying to 'kill', to use her own metaphor.

[B]ack from where I came from I tended to be hesitant and, traumatically, I wouldn't like to talk about... too much of the things that happened there.'

R: What does the term lone mother mean to you?

LMH: It's about stress. It's about stress for me. Stress that would like sometime to ask someone who is his [her child's] father, 'Please can you look after this child? I am going to do shopping'. It's a lot of work, you don't have time for yourself. It's a nightmare for me. I am recalling the time when you have to get up and give this child the medication, to check whether his oxygen is working, to check why is he crying? To take care of a child when you are alone is hard and stressful. I don't want to break down and I don't want to become negative [about] what I have achieved with my son, but God knows that I don't want to play around myself.... Just be with a person as a boyfriend and then, at the end of the day, produce a child and then be left there to take care of the child by myself, God forbid. I do not want to do that business because it is stressful and it kills you, especially for me, even I have hurt my back so many times. There are limits, it's like he is crying and he needs you to pick him up. There was this time when I hurt my back and I don't know what happened ... he cried and I just ran and asked him why he was crying and it was not very important but before I reached to him I was only down there. Then I called for ambulance... no, not ambulance, I called my friend and when they came I couldn't even open the door because it was too hard and there were muscles... I don't know what happened to my muscles. He was a child and he couldn't do anything and by the time ambulance arrive and after they put me on this bed, I was lying on this bed and he was lying there crying, crying, and crying. He doesn't know what is wrong with me. He can't understand, [it was] good that he was then with the carer. Hospital called social services and they just told them that he was already under a carer and the carer came straight away to pick him up. He was with the carer for two weeks until I was well again. For a person who is left alone to raise up a child or children... I don't know that some people may be alone but they are not alone, maybe they have parents or extra family with them so when things get tough they can call [them]. But me I don't know, I don't know... although the carer is like family to me. She usually comes down for therapy because they really care for him, but in this country everyone has their own thing to do. People got jobs and other things so it's like when we catch up, we catch up. For me, I will just tell other people that I am fine because I don't want other people to be out there and talking that H[...] doesn't know how to raise a baby, so I say I am fine with my son as far as I am concerned. That's how I deal with them. To be honest with you, I don't encourage anyone... if they are with a partner, they should stay with him and raise up their children. For me, it is stress. I don't know how people go higher and higher when they are raising a child, although I am talking like this but I won't give up and I will go higher and higher.

R: Well, you are achieving. You have 83%.

LMH: Yeah, that I will do anyway. I am his future anyway. I have to show him what to do. I need to have a lot of information in terms of education-wise to teach him things. I don't want him to come home and I don't know to show him how to do his assignment.

Again, the 'vertical' or 'generational' theme recurs with regard to the role of education: 'I am his future', but the difficulties she faces with her child's disability, the lack of family or friend support, and the fragile nature of her own health become increasingly apparent.

In a follow-up interview almost three years after the first interview, I receive a lot of surprises. The most obvious is the remarkable improvement in her English:

LMH: I am extra busy because I have got these appointments that I needed to attend with City Council officers in my son's school with his teacher. Because first of all they think that he should be in mainstream school but the teachers feel like, 'How could this child be in mainstream school? We can hardly manage him.' So it's like, I want to go and challenge the authority. Does it mean that funds are more important than a child who needs to be trained in [the] right environment? My son has [no chance].... in a mainstream school. He can't cope and even other kids are like... he is doing stuff to them that he shouldn't do to them so....

Another theme is LMH's much greater understanding of the education and care system and her confidence in challenging the 'city council officers' who want her child in mainstream schooling, apparently against the wishes of his teachers: 'we can hardly manage him'.

There are things like where he really needs one-to-one support and obviously this [mainstream] school cannot provide that support. Like in one class there are like 20 to 25 students and they cannot provide extra attention to my son. So, yeah I am really busy. I want to attend this meeting to find out what are the options and what is out there for my son.

A further theme brings up the passing of friends and networks – 'life moves on'. More formal help also changes, as the child grows older and stops being eligible for some kinds of support.

LMH: Life moves on, life moves on. Some friends left and maybe some have changed their working environment. Let's say that some people who were advising me, pushing me, they were working with my son, who are no longer with my son, such as the health visitor and her assistant. They

are no longer working with my son because there is [only] a certain stage that health visitor can work with the family. When the child is growing to an early stage or something they change. I do remember that I had a good support network, the company of friends who used to encourage me and support me that 'don't worry things will get better'. I really appreciate that because if it wasn't for them I wouldn't even achieve what I wanted to achieve and I wouldn't even be where I wanted to be.

The idea of a 'network' started off in my mind as something that you had, or did not have. As LMH updates her story it seems more like something that comes and goes. Associations change, health visitors become ineligible, intensive vs mainstream support for education is threatened with withdrawal. Her child's head teacher pressures LMH to give up her educational ambitions for a while: '... you know you won't be able to study at the same time as your child is studying [...] when it comes to his needs, you've got to put his needs first.'

Government support also varies according to the age of the child, and also his ability to cope with other children.

He was going to Seaside Nursery. But remember that this child is three so when they are three they need to be moved to another nursery for 15 hours of free education. He needed to access that and that was accessible in Seaside Nursery. When he was referred by the Health Visitor to Nursery then I went to meet the head teacher in Nursery. She agreed to have my son in their nursery. It was the start of my second year in Community College. When I went to College to discuss my second year, they said that, 'Yes your place is safe and you can continue in the second year'. A week was left for me to start in College when the head teacher called and said, 'Hold on, wait a minute'. My course was supposed to start in September 2013 and it was only natural for me to send my son to nursery whilst I was waiting to start my course in September, so only one week was left for me to [rejoin] my second year. When Joseph was in Nursery, my week to start in College was approaching. I dropped my son at Nursery and I went to attend my first session. After my first session I was called out by the nursery and [told] said that, 'Sorry, we can't keep your child in school as he hits other children.

The end result was that LMH 'stayed at home with him, left Community College'. Following reduced hours at St. Nicholas's school, her studies remain postponed, although it is clear that she has not given up:

R: Are you planning to come back into education?

LMH: Of course, of course I am planning to come to education but once he is sorted.

R: So when he is in one-to-one or a smaller study group?

LMH: Yes, I will be more secure and I will be able to expect [more from] what I want [to achieve] from my career.

R: You are a strong person.

LMH: Well you got to be, you got to have faith in yourself, otherwise what can you do and who will do it for you?

A new theme emerges in this later interview, one that I am very well aware of myself (see Chapter Three).

LMH: My son is asking [about] his father every day, 'Mummy where is my father?', especially when he is having these tantrums. It is obvious that he will say, 'Mummy where is my father?' I really understand his situation, sometimes he is just too upset, not because someone has done something to him. But that is just the way he is and I can understand that. His lack of understanding in general makes things hard for him. So whatever you tell him he is like, 'Ahh Ma that is unfair; I want my father'. So he is like really upset, that is the only way he can express himself. But unfortunately I have no father to show to him. He will have to grow up and stay strong. He won't meet this person he is thinking of.

R: So all this while his father never approached you guys?

LMH: No, he never.

R: You don't know whether he exists [lives] in England.

LMH: No, because he was not even interested in the child. So I really don't know what to say. I don't know anything about him.

A further theme is perhaps the most important one. Earlier, LMH was so 'positive, positive, positive' about her education and its ability to enable her to 'recognise herself'. However, as we saw, her child's head teacher persuaded her to give the child's education more of a priority than her own. She looks back and sees herself in a kind of denial about his disability and his needs.

LMH: ...I was looking after him but I didn't know that he was not able to see properly. He was able to see but he had visual impairment. It's like you look after this child but you really don't know what they are lacking and what are their difficulties. So yeah, that time, it was tough. And you

know what I am even glad that I stopped college at that time because I was hiding under the shadow at that time.

R: Which shadow?

LMH: Shadow of pretending that things are alright when my son was not alright. So now I feel like at least I have worked this hard to support him rather if I was there hiding [pretending to] myself that I am happy, am studying, doing this and doing that and yet he was struggling and suffering. But since in Nursery [it was] recognised that 'he lacks something and you needed to support him and spend more time with him', so I managed to go with him and attend his appointments. There were a lot of appointments that I needed to take [him to] and also sometime last year, in May, he had to go to hospital as his tonsils needed to be removed, so he had a lot of health issues. If I was in the college and looking after him I could not have made it for college because today you are, there tomorrow you are not there. You've got to be committed at least. So I couldn't have done it, being in the college at the same time as looking after him. So I had to do one thing at a time.

She therefore made that switch in priority. It made me curious about what that involved.

The following excerpts from the data come from the sort of questioning that Spradley's (1979) ethnographic approach recommends; that is, trying to get an account of a 'typical' day.

R: I know what you mean. Tell me your routine these days.

LMH: My routine is to wake up at 6, pray. After I finish praying I wake up Joseph. He won't wake up until quarter to 8. So, due to him lacking routine – he doesn't like routine – I'll go sort out myself, clean up, dressing up [get dressed] and he is not even awake. I will prepare his breakfast, leave it there to cool down. After that I will iron his clothes, and after that wake him up, but he will still kick off and throw tantrums. So what I do is that, since he is big and strong, I will tell him 'don't be lazy' and if I am successful in bringing him down without him fighting me back, although he is crying and screaming, that won't bother me as much as if he is physically strong and that can [be] hard. So even if he is screaming I will chuck him in the bathroom. I will put toothpaste [on his] brush and say, 'Joseph, it's time to brush; you want to brush, I know'. He wears diapers and I will help him to [take] off his diapers. He will scream 'I know how to take off my diapers' but if you will want him to do it then he will take ages to do it. So, remember he just woke up, quarter to 8 and you have maybe half an hour there to get ready. So what I will have to do is to take his clothes off, put him in the bathtub, rinse his face, hands and bottom.

No need to wash his body because last night he had a wash. So when you take him to dry, he will again kick off. When you dry him, he will say 'you are hurting me' but when you leave him to do it, then he won't do it on time. So he used to make me late every day so, since I know how to deal with him, I say to him, 'Joseph, do you agree to mummy helping you? Look, I am dressed already so do you still want to go to school or stay naked all day?' So what you do is just to help him out in dressing up [getting dressed] and operate as an adult with him. If I am there with him waiting for him to finish his food then what he will do is keep staring and staring at the window and not finish his food, so what I need to do is to sit down with this six-year-old boy and feed him. If I don't feed him then he will go to school hungry and won't eat anything in school as well. He will be given anything he wants to eat in school but he will just play with the food and not eat. It is even harder to deal with him when he is hungry unless he tries some of his Weetabix at home. So when he throws his tantrum that 'I can't, I can't, blaah blaah blaah',. I end up leaving him so most of the time I let him go so that I can see what he can tell me later. In fact, he is crying that 'I am really hungry, I didn't eat in school because I didn't like to eat anything'. So yeah, after I drop him at 8.30, I come back, I have cleaning up to do, in terms of dishes, cleaning of house, sorting out clothes, going out to do shopping and things like that.

We have already argued that 'lone motherhood' in relation to HE has a number of different 'directions'. There is the 'horizontal' – HE to work/employment/competencies and so on. There is – more importantly to some of the respondents – the sense of the 'vertical' career – self-improvement that also models educational aspiration for the child. The third 'direction' is really development of the child. Such an absorption makes a 'shadow' out of the other possibilities, as LMH puts it. LMH carries on her account of a 'typical' day:

R: When you pick him up from school?

LMH: When I pick him up from school sometimes we go straight home. When we are outside the house he starts crying that he wants to stay outside. When he is outside it is dangerous. Remember, it is a communal place and he might end up being in front of someone's car and it is dangerous. So, yeah when he is outside I have to be outside. There are some days when we have to be inside for me to cook dinner. But Joseph wants to be outside. He always eats cooked meals and I have to cook. The only thing that he likes at home is watching TV and playing games. But sometimes I switch everything off so that we could have peace and quiet at home. He may come to the kitchen to see me cooking, which I don't allow as it is dangerous, so he may find a catalogue, maybe the Argos catalogue, and he will just lie on the floor and go to a world of his own or just go

quiet or talk to his own [to himself]. He likes to eat food with his hand; his favourite food is maize flour with okra with lamb or beef.

R: He goes to bed at 7 or 8?

LMH: I have an issue with him. He used to go to bed at 7 or 7.30 but he used to wake up at 2, but when he woke up at 2 then he would feel tired and sleepy at 8ish. He won't wake up at 7 to go to school [because] he is tired. Sometimes the paediatrician gave him tablets but sometimes the tablets were making him very, very tired, so what I decided to do was I attended the sleep clinic in Alder Hey and they advised to send him to bed at 9 and since I started sending him to bed at 9, he never woke up, but the condition is mummy is next to him for him not to wake up. If I am separate from him then he will wake up, and when he wakes up don't expect him to sleep back again [go back to sleep again]. It will take him an hour or so to go back to sleep.

LMH's concern is also for his educational development. He obviously has learning difficulties, behavioural problems, although she feels he is 'a clever boy', although 'vulnerable'. I am not sure about what that means.

I turn to another aspect of 'lone motherhood', one touched on earlier: the missing father, for both the woman and the child, a 'father figure' as she puts it, or – for herself – a 'man figure':

R: How about finding someone for yourself, for being in a relationship?

LMH: Yes, I do want to be in a relationship but not in this country. Here there are not good people because of my past experience. I am not ready to find someone from here, maybe from my home country but not from here. People here are not trustworthy. I don't want to be in a relationship where I am not sure that it is healthy for my son and me. My son is vulnerable, he wants a father figure, a person who is not just there to take advantage and go away, so I am planning but I will have to take my time. I will have to just look around and take my time but, yes, I do need a father figure for my child.

R: Are you mainly thinking about your son not for yourself?

LMH: Yes, for my son and also for myself. Because having a man figure at home will help in sharing responsibility, if one has got a child as well. If they know what it is like to have a family or to have children then, yes, that will be good. I won't stay single forever. I am too young.

R: How old are you now?

LMH: I won't tell you that.

R: I have it written on my sheet but forgot to read it before coming here.

LMH: You will then read it there but, sorry, I don't want to tell my age.

It is interesting that she is shy about her age, even although she recognises that I have a record of it. It seems typical of an instinct to hold back some things that we saw earlier.

Finally, just when I think she has chosen childcare over education, or been forced to choose it, she turns again:

R: OK, no worries. When do you think you will be ready for continuing your education?

LMH: As soon as my son is sorted. If he gets sorted today then I will start this September.

But her parting remarks make her priorities clear, as she sees them, or chooses to express them:

LMH: It has made my understanding better with him because it would have frustrated me every day, coming from college, meeting with him and not knowing what he is going through and what is his life to be in a situation that he is in. Can you imagine, being in the college, struggling and doing this and doing that, coming in the evening just wanting to rush him, eat quickly, wash, and go to bed. In the morning again, prepare him, go to college and rush. At least I have got a better and clear understanding of what is happening with him. I am more sympathetic. I cannot really offer any help to make things better but to understand the situation is better. To understand it is helping, but if you don't understand, it frustrates you. I wouldn't have understood his situation and that would have frustrated me big time. I won't say that it is easy to look after, no it is not easy, but it is better. I know him and I know who he is so I will be able to defend him, so if in public he behaves a certain way that everybody else is looking at him in certain ways then I can say 'leave him alone'. He is who he is. I am there for him.

4.4 Case Number 2: LMTs

The pattern of these interviews is very different to those conducted with the previous interviewee (LMH). LMTs is also a refugee, but she is mother to two girls, aged between 12 and 16 at the time of interviews, and her status as a refugee is very different. She is from a former British colony (Zimbabwe), was educated through school and college, and became an Audit Manager. As we'll see, her flight to the UK involved a loss of status (qualifications unrecognised, a perceived sense of her 'criminal' status as refugee, location in a poor part of Liverpool, poverty, poorly treated by the Home Office, etc.) This case starts with her early experiences of being in the UK.

I came here as a political refugee...when you come here as a political refugee it is very, very, very tough. You come here as a political refugee, you are asking for refugee status [that] is almost similar like [to being a criminal] and you have to prove [beyond] reasonable doubt that you are a genuine political refugee [...]or the nature of that process is very, very stressful and all the time you live in fear [of deportation].

She does not feel part of society and expresses feelings of 'social exclusion'.

The first thing is you are not allowed to work you live in certain areas and so society does not know that you exist. You are not part of the society, so to speak, and that is after four years of living here in such a society.

She expresses herself openly to me. She feels at ease because she considers the researcher as also sharing a similar experience, or if not similar, then at least also is an outsider like her in this country, so it is alright to be honest in front of me. This is one advantage of being an ethnic minority researcher.

A follow-up interview was conducted a year and a half after the first two interviews. The interview was carried out in my apartment. My apartment was minutes away from the university, where she was usually based throughout the day, so it was convenient for her to park the car outside my apartment and have a chat. After the usual greetings and tea and biscuits she started by telling me how things were when she came to the country as an asylum seeker (refugee). She explained how she was dealt with by the accommodation management in Anfield, where she was initially accommodated.

At this stage she developed a different strand of her story, involving what seemed to be immigrant racism.

They [welfare team for asylum seekers] didn't like us anyway. They didn't give us any support and the final bit of it is most of the people that were working for the welfare of asylum seekers who knew that asylum seekers were foreigners didn't like foreigners. They were foreigners themselves and you know why the British system put them there to work with foreigners? They assumed that the foreigner would appreciate other foreigners and treat them well [but] they got this belief that maybe they were better than us because their colour was like the British colour.

Here is a theme of racism by foreigners who are now British citizens. Later on she explains that these foreigners are Eastern Europeans and are 'white' in colour but are not English.

R: OK, you mean Europeans?

LMTs: Yes, they were not black, most of them were may be Eastern European, like the Czechs...

She talks about being treated as a 'foreigner' by a 'foreigner' in Liverpool, about which she is not happy. She claims that Eastern Europeans (Czechs, in her case) are racist because 'they never see any black person in their country'. She also brings up the 'multiculturalism' in London and so it seems as if she is fine with the foreigners in London who are more 'receptive' to black people. Again, I felt the positive effect of being accepted as an ethnographic listener who could be trusted to empathise. Such an assumption might have been less likely had I been 'white', and not an immigrant.

She quickly turns to giving reasons for coming to the UK as a refugee:

Yes, then you are running away from political persecution in your country. In my country it's [either] political persecution or if you are lesbian or gay you could be killed, so you come here as a refugee. So when [you] live here, running away from political persecution – like in my case it's political persecution – so you come here, you are running away, you are asking them to save your life and you are asking them to give you refuge so that you may stay here peacefully. So, normally from my country I would come here because that's the only [other] country I know. The British [English] is the only other language that I could speak so I wouldn't go to France for refuge. I wouldn't go to Italy for refuge. I would come to an English country because everyone I know [back home] are white people and British and in my country we use English... In fact, we should be calling it our first language, to be honest with you; it makes sense.

When you appeal, you go through court so much that the asylum process is criminalised just like [real] crime because you go through the court.

In the above passage there are themes of ‘political persecution’, ‘running away’ and ‘being criminalised’. She is from Zimbabwe where they are taught in English, hence English is the only language she knows apart from her regional language: ‘in fact we should be calling it our first language’. The choice of coming to the UK is thus straightforward as this is the only other English-speaking country of which she is aware. She has run away from a miserable life where she could face ‘persecution’ to a life of safety; however, she also chooses words like ‘criminals’, ‘criminalised’, and ‘limbo’ for the treatment that she receives in the UK from the Home Office and also from the accommodation management team.

So when you are an asylum seeker you are waiting to be asked to be granted permission to live, so you are at everybody’s mercy. Everybody that comes to you, they can take advantage and they can abuse you [...] I remember being shouted at one time for having my house burgled.’

‘Some of the rights we had we didn’t know [about]. I had to struggle to get my kids into school, because you don’t know whether your children are allowed to go to school and at the same time you hear other people say that if you don’t send your child to school here, you are prosecuted. I remember speaking to my support worker about how I register my child for school, and she said that, ‘You don’t register your child for school because you don’t know whether they are going to live here or not’. So she was lying. I said that, ‘You are telling me about truancy and things’, and she said, ‘Truancy only applies to citizens and you are not a citizen’..

In the excerpt below she gets information through the church, and for LMTs I feel that there is some connection between church and a sense of trust in the church to provide the correct information.

But I said that, ‘How come you are telling me that I can’t send my kids to school because I am an asylum seeker and because I have been granted leave to remain? Why are you saying that when there is this rule of truancy?’ And she said that, ‘Truancy applies only to citizens and you are not a citizen and you won’t be prosecuted’. She was lying and then I had to go to the priest. And then my priest said that that ain’t true. He said that this is a school which is very receptive to foreigners, this is the school, which was St Louis primary up at Lawrence Road.

Here she also points to the school being ‘receptive to foreigners’. What she might be doing here is working out the best school to choose for her child based on her earlier experience of racism.

4.4.1 Burglary Incident

The burglary incident is like a ‘vignette’ into her life of living as a refugee. She was ‘blamed’ by the housing authority for the burglary.

One [person] from the Accommodation Management was at the front door... because what they used to do is... our electric and gas. They used to come in, bring a key, and they would take the electric meter key and take the key to the corner shop and every week they would come and feed the electricity in there and gas. They never give us the key so that we could do it on our own, if you understand what I am saying. She was busy trying to get in using her key but she was not able to get in because those guys [burglars], when they discovered they were in the house, they went and blocked the key holes. Then she called me in College, I was in... College. She called me in and said that why have I changed the locks? I said that I didn't change the locks at all. She said that, "I am at your door [now], so stop playing games with me. If you have changed your locks I am going to go away and you wait until next Friday to get gas and electricity. You are going to spend the whole week and weekend without gas and electricity if you no longer have it". I said, "No haven't done anything", but I think she later on discovered that I was serious and I haven't done anything, so she called the locksmith. So, while she was there, the guys were upstairs and searching through my things and they could see that there was somebody [outside], so what they did was quickly ran out, came and unlocked the door and went away and they left the keys there, you know what I mean. So when she found the keys outside the door like that, common sense would have told her what I've just told you, but she still blamed me. So do you really see what I mean when I say that they were just abusing the authority... that's not my fault, it's not my fault?

R: Yes, because the key was inside so no one from outside could see it?

LMTs: Yeah, but she went on blamed and blamed and shouted and shouted at me for that.

It connects again with her entry into the country as a refugee. It is not her ‘fault’ living in refugee houses and ‘being burgled’ and then facing racism for something that is not her ‘fault’. In her words, ‘they were just abusing the authority’ and ‘blamed and blamed and shouted and shouted’ but ‘that’s not my fault, it’s not my fault’.

LMTs: She [Refugee support worker] was the worst of them. Her accent showed that she was not British, so you see that most of them were foreigners. My case was with her so I had to complain to the manager that I don't want her, so then I was given another. She was also foreign but she was good, and another one was called Zaeef, a man; those two worked with me on my case. They were just brilliant, oh my goodness. I really felt like a person. Because after that racist attack that I told you... I left. Anfield was a racist area and it is even now. The people in Anfield are very

uneducated and the more uneducated the people are, the more they are not very receptive in accepting [refugees]. They know nothing beyond what they know; if they know nothing about what is beyond their colour then they just think 'No, No'. All crimes arrive in Anfield, most of the shootings happen in Anfield and people die. It is the most deprived [area]. It is a highly deprived area. At times they would just come and kick at my door and shout abuse because they knew that there is black lady here alone and there is no man figure to scare them away.

What is Anfield to LMTs? She claims that it is 'racist', a 'highly deprived area' where 'shootings happen' and 'people die'. It connects to her running away from Zimbabwe and the expressing of 'being persecuted' in Zimbabwe; even when she is living in Anfield, she still faces the threat of being killed. She also gives more insight into Anfield, but we also find out that she understands the economics behind her being placed there. There is also a theme of being alone and the absence of a 'man figure to scare them away'. Later on in the data there is more talk surrounding 'the need' and the 'not so need' of a 'man figure' in her life.

R: Oh, OK. When you lived there did you have more refugees living there or maybe lone mothers around?

LMTs: Most of the refugees were put there because it's a bad area, houses are cheap there. The rent is cheap there; because we were on free rent they would not want to put us where the rent is expensive. I mean, it makes economic sense, you want to share the funds that are there among a lot of asylum seekers... what do you do?

In regards to racism at home and from the accommodation team she also brings up the issue of not being fairly treated at work and also being over-charged. Eventually, the police were called in. It again connects to her 'flight to safety' from Zimbabwe.

...because of the so many incidents that were happening, the police had to talk to some guys that were managing that house. They've given them enough time and reports that had happened at my house, so they told them [the management] that if anything happened to me they were going to hold them responsible.

She connects the incidents to not having a 'man figure' What she is doing here is maybe trying to sort out her ongoing problems with racism and being bullied in the neighbourhood, and thus feels that there is a missing 'man figure'. She faces vandalism in her area and she was targeted for being 'black' and not having a 'man', all of which added to her ongoing misery.

LMTs: The lady who was shouting at me is the one who was managing my accommodation so, because of the incidents at my house which would be reported to the police, so the police then said that you need to be removed from that place because she is a lone parent with two kids, so that's why I was really suffering as much because I didn't have a man figure.

R: OK.

LMTs: Because let me tell you one thing: that all these neighbours of yours know who comes in your door or not. They would know whether you were staying with a partner or on you are own, so they would know. So, the guys that were causing trouble, the ones that were knocking at my door, would be the people from my neighbourhood who knew that it was only a lady and two kids, blacks, staying there. At times they would just not even come in and do anything other than like cut an orange and then come to my door to my windows, while I am watching, having lunch. They are launching just squealing [rubbing the orange against the window and making a squeaking noise]. You know how annoying is it that when they are squeaking like that and laughing and kicking at the door and laughing, and it would not give you a peaceful time... So one day I had to phone the police and that particular day I did. I explained to them the noises that I was hearing, so they just came and they said, "Come out, let's show you what they were doing from what you were explaining on the phone". After they did what they did, they just left the oranges. There was orange juice on the window and you can see how it makes my life miserable.

The theme here is need of a man or 'superman' in her situation, as her neighbours were better off since there was a man in their house. For her, it is like 'living [in] a different world' than those of her neighbours who have a man figure around. LMH's bringing up of 'the need for a man' on answering my questions reminds me of Reissman's (1993) account where her respondent also tried to tell her something that is important to them, not by answering the question directly but by bringing up something that they think needs to be told. For Reissman and myself, when interviewing, the story is led not by us but by our respondents, who choose what to say and when to say it, such as here when LMH connects staying alone to not having a 'man figure' – the protector. Her version of 'lone motherhood' is the absence of a man, as a physical presence in a dangerous and abusive neighbourhood.

She talks about Zimbabwe and the taboos. It is here that we get to see her life in Zimbabwe and also might be able to compare and find the benefits in her flight to the UK.

...as many as you want [wives]. The African marriage act in Zimbabwe allows that you can get as many wives as you please but if you take the

civil marriage, which is European oriented, it's only one. But even if you are here [UK] you can't go and say that you are going to divorce your husband because he has cheated. Society will just say that you are just the one who is a slut, every other man does it, because the society has got the certificate to legalise polygamy, so it's not a big deal if your man has got a kid in Anfield, a kid in Old Swan and a kid in Garston and you are here with him, staying with him. Do you get what I am trying to say?

Here are themes of the breaking down of relationships, a 'taboo' on divorce, culture of oppressing women, polygamous society, world of men, and a culture that pardons men for their behaviour. She then compares it to the culture in the UK and the 'polygamous relationships' of men. I begin to see that the 'lone mother' also has a very different meaning set against such a patriarchal, polygamous background.

In our society we even used to say that it's like he has got a small house in Aigburth, a small house in Anfield, so it's like he is allowed. Men are allowed to [have more than one wife] and men are proud to do that and women are oppressed... The other bad bit about it is that once you have got a kid society looks down upon you, like when I got my first child, you are almost like a second-class citizen. Society looks down upon you as a failure – not a failure, as somebody who is a slut [...] Why do you have a kid without marriage? Why are you not married when you have got a kid?

There is another theme here which I have discussed earlier on in LMH's case as well: the becoming and being of a 'lone mother'. However, the choice of words here is slightly different: the becoming of the lone mother is like a 'failure', 'second-class citizen', and the women is a 'slut'. In LMT's case having children outside marriage means that some people will 'look[ing] down upon you', and you are a 'second-class citizen'.

4.4.2 Higher Education Pedagogy and Workload

LMT's anticipation of university life is different to the reality. She was unable to help her girls out with their studies. She spent most of her time in the library.

I thought it was just going to be smooth sailing and I would be doing very minimum work, but I was doing a lot of work. It came out to be more... because when I took up the course, when I made up the decision, I was quite happy that I'll be able to look after them [her children] ...look after them in their studies and also develop them in their studies and also have a social life with them. I didn't think that university will take a lot of my time, [that] the studies will take a lot of my time.

I was thinking that my studies will not need more time, so I will give more time to my girls, but it turned out that the beginning was really tough, so I ended up using more time for myself than for the family.

When it came to reality it was more than our expectations, it was worse than what we expected, so I said to them, "We already started this, there is no going back; we can't be failures the three of us together, we can't."

She had not been able to help her children in their respective studies as she had to spend more time on her university work. She estimated that she spent 24 hours of study time at university plus 10 hours of lecture time and thus it did not leave her with enough time to be with her children or to socialise with them. This is also quite different to her initial perceptions of being a university student.

It is about that I am building up on that because I expect... but I did not expect it will take so much time, like when you got a piece of coursework to do, which is normally 2000 words, you are expected to go through almost 10 different text books in one piece of coursework – maybe two weeks or one and a half weeks of continuous reading and writing of the notes before you can finish one piece of coursework, so that is a lot of time.

She opted to stay in full-time studies instead of moving to part time for a number of reasons. First, there was the issue of financial loss: as she would be required to register with Jobcentre Plus as a part-timer and thus look for jobs. It would also result in her losing out on the funding to which she is entitled at present. Second was the issue of Jobseeker's Allowance: being a part-time student would mean that she would have to register for this and she felt that it would not be enough to support her family. The third reason was the recession, and she explained that due to the recession her chances of finding a job were in any case very slim.

I am looking for funding which is a loan grant but I don't think that if you are a part-time student you get a full grant or full loan. You get part of it, and being a lone parent... the jobs are not forthcoming and I would have to go onto Jobseeker's, which wouldn't be enough to [support] a university life and, you know, and you don't even get the job. I was not guaranteed a full good job so that would mean that I'll be running into Jobseeker's Allowance ...and I didn't want to do that.

Thus, a key aspect of her lone mother/Higher Education student role was negotiating the complicated possibilities and limitations of state support.

4.4.3 Administrative Problems

Her first month in university was filled with admin-related problems. She was not registered as a Home Student (UK/EU citizenship holder), hence she was treated as a fee-paying International Student. She was expected to pay her fees before she could be added onto the system as an enrolled student and thus be able to access university facilities. She had a difficult first month sorting out her status in the university. She did not receive announcements about lecture venue and timings because they were made on the online system known as 'Blackboard', to which she at first had no access.

My first week was... difficult, had problems.... such as registration... I wasn't on the website... lecturers communicate through Blackboard and I wasn't properly registered and so I couldn't get access to information. The first week, there was no order at all. It was trying to find many things.

There was a technical problem in my registration. There was nothing that they could do other than wait for it to go through. First there was confusion as to whether I was an international student or a home student.

My finance only came in January and so from September to December I only had tax credits; before that, I didn't have anything to live on ... as a full-time student I couldn't ask for Jobseeker's Allowance... because I am registered on a student loan... my student finance forms only went to student finance in November 2009 and then payment only came in January 2010, so you could imagine that from September to January I didn't have any sound finance.

Because when you get your refugee status... it takes time... you don't have NI [National Insurance]... so the first thing you have to have in this country is NI... you can't even apply for your student loan with student finance without NI. So the NI was everything. So it was a long process having to get into the job centre to [request] NI and then waiting for the NI to come.

There was nobody [in support] except Student Welfare. I remember they were giving me a hardship loan of 400 pounds, which we just used to buy a laptop. There are some groups... refugee I had to go... what do you call? This group is called Connexions... these are [the] people that secure an appointment to get an NI. They phone around and they got an appointment for me... so after the appointment then I got the NI.

She also felt that the university's timetable did not help her. Her first lecture was at either 10am or after 11am, and so she felt that much of her time was wasted as she was not left with much to do during the earlier hours of her morning. She had to plan her day around the lecture hours and so expressed regret that much of the time in the morning was wasted. If the lectures and seminars started early in the morning, then she could plan things, as she was already up early in the morning for her children.

None of the lecturers ever started at 9; most of our lecture were scheduled for 10 to 12 or 11 to 1pm.

I was recorded in the system as an international student who had not paid, so I did not have access to go to for registration without full payment, but I was not supposed to because there was no need to. It really takes time for them to recognise such a technical error. They think that nothing has gone through registration and that the form has not been properly done or completed because I got my status at the same time. In September I got my status [refugee] and I got to uni at the same time and some of my papers were not through the Home Office and since the Home Office cannot be pushed... so without that document from the Home Office you would not be on the list of home students. But anyway the administration allowed me to attend lectures, but before that letter you cannot be registered and [until] you are registered you cannot get an email account or Blackboard, so it took some time for me to really settle there [in university].

So far, the themes emerging from LMTs's data point not to 'lone motherhood' so much as becoming any kind of person at all. Without administrative identity – for example, NI number – she is a non-person. It is the same with her status as a refugee. And as a student – home? Or international? And the problems of being a 'non-person' had financial implications. These problems also turned up in the university. She had to pay her fees before getting access to Blackboard, libraries and other resources. No refugee status means no National Insurance Number, no NI number means she is unable to apply for a student loan. No student loan means no funds from September 2009 to January 2010. However, at least she received some help from Student Welfare and Connexions. She refers to these problems of administration recognition in terms of her 'getting [my] status'. As in some other cases, 'lone motherhood' was not at all perceived as the biggest of her problems.

Another cluster of themes concerned the lack of a support network, the feeling of social isolation. This theme occurred for 'international' as well as 'national' lone mothers. Currently she had only one friend and not much social interaction with other fellow students. She had lost her old friends as she was now a student in university and did not have much time.

I lost my friends... now when I go for studying... my friends were no longer... I mean, my friends were not doing the same... so yeah... you are removed from that circle of friends.

I would just talk to you when I bumped into you on uni grounds but when you bump into somebody in on uni grounds... they are not there to be talking to you... Most of the time they are running, they are in a rush, they

are late already for something... they are rushing to a lecture or they are rushing out from a lecture to catch a nearest bus to go to a shift, so they don't have time for you.

Because of the scarcity of time I dropped my dance lessons... I used to take dancing lessons....quit my dance lessons... but I just couldn't do it anymore because of pressure of work [....] I always thought that going dancing was one thing that I enjoyed but I had to give that up because I couldn't ... I couldn't continue...

4.4.4 Cultural Distancing

I felt a picture emerging. She suffered from a kind of nested isolation. First was her exclusion from Zimbabwean culture. Then there was the problem of being a political refugee, and acquiring that status. This was surrounded by her initial identity as a 'non person' in the face of government and university bureaucracies. When these formed 'exclusions' were overcome, she then faced a university work pattern that cut her off from her friends, and even her family, as she saw it. For similar reasons, hobbies like dancing had to be abandoned. It is perhaps significant that she chose to include me in her social network at university – at least an ethnographic researcher is always happy to listen.

In addition, she felt that contemporary university life was asocial, or even antisocial, as a culture. It was also nested in the UK culture, which she found distanced and indifferent, in ways that Fox (2014) has vividly depicted in 'Watching the English: The Hidden Rules of English Behaviour'.

People don't network [....]. People just come in to uni as a person and listen to the lecture and go out; they will not even say good morning to the person next to them, even when you are sat with them in the lecture theatres. I think the culture of people in this country, they don't want to talk to anybody, they don't even know that if she is making an effort to say 'Hi'. At times you find people just say 'Hi' to give you that look that says why are you saying 'Hi' to me?. Are you mad or what?' People are not very friendly in this part of the world, unlike people from the third world. Honestly, people from the third world would have been talking to half of the class by now – I mean the tutorial group – because I come from the third world and we talk to people. Nobody here has ever greeted me in that little tutorial group of 12. None of them have said 'Hi' to me and I always say 'Hi' to them, and in the end you do not know [whether] to say 'Hi' because if you say 'Hi' to them, that person may not even answer you.

She is puzzled by this kind of cultural distancing.

Yes it's easy for them to know us – to know me, because I am so distinctive. Whereas to me they are all so very similar because [they have the] same colour hair, everything is the same, so it's difficult for me to identify them. Whereas, it's so easy for them to know me. Even for the lecturers, it is easy for them to know me because of my distinctive features, so different; I am the only person with this type of hair and I am the only mature student in my class with this type of hair. What I mean by 'this type of hair' is, this is natural hair and its very, very long – you can't miss me. Even the first day you came you know me that's because I am so different.

An interesting theme in the excerpt below is that her class fellows had a change of attitude towards her: as she was doing better at her studies, she was given more attention and looked up to.

Oh! in university I would tell you now that I am in third year. First year, they would never even want to talk to you, they would never, the young ones. Second year, because you have got now your results for the first year maybe they are appreciating and have seen that 'Ohh she is a mature student but she is sort of like an achiever' [so] they would now talk to you. They would be like, 'This one participates in tutorials, OK, this one participates in lectures, and this one can answer questions'. Some of them can't even answer questions. Because of being a mature student... I really want to apply myself, and at times I listen more than they do and now they really, really don't give you that demarcation. In the first year, I could see that they are like, 'You are a mature student, you are not our class; we will not have anything to do with you'. Second year, it's almost like they do mix a bit. The people who saw your work would want to talk to you and see how much they can get. You are involved in their study, and in the third year you can really see that they really want to talk to you and they want to revise with you because they have now got to know you. If you know the class in year one you would know that it's now going thinner and thinner and smaller and smaller because some people have been asked to drop out and some people have voluntarily dropped out because they've seen that they can't manage. So it's now different now, really different now.

4.4.5 Missing Father and New Relationship

Although LMT does not mind being a lone mother as it gives her a chance to make her own decisions, at the same time she is also missing the 'absent father' – a helping hand that shares responsibility for everyday occurrences. This missing father is needed the most when the child is unwell. He is also required for 'child consultation meetings', 'parents' evenings' and so on, and such an absence adds to the dilemma when something serious like a child getting sick in school happens.

The only thing that I can think is wrong is when you know everything has to be done by one person for the good of the family – that's when you think,

if you had a partner, 'We will share the responsibility', and if you don't have a partner you are not sharing any responsibility with any one ... like, I got my studies... and child consultation meeting or in a child's parents' evening and you cannot be at two places at one time so you got to see how you can manage your time, and at times when one child is not feeling too well it has to be out of school and you have to be in uni but this child has to be in the house. That is when it really becomes a problem; you have to forget the lectures and...attend to the child; you can't ask anybody because your child is ill, but if you do something like pick up your child maybe [you] can make an arrangement with a friend to do that for you, but there are times when you really see that being single handed is not always... you need the other person... but somehow you always manage, losing a lecture or not attending something for one day...

The excerpt above contains some common expressions of the reality of 'being a lone mother' and living the life of a lone mother – making decisions – 'when you know everything as to be done by one person for the good of the family.'. The missing father is not just a matter of practical support for her or her family:

They [the children] feel they are losing out on something. The father figure is something that they would love, is something they would really love to have, father figure, and you find at times they always say 'Oh Mum! We don't mind really if you get into a relationship; honestly, we will be happy for you to get into a relationship'. And they wish that for me, but they also wish so much for themselves to have a dad in their life, they really do, so much that at times [I] think they might not accept somebody who is not their dad. But they assure me that they don't mind, I can date anybody I want. They are prepared to accept that person as Dad and if that person makes me happy, they said they will be... they don't mind, but at same time they also wish they could have a dad in the house – you know, it's different when a man speaks or Dad speaking. I always see it when I bring a friend who comes in... I brought a friend from my country. We used to work together in the same department. When he visited some time back and he spent time with them so they enjoyed themselves – he is a dad as well but his kids are unfortunately back home and he has also got two girls and mine are two girls as well. He knows what to talk to them about, he talks to them like a dad, and those few times that he came over they enjoyed themselves, they are laughing all the time.

I am very open [about] getting into a relationship but I am not very keen on having that relationship... hmmm... prematurely. A person gets into my circle, my unit, my family unit, I am bit sceptical about them coming in. I don't mind having a relationship...but for them to adjust to the children is one thing that I am sceptical about.

4.4.6 Priorities and Time Management

It is a complex kind of management in which priorities are placed in order – first LMTs's studies, then the children's studies, then the household work and lastly having fun. Almost all of the participants talked about this kind of scale of priorities, although the stress varies.

I believe mother[ing] is a full-time job, parenthood is a full-time job, so it is challenging that you are supposed to be a good time manager...time management is of an essential importance. You have to manage to be on time in your studies, have to manage your time in your duties, in the house, and manage your children's time, see that they have done all their work. You manage their time, you manage household time, and you manage your time as a student.

I don't remember playing games with them, no, not even dance. I used to do that when I joined uni, we danced together in the house, but I don't remember doing that any more [laughs].

There is also a 'sacrifice' made by the children while their mother is busy with her studies.

They are quite disadvantaged. They want more time to play with me and more time to talk to me. But time, more of the time now is ticking. I also have to assign time to my studies, so we find less time for play.

She goes on to talk about university life where she faces complexities of management and the scarcity of time that she faced during her studies. She feels guilty at not giving enough time to her children and also questions her decision to join education whilst her children might need her support.

I don't have enough time, because I would have loved to be there for my kids and give them supervision, but then I once spoke to my friend who is at Newcastle with whom... we were together doing the same job in Zimbabwe, and I was airing my concerns. I said, 'You know, I should not have gone to uni and I should have just stayed and helped my kids'. She said to me, 'I will tell you one thing: you think you would have helped, but I don't think that you could have done much because what they are learning now and the way they do things now and the way we used to do things is a bit different from home. Here they have got internet to help them, they have got better facilities than we got at home.

She does have a change of heart after speaking to her friend. She then agrees that it is good to be studying.

Yes, so my friend said that they are not missing a lot because they are supposed to use internet and they will use the internet to their best advantage.

She prefers working in the library as it helps her focus more on her university work, whereas when she is home she cannot ignore household chores. This is quite similar to the findings from many of the lone mothers that I interviewed, especially mothers with older children. It means they can stay away from distractions at home. I also feel that working in the library works better for me than working from home most of the time.

... I've got OCD, what is it called?

R: Obsessive Compulsive...

LMTs: Yes, I have got it for cleaning. So if I go to the kitchen to make a cup of tea [and] I see something I need to clean, I get distracted. So at times I prefer going to the library because I think at times they need to be kids, and by needing to be kids they need to talk, they need to shout, they need to play. If I am there I would say 'Shut up', which is not fair, so I leave the house to give them their freedom and space.

LMTs: Yes, during Easter that's the best place and best time to read when there are no lectures, but the library is closed, so during that time I just have to go to 'please, please' – all the time I will be reminding them to be quiet, but I think this time it would not be difficult as they will also be writing exams I think in May. So this year it will be different because they are both in exam mode and they are the ones who are finishing GCSEs and O Levels and they write exams in lower sixth which they call the AS Level then A level, so this year has really been good because all of us have been in exams, but the other bit I was saying is that the more time you spend in uni, the more time you are spending away from them, so you don't see what they are doing. I've got to have internet at home because they need internet after school to do their homework. Even for me, because I can't spend all my time in the library, so I've got a landline and I have broadband. So because I've got internet at home it's very difficult to know that somebody might be in their bedroom on the laptop doing homework. They might be in their room on the laptop busy on Facebook chatting or Skype chatting or just accessing these nice websites like YouTube where you know people are saying things, people are socialising. There are videos on YouTube, they can be watching singers, their videos. So if you are in the house you are saying that, 'Oh what you are doing? How are you?' At times you find that you can't even ask them every day, 'How was school?' Like when I was an asylum seeker I would ask, every day when they come [home] from school, you would see that what she has done or what she has achieved, what was the most interesting bit today, what was the most boring bit today. It was just like a routine thing but now I feel like I just can't do that.

It is interesting that she should think of ‘OCD’ as an explanation for the work/household jobs tension. It is, however, a very common kind of displacement that all thesis writers probably recognise.

4.4.7 Latch-Key Kids

The scale of priorities leads sometimes to less than ideal compromises where ‘we just take chances’. In this case the Zimbabwean cultural family background enables a greater independence at an earlier age. Nevertheless, locking the door and never leaving the house show that the participant feels an element of exposure to danger:

They should not be alone in the house. We just take chances that this will not be found out, because if it is found then that is criminal. So as long as kids are below 16, they are not supposed to be left alone. But from my background I came here when they were 8 and 9 [years] and we have to leave them alone back home, so they are already groomed to live alone. I don't have any problem with them. My kids will get from school into the house, get into the house, lock the door behind them and they will not leave the house.

I go back home when I need to go back home. Sometime it's so distracting to be in the house because they are teenagers, they need their time and space [and], they need to jump around. I feel I have to come to the library not because it's very necessary but at times I want to give them space and because they are so well behaved; we speak on the phone and they say I'm BBC through the phone [laughs]. 'Have you washed your plates? Have you locked the door?' 'Mom, yeah I have' and I ask them, 'Can you put the alarm on?', 'Yes'.

The challenge is: when they are in the house are they doing what they are supposed to be doing? What I mean is, are they doing the homework which they are supposed to be doing? Are they doing the exercises that they are supposed to be doing in school work? Are they watching TV or are they playing music when they are supposed to be reading? That's the only big problem, but otherwise I don't have any discipline problems with them.

There is also an element of risk assessment in the HE lone-mother experience. One element is the ‘latch-key kid’ phenomenon. However, she feels that a combination of cultural and familial factors make that behaviour possible. Clearly, she stays in close touch by phone with her children – hence their ‘BBC’ joke about her. Her main unaddressed concern was about the quality of their time: were they ‘playing music’ rather than reading or doing homework?

4.4.8 ‘Lonely’/‘Single’ Mother Debate

LMTs sees the deficits of ‘lone motherhood’, a term to which she objects, preferring ‘single’, while noting that the latter term also has problems of ambiguity. But her views on her status are mixed. The data on ‘time management’ carries the theme of pressure, of course, but perhaps also the idea of autonomy. She ‘manages’ the time, orders the priorities, and speculates that trying to be a mother and a student might be more difficult – ‘compromising’- if she had a partner. Such a relationship has its demands. Better, then, to ‘finish your studies before you meet that special guy’.

I think when you are a lone mother it is the best time to be a student.’

‘Lone mother actually wants to describe that you must be lonely [whereas] single mother does not ... I think lone mother really makes it sound bad and serious whereas single mother can be single but not lonely. I could be single but with a partner, you know, somebody who lives with a partner is still single as long as [it’s] not a registered relationship – they can still be single. I think a single mother makes sort of more sense than a lone mother.

I can be a single mother. I am also a single mother, but I am a single and lone mother; somebody can be a single mother but not a lone mother because they may be living with the father of their child but they don’t want to go and register their marriage, but the system here will not say they are not married...

Then, in the excerpt below, we see LMTs’s different trajectories: LMT works her way through the various descriptors of ‘lone motherhood’ and its various forms.

When you are with a partner you are compromising; I don’t compromise with anybody. I do the planning, I do the executing of the plan, and I do the assessment of the plan. I look at my own failures and at my own successes and put in place what needs to be put in place – any interference. With a partner you always have to give up something and I don’t feel obliged towards any of that. You feel selfish if you don’t give time and are available... relationship has its demands... not only the negative but also the positive one... it has to be a happy and healthy relationship, whereas I can be in the library without ever hurting anybody. But a partner wants you to be in bed on time, bed time is 10 or 9pm, be home on time, have meals on time.

An emerging theme in several accounts was ‘juggling’ between student and parent roles. Along with that, some tried to use their educational aspiration as a model for their children to copy. LMTs also narrated a similar kind of role modelling.

I think the advantage of getting a university qualification is a career choice in getting this, a way of supporting yourself and being an encouragement

to the kids so they see the value of education. If I can do it at this stage – because I have a good chance of doing it because the children are already sort of grown up. They aren't babies any more. They are grown-ups with whom you can talk and reason things with and we can support each other, because without their support as well I wouldn't manage. It's just making them see the need for what we are doing....that what I am doing is not just for me... you have a healthier mind when you are doing something that you like.

To me, I really want my children to appreciate the need to get education although that is not the ultimate thing in life but it's a necessity.....it is a necessity for one to be educated. You are different, you put yourself in a different world, if you are educated than those who think it is not necessary.

It has... it's a sacrifice, so I always tell them, 'Guys, let's not stress each other because we have sacrificed this one, we have gone out of our way to make this big decision. Of course we spoke about it before I joined uni, that this is going to happen. This is what we are going to expect to happen. [But] even when it came, the reality was more than our expectations. It was worse than we expected so I said, 'We have already started this, there is no going back.

In this final section of the interview, LMTs subordinates the 'lone mother' narratives to the trauma of becoming a refugee and asylum seeker. Most of the other 'lone mother' accounts contain 'redemptive narratives', as in the case of LMH (Case Number 1). But for LMTs it is a story of sudden loss of status, from 'an elite class' to four years in the UK as 'somebody who was nothing'. That seems to be her most powerful and influential story. Her studies are her attempt to reinstate that status:

I think [what] it has brought in me is... You know what I lost in all this when I was denied to become part of the society that I belong to, I don't personally belong here, and I personally belong to an elite class. I am a professional. Those four years just reduced me to somebody who was nothing [...] I went to uni and studied to acquire the British certificate and academic qualification. I was too much of a coward to want to the idea of applying and being refused, and applying and being refused. You know what I am saying, so I thought if I got their qualifications and put them together maybe they will recognise and offer me a job, and law is something that I should have studied instead of accounting. When I wanted to study law my mum said that, 'I don't think that you should study law because lawyers are just guys' and so I just did the administration thing, the accounting and administration, because I would never become a successful lady lawyer. You know, when I came here and I heard OK this law is UK and they don't care which year you go to uni, you don't have to be straight from school...

That is the structure of her story, imposed on her life. But LMTs is a formidable woman, both in terms of her 'lone mother' role, and also in terms of her sense of powerful agency, for herself and for her girls.

R: Thanks, so tell me about your relationship with your girls?

LMTs: My girls, with my girls I would say I've got a multi-faceted relationship. I will explain what I mean: I told them I was going to be their friend, their mum, their dad, their sister, their aunt, anything they could think of. That's my relationship with my girls.

The excerpts below connects well to the article published in the Guardian (2015) that states that children of working mothers are better off.

Daughters of working mothers have better careers, higher pay and more equal relationships than those whose mothers stayed at home. What's more, their sons thrive too and grow up to be better men, more involved at home, taking more time caring for their own family. (Guardian, 25.06.2015)

I ask her to sum up her multi-tasking role. Her response is full of energy and ambition, for herself and for her daughters.

In my home it is the survival of the fittest [...] I always say to them that nobody will say that, 'I feel pity for you because you were brought up by a single mum or you were brought up by a mum who went to uni or brought up by a mum who was a refugee' or 'We feel pity for you because you are black or feel pity for you because you were once in slums and you lost four years of your life or we feel pity for you because you have left your country and you had to come to a foreign country'. I said, 'There is no excuse. You are responsible for your own fate and you are responsible for your own lives'. [...] So with my daughters I told them that, 'You are disadvantaged but that's not... even the most. Look at President Obama, he came from disadvantage but where is he now, he lived his dream. Martin Luther King, before he died, he said I have a dream, I have a dream one day this country shall be ruled by a black man and don't we have a black man ruling it now?' So this is the motto in my family [...]. The world is a cruel world and you will never be forgiven. I always talk about Michael Jackson, how many people feel pity for him. They say you bring it upon yourself. Why are you taking these drugs? Stop. At least Michael Jackson, they used to say that his doctor is to be blamed. What about Whitney Houston, she is the latest victim. Amy Winehouse. People never feel pity, they always say, when you see on the internet, 'Oh, you took those drugs, you met a partner who used to take drugs and you took them, but you knew'.

The interesting aspect to note here is that all names that she used as role models are black. However, when she talks about the downfalls, she chooses a 'white' English

example. She used strong examples to dramatise the act of role modelling. This seemed to me to be a very good example of how a lone mother role-models.

R: If at times you get all depressed then how do you cope with it? Where do you get emotional support?

LMTs: Yes, I get what you mean. I came and lived with my kids and we have bonded so much that we talk about anything and everything. Most of the time when I get very lonely, it's because of pressure. Mainly because you hear something from home and you think that people are doing this. At times I think that my brothers and sisters are not doing what I think that they should be doing to give support to my mum and my dad. My daughters, because we are so close they are more mature and grown up than their age that they at times talk me out of it. We talk together.

What is interesting to note here is that when I asked her about support she talked about her daughters as her support but yet she still talks about the missing 'man figure' when it comes to the business of dealing with vandalism, racism and also other responsibility sharing that she discusses in the earlier passages. A different theme here is her talk about the 'freedom' that she has after having her status resolved.

R: You don't feel alone?

LMTs: Not really, because they [daughters] always come to my rescue and say, 'No, no, no, Mum, you can't be giving a chance to yourself of letting your high blood pressure take control.

I explore one of the possible 'happy endings' with her, asking if she has met anyone.

R: Have you met anyone?

LMTs: Yeah, now that I've settled like this. I've gone past that stage where I am fearing for my life. I've got that freedom now that even if somebody wants to come into my life, I would actually be more receptive and try and see whether I can cultivate a relationship or a friendship at the same time [as] the need to have somebody who is helping me, I fully embrace that I need that. I've met somebody, we are good friends; I would say that we are just good friends who live on their own. He lives in his house out of town and I live here.

'LMTs: It's almost like coming to two years now. I like doing dance; we met at a dance school and we are just dance partners.

R: Is he from Zimbabwe?

LMTs: No, no, from here. He is British and white. We've got like a half-life where he has got other children as well and he has got grandchildren as well – I've got a grandchild – and he is single. I find that he has given me a lot of support, like some chores that you need him to do... even like...

there was a time when I bought a car and I parked the car at uni and when I parked the car there was these boys who were in black hoods and on bikes. You know the student union, in front of the student union. We saw them there and we didn't suspect anything; we parked the car there and we went into the university and we did some work. When I left I just got into the car and drove the car to the house. They actually had their bikes on top of my bonnet. Even now if you look at my bonnet it is bent, so then I rang him and he said 'Oh! You don't need to worry about it' and he said, 'Can you just come up and let me just have a look at the car?'. I just went up to him and he just looked at the car and he just opened it and he just used his hands to straighten it. He said that if we just take it to them [garage], they might say that you might need to replace your bonnet. He actually comforted me and made me feel much better. Even now it's the same, but if you see it you would know that there are some dents.

LMTs had a change of heart and I see that she now says that a man could mean more sharing of responsibility and a source of help. Earlier on she saw a man as more of a dominating kind of person who wanted her to come home on time and cook. Then she had a phase of actually liking the autonomy of being the boss in the family – the 'manager'. Finally, the long-expressed feeling of having a man in her life was achieved. She got her 'superman' and it is appropriate that she ends her account with a 'rescue' story.

4.5 Case Number 3: LMT

This lone mother is taking an access course in a Community College. She is in her 50s, mother to 12 children, 11 girls and one boy from four different fathers, taking Level 1 and 2 and now is on an access course in Education, English and History. She has never studied IT before and is being taught it as part of study skills. She has plans for getting into university the year after the course and so has already applied to two universities to study English and History.

I wanted to do it [for] a long time but the children were too young. I didn't really have anyone to mind them, so as they got older I've been able to do it now. That's why I am on the access course now – to try and do something with me life, really.

It is interesting to note here that since her children are a bit older, the eldest is 31 and the youngest is 11 years old, she has a bit more time on her hands so is thinking of doing something for herself. It also refers back to the theme of the 'vertical' dimension of education, in which educational gain is not just instrumental but rather personal – 'do something with me life, really'. She never thought that she could gain education because she lacked 'self-esteem and confidence'. She explained that she was insecure and not very confident throughout her life and, according to her, that might be the reason for her getting into relationships with such a succession of men.

When I had my first child I was 21. After my eldest daughter was born they just kept coming after that. It was not always the same father. I have been in relationships and they leave and I have someone else because I was young and I wanted someone, and then I have some more children, so it went on. So they got four different fathers, so I actually bring them up... so the only time I actually lived with anybody was six years. I was married at one point but he didn't want to live with me. He wanted freedom but the whole time I really didn't have self-esteem and confidence; because of that I never tried to do anything at all. If I hadn't been pushed into this really by the tutors I would never be on an access course. I never thought I could [...] I brought the children up myself. So I haven't lived with anyone since my split in 1997. So I have been alone since and was alone before that as well.

Again, it is striking to see in this case study, as well as in the other extended case studies, how individual and distinct the experiences of lone mothers are. It is also clear how deceptive appearances are – 12 children, four different fathers, a series of short-term relationships, all seem to point to a rather careless 'motherhood'. One can see the

stereotypes jostling to get into this story, but here is how she reports how the children are getting on:

Oh, yes. My eldest is 30, she will be 31 next month. She is married and she is going to have a first baby and she has been working full time. She stopped working to go on maternity leave. The next daughter is Cheryl, 29, and she is almost 30, their birthdays are four days apart, and she's got two little girls and she works in Subway. Next one is Amanda; she is 27, nearly 28. She lives in London and did work for a Recruitment Company. But she wants to be a History teacher so she started a programme where you do a Postgraduate Diploma while you teach. My son, he is 26 and he works. He is a freelance film maker so he does classes [...]. Abigail is 24 and she manages a pawnbroker shop. She lives near Manchester but she comes to Liverpool for work. Becky, she is 22 and she is in Seaside University, and Charlotte is 19 and she has an extra year in school because she took drama. She is about to finish school and then there is Olivia, she is 18 and she is still at school and about to leave school and go to do Drama and she's got Asperger's syndrome. Then Eva, she is 16, and she is going into 6th form in September. Lauren, she is 14 and she is at school. Mia, she is 13 and going to school, and the youngest is Sophia, and she is 11 and she is in year 6.*

*All names have been changed to protect the anonymity of the respondents and others named in the interviews.

The picture is of a remarkable, productive and successful family. Nor is this the complete account of her 'family'. She tells more about her routine and her pets:

I get up at 5.15am and I got a big dog, two ducks and four cats. I put my dog out because if people are going past he loves when he sees them. He barks and at that time no one is out, so I put the dog out and feed my ducks and feed the cats and tidy up anything left from the night before. I go to bed at 8pm. I do the washing and if I have taped a programme on what I am studying that might help me, I will watch it for 30 minutes and then get up and make the kids' breakfast and then they go to school and I come to college on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. I read at night or write essays if I got to. When I go home I pick up my daughter from primary school, then make tea and sort the housework. I just feel like sleeping then, that's like every day. Always trying to squeeze in everything.

The noticeable elements of her above revelation are the 'numbers' that she is managing on a daily basis. Mothering for her is not restricted to children, pets are also included, and that not to just a dog or a cat but a 'big dog', two ducks and four cats. She is another example of a complete opposite to the 'stereotypes' that surround lone mothers. She is 'trying to squeeze in everything' and she is a 'lone mother' who is never alone.

Like her own children, she was also one of 12 siblings. She did not like her school days and was admitted to a 'handicapped school' – special school, as it used to be called. She left school at the age of 16, not after taking exams but by walking out one day and never returning, and went to work. However, she did not like her first job, and her mother died one week after she started it. She became depressed and thus left the job and met somebody and had children.

I just put my coat on, went home from school and said, 'I'm not coming back'. And I was off from school. I just didn't know, I just didn't feel secure and was panicking at the thought that I have to live in a strange place and do my studies.

'I grew up in Kensington; my mom and dad have 12 children as well. They have six boys and six girls, I was the 11th. I grew up there and I went to local primary school until I was about 7. I got very ill and too ill to go to normal school so I was sent to another school; it was called a handicapped children's school. They don't call it that now but then it was and I went to special school.

R: Because you had asthma?

LMT: There were no inhalers, before. It came out when I was 14. I was very seriously ill and was expected to die. It was a very tiny school. And it went from ages 4 to 16, and then you are supposed to leave when you are 16, and they did not do 11+. My mum wanted me to do 11+. I did 11+ and went to a school which is not there anymore. I went into 6th form and I was so frightened cause of not being with my family, that's my school life. I think I was 16 and left school.

LMT had wanted to join education for a long time and was also inspired by one of her sisters who took many courses and who always encouraged her to take courses. However, LMT was unable to take any as she did not have any support. LMT used to drink a lot because of all the stress that she was facing at the time. She felt that she was being ignored and 'overlooked': 'When people see us behind the pram, they see us as a mother and not as a person'. It took a long time but finally, 'I really want to do something'. Again, it is the 'vertical' dimension that is apparent. She wanted to become a 'person' who would not be 'overlooked'. This kind of non-person/person switch appears in some of the other data, such as that for LMN, LMP and LMTs.

R: What made you think of coming back to education?

LMT: I wanted to. It was such a long time. One of my sisters went to education quite late – she is dead now, she is extraordinary, she could do embroidery and it was very beautiful and she went to a Centre and she did a course and she did more and more courses. It was a lot to do with adult teaching. She became an adult teacher but she died very suddenly. She wanted me to do that but I didn't have the support to do it. I kept putting it off. I used to drink too much because of stress, so I later thought, 'I really want to do something'. When people see us behind the pram, they see us as a mother not as a person [but] there was more to me. So I felt that's what I was, so I stopped joking and I thought not to have drink for a year. I had become very dependent on alcohol and used to drink every night. So I thought, 'If I can stop for a year I can stay off it completely, so after a year I enrolled in a course. When you are working, people think of you as a single mother earning the money and you don't see the real person who has a valid opinion, you get overlooked all the time, and I get tired of being over looked, so I decided to enrol.

LMT was supported to get into university by her tutor. Now as her youngest child is in year 6 (primary school) she can see herself achieving something. She repeats that she was insecure and not very confident throughout her life and, according to her that might be the reason for her getting into relationships with such a succession of men. She was not too keen on the particular subject, History, as she did not want to be a teacher after her studies. She was advised to go for the course at one of the drop-in centres as she was keen to get into university. Furthermore, she is unable to attend any university outside Liverpool as her children are still at school locally.

Yes, I have applied; because I have children I cannot apply outside Liverpool [...]. [University 1] didn't do English and history, [University 2] is too far so I applied to [University 3] and [University 4]. Let's see what happens; you can fail the course, you know, on different things. There is a lot of things you have to have in there or if your attendance is bad and you have to put your work in. You can still fail the access course, it's just not ... you have to show commitment as well, so I got to pass the access course and specific course.

She makes her choice of university with her children in mind and she compares herself to the time when she was young and also to other younger students in her class as they go clubbing, to the gym and socialise. For her, academic achievement is the priority and she is happy that she does not have to go outside and socialise like the younger students do. She wants to spend her time with her children.

It's funny really, I think, I know I am much older than the rest of the students but I am doing well at the class at the moment, but I know I will not be able to live that student life. That's an advantage [because] I don't drink now. I used to drink when I was young, I used to drink but not now.

There is no booze night out for me, so I enjoy the academic side but I don't want to do the social side. I don't want to go out anyways so it's an added advantage. I am nervous and excited about it in lots of other ways. I just need to concentrate on what I need to study. I am not socialising anyway so I don't have to worry about that. So I am not going to take advantage of any of that thing, no gym, etc. I just need to concentrate on my studies and go home. I carry on with my life and I can't let that drop because I don't want them to be disadvantaged because of what I want to do. I can't let the children have less of me and I can't let that drop.

When she started her course, she was not confident and was very shy. The access course built her confidence. She explains that younger students were also very supportive towards her and always invited her on nights out but she used to refuse. I then asked her how she felt about being a student in college:

I love it. When I first started I was worried, I didn't think I will fit in compared to other people, too old. I was very anxious when we first went there. We have to [have a] test exam and interview. I was very nervous. But there was a young couple sitting there in the café area. They looked more scared than I was. The boy went out to have a ciggie and the girl said, 'Don't leave me'. I thought, 'I am not like that'. And when I started I was very shy, but when I started getting my marks that's when I got my confidence and [nothing] fears me anything. They [classmates] send me texts and put me on Facebook. Every time they have a night out they invite me. I don't want to go out. They always invite me and I say '[no,] thank you' but they have been incredibly supportive.

Another theme of now being listened to in the family recurs across the data. It reflects, I think, that 'vertical' dimension of educational outcomes – 'but I am getting asked about my opinion on things, which nobody ever used to do.' She adds, 'I can't explain the difference to my self-confidence it has made.'

I am far more confident than I ever was. It just made a massive difference to my self-esteem. I have noticed it at home with the children: they listen to me more, especially at home. It's not that the kids will do all the time what I say, but I am getting asked about my opinion on things, which nobody ever used to do. It has given me something to do.

Again there is that 'becoming a person' theme behind this, someone worth 'being listened to,' having 'something to say'. She goes on to give details of the changes that Higher Education has made to her life.

It's when you call people up on the phone, the council people, or phone bill. I have stopped people talking over me. I have changed the way I speak, so instead of being upset and going 'you are not listening to me' I will wait until they finish speaking and then I say what I have to say and they listen.

I think they listen because I have got more confidence to speak up. Even in the group in class, before I started, didn't have confidence to speak to anybody. My kids act on stage, they take part in dances, too, and I have never been able to do that. But in class last month I got up and gave a PowerPoint presentation. I wasn't happy about it but I did it, so it made that difference that I don't feel bad about people looking at me. I am not afraid, so now when I speak in class [and] people look at me, I don't mind that. Before, I didn't like that. I used to cover myself with a coat, even in summer, when I used to go out and walk diffidently but now I am walking more confidently and it made a big difference. I spoke to the council about a blunder they made. A year ago I would have put the phone down and cried, and nothing would have been sorted out. But I was confident enough to say 'No! That was not my mistake, it's yours'. I never, I have never been able to do that before. [It's] because I have realised – I never thought I was stupid, but I never thought I had ability that will get me anywhere – because I am doing alright on the course. When I get good marks confidence builds up. I think I can do something. It's not the world's greatest thing but I did it and that makes me feel good. And I have something to say that I have, and I wrote that thing down and got good marks and that was me talking and I have not written what is someone else['s ideas] so that's me. And it feels like I put a part of me on a paper and somebody approved it. Which make me feel good about myself, do you understand?

It is especially clear how deep the impact of Higher Education has been in terms of personal and intellectual development when she says, 'And it feels like I put a part of me on a paper and somebody approved it'. She seems to find the courses literally enlightening:

When I first got the acceptance on the course I was so thrilled and excited. It's like you are in a dark room and someone just let some light in, and [when] I got on the course, I felt that there is a chance to do the things that I have done. I thought it will be hard but it was not that hard. When I did history, I have never done history before, and I thought, 'Will I be able to understand it?' because the approach to it is different, but I did get the hang of it. It's different as I am enjoying it and I am not finding it difficult. When I write something I put everything in it, I enjoy doing the best job I can, so it makes me happier. I got an offer from the university – I couldn't believe it, I cried. I never thought I will come this far as I have; it makes me emotional, and it makes me happier.

Another dimension involves fitting in family life with studies and making adjustments: older children, for example, can feel threatened and even ashamed that their mother is a student. The oldest child who lives with her is 18 years old and the youngest is 11 years old.

I found that different age groups reacted differently to me getting on the course. They always wanted me to do it. At the start I had to pick my time,

I had to trick them by saying, 'Who is going to do the dishes?', then they run upstairs and I can do what I want do, that's when I realised I will do it no matter what. As the time passed by I found better ways of doing things and faster ways of doing things, so I get up really early now to fit in as much as I can. Some of the younger children were not happy at the start because they need me more, so I started to find a way to work when they don't want my attention, so I gave them time once I have cleaned the house and I have helped them with their homework, then it's my time, 'Don't disturb me unless the house is on fire because I am writing'. The older ones were happy for me at the start and then it shifted a bit. The younger ones are now happier and older ones felt [at first] threatened by this, somehow feeling shame that, 'My mum is going to be a student'. Once they realised things will still stay the same, I have to make the adjustment so I squeeze in time so they know now they don't interrupt me. If they want something they have to get it themselves. So that's what I have to work out between needs and wants.'

R: What about the ones not living with you?

LMT: They gave a mixed reaction, like, 'It's about time, Mum'; they realised I am sticking to it. I think they thought I will leave the course, not that I gave them any cause to, but they thought I would and then some of the kids showed their reaction, like when I told them I have an exam tomorrow or Thursday, they will come around on Wednesday night and make lots of noise. When it happened a second time and third time I thought it was quite deliberate: Why is this happening? So I did say something about that to them and they got used to that. I think they got a bit threatened, even though they are growing up. They think, 'What will Mum do? Where will she go?' They had me for 30 years there and now all of the sudden I am doing this, and they shifted and they didn't know where they are with me. But now it's settled down, they are alright.

Again there is a 'person' theme for the children. Their mother is becoming different, adjustments have to be made. As she says, '(t)hey had me for 30 years' and found the 'new person' of their mother at times 'threatening'. Another aspect of that new relationship was that some of the children would seek academic advice, 'help from their mother'.

There were ups and downs for different reasons and [their] different ages. It affected them differently, I can't say it didn't affect them, but I was always try not to affect them in bad ways and now one of my daughters who is 16 is doing GCSE and our English teacher is the only one who gives us essays back. All tutors work differently, he is the only one who gives our exams back to go in our file, and she [the daughter] has her GCSE coming up and she asked me if she can read my essays and she liked them and said it's a big help. It has smoothed out now.

She has developed her connection with her children: more respect, look up to her, ask her for advice, and discuss schoolwork, such as the child taking her GCSE discusses her assignments with her. They come to her when they need help with their schoolwork. In LMT's case, the 'vertical' direction in Higher Education is stressed. She is undertaking the course for personal gains, 'more respect', 'proud of me', to be 'more confident' in dealing with people on the phone or to increase her confidence to make new friends and also to talk to new people. Again, there is that 'person' theme: 'they noticed me for the first time.'

I think it has been really good, the fact that possibly when I started they [her children] thought I would not stick at it or I'll be interrupted by it, or they kept saying things would change for the bad in some way and the thing is it hasn't. So I think they think, 'Oh, Mum is going to get an education'. They've seen that I fulfilled everything I got to do. I haven't spent much time with them, I have done my work, I have got my grades and they see me in a different light. And it is me that's the difference, the behaviour I think, so, 'It's my mum doing something and she means what she says and sticks to it'. It is a long time especially for young children, you know it is a long time. And they see me stick to it and see me more determined to do it. It has made a difference to them; I think they've got a bit more respect for me. It is very easy for them to take their issues out with the person that they spend most time with. Like their dad wouldn't get this, you know, I'll get this when something goes wrong and their dad doesn't.

So they've seen that commitment meant determination and it has made a difference; they are quite excited for me and they [have] said they are proud of me. They said it a few times, which is quite different than I remember them, for which I'm very pleased.

There is another aspect to the 'new person' mum. She clearly expresses that in terms of her growing 'confidence' in her success in education. However, there is also a theme in there about modelling the possibilities of education to her children, at a 'higher level' than her children at school. She calls this a 'knocked-on mum level.'

In some ways I do because, although I have to do sort of study as well and I have to pick a time that is not going to interfere, there are better ways because I'm sort of reading and learning how to study things at a higher level than they do in school. Like my daughter this morning, she is in the middle of her GCSEs, and she was asking me to talk this morning about it. There is a connection that wasn't there before. It feels that something more than, 'Mama, [I] can't find my socks.' There is a connection on a knocked-on mum level and they come and ask me when they have more to do with schoolwork, if you like, I can understand it better. Because how they look at you, you went to school like a hundred years ago.

The perception of friends and other people around her have also changed.

R: Do you think your friends or other peoples' perception changed towards you?

LMT: I think it has. People have been surprised that 'Oh!' – and it has nothing to do with my age. It's just sort of like they have noticed me for the first time, like the neighbours, they are pleased. Before they used to think of me as a mother. So they thought, 'She can't be that stupid', it has made a difference. I get more respect. They have seen me differently and I have started to see them differently. I never used to talk about kids or mum stuff, like mother kind of stuff, when I use to pick my kids up. I used to stand in a corner waiting for my kids as other mums have kids' stuff to talk [about] and I didn't have much... Now I have new and different friends, now [my social network] sort of expanded, it's because I met more people who are like minded.

She now feels that the attitudes of her neighbours and others have changed for the better. She is not seen as 'stupid' and she receives 'more respect'. She expresses here being seen in a new light, 'noticed me for the first time', as if it is her new existence. This has opened her up in meeting new people, making new friends and feeling confident. The sort of improvements that she discusses seem like the real developments that makes gaining education a worthwhile experience. Looking back at her lone mother data, I can see her developing a new relation to herself. She also develops a different relation to those of her children who are still at home. A third development for her is other adults respond more positively to her.

I turned next to exploring her feelings about being a 'lone mother'. LMT initially reiterates similar descriptors that are echoed by other participants as well, such as 'it's her fault', 'an insult', 'not very nice', has 'implications' and 'having babies for benefits'.

It doesn't have anything positive said. Overall, the general impression you get from newspapers and television [is] that single mother has implications and it is not very nice, and it shouldn't be like that.'

'I think it's a label. I think it's used in a way it shouldn't be, it's not very nice. If you are bringing up your children on your own, it doesn't matter if you are men or women, you are bringing children on your own. I see the term meaning, it's all her fault, it makes me annoyed. If you are raising your kids on your own, it means you are a lone mother but it has grown to mean something else; it has become an insult [that] it was not meant to be.

When you say single mother or lone mother all people make assumptions and that's why there is no other way to put it, so I think I prefer lone mother over all of them.

She brings out the talk surrounding mothering as a job but not a well-paid one. She explains further that the amount of work that mothering entails, and comments on how little that work brings in financially, contrary to media 'stereotypes' – 'you don't get rich out of it', 'could not do that for money' and it's 'twice as hard'

It makes me very angry. I am grateful for the benefits I receive but you don't get rich out of it, and the amount of work you have to do, it's not about being a single mother, it's about being an effective single mother. You are getting the prejudice of other people who see you having babies for benefits, but the amount of work you do for the amount of money you get I think no one will have another child. There are people who think they have another baby and they don't have to go to work. I understand that, because to go to work you need to get someone to manage your children. If you haven't got anyone to do that what will you do? No one, in the vast majority [of cases] and I could not do that for money, for any amount of the money in the world. It's too hard if you are doing it properly, it's too hard, I mean twice as hard. The single mums I know don't leave the dishes or house not clean.

Men say, 'I am an architect, [I] am a driver' and women say, '[I] am mum'. It reflects our background.

As she made clear, she has never worked. However she did volunteer work. She had children to look after and it was hard and expensive to arrange childcare for her children whilst she was at work.

I haven't worked for years. I had children and I have done volunteer work but did not work [i.e. paid work], I have too many children to look after. If the children go to school it's great, but to get a job and then you need someone to mind them, not for that many children, so I have to wait.

Looking at her case, it is hard to see university, 12 children, 'dog, two ducks, four cats', voluntary work, etc., in terms of a 'lone' status. What is apparent is the powerful 'vertical' orientation of motivation, self-improving, becoming a 'person', being valued by others, and modelling education for her school-age children. The 'horizontal' dimension is much weaker. She seems not to have worked (in the conventional 'job' sense). As far as the future, 'I have to wait'. The instrumental side of education is barely present and is 'perhaps not yet feasible' (qualifications, employability, a job, plus her age, etc.).

What I hoped was to teach literacy in prisons. That's what I always wanted – I wanted to do PE years and years. But I also know as you go along you can change your mind and do something completely different, and I know that and I'm ready for that. It's more for me, I have to be honest, just this year the enjoyment of learning. I read about looking for work, I know by the time I qualify, as I'll be older and there aren't so many jobs, it will be difficult to get a job, but I'm doing more for I really, really wanna learn, it's for the joy of learning more. I can get a job and wait a few years and get a job; if you need to work, you need to work. Because my benefit depends on how many kids I have at home. As they grow and leave home, if you get working parent and child is at home, parent is better off rather than if you are on benefits, and [when] children leave home you are worse off. I just got to the point that I want that money coming just for me, I don't want to be like that my whole life, be at home. So I want to enjoy the studying and see what happens at the end, if I find something.

There is an obvious tension between vertical motivations and horizontal ones. Here she does consider the instrumental destination of qualifications and jobs. However, there is a note of uncertainty. She will 'see what happens', and it is clear that currently the vertical motivation predominates, 'the joy of learning more'.

4.5.1 Support Network

In her view, tutors have been really helpful. Fees were waived, council tax did not have to be paid, she was given a free bus pass, and a hardship fund was available if required. As we saw elsewhere, there is government aid (both local and national), as well as university funds that can be applied for. LMT's tutor is very supportive, he 'always makes time, he always does that, he is very good'. She mentions that her children have been healthy and thus her studies have not been interrupted. Lone mothers with younger children had different health issues related to their children, hence their studies were more likely to be interrupted, whilst this is not the case in LMT's story.

It has never been an issue for me because I have been lucky that the children are very healthy, they are healthy, touch wood, it's not been an issue.

They [College] gave me a bus pass but I didn't know that I can apply for it until this January. And I got it straight away. Apart from that, they waived the fees for me, which was good, except the exam fees. I suppose there are things that you can go for like hardship fund you can ask for... I was allowed to keep income support... I am really grateful because I couldn't pay.

I don't pay for council tax but when my daughter turned 18 they stopped it; I have spent one year sorting it. At the moment I am not paying for the

council tax – I should get it paid as I go to university. I think I might have to pay, but I have a social housing landlord rather than a private landlord, so I might have to pay.

She was also supported by the college's induction programmes.

It was good, we got shown around the college and everything like that. We were told exactly everything we had to do. But other things I found really useful was I had the study skills that you did, there were only two of us in the group that actually liked the study skills. Lots of them did their A levels and they come through accounting before so they found it boring. But I have never done anything like that before so I found that really, really useful. So to start with when we did the study skills that week I just enjoyed it all, you know. I was a bit anxious about it, to do, to write at the level they wanted us to write, because I have never done anything like that. But I didn't have any problem.

Straight away they got the resource centre on Moscow Street, they are really well staffed and they are very, very... so helpful and they want you to do well. The other impression I got was that they actually take a personal interest in what one wants to do. And the girls who are doing the rating are making sure that you get all the support you need. You don't have to go look for them. It's there straight away if you want it. I didn't know it is there, if I had, I wouldn't take advantage of lots of it. And just to know it's there was enough because it made you more comfortable that it can make a difference for me, [be]cause I'm so much older than the other students. And so it was so completely new, I left school when I was 16, nearly 40 years ago. But all support was there, it was really good.

4.5.2 Becoming a 'School Failure'

LMT's stories are, as we have seen, full of surprises. Although she was one of 12, and although there was clearly a gender difference in her mother's expectations – the boys got 'preferential treatment', and the girls did the domestic chores, even with 12 children her mother went to university, and singled out LMT as one of the girls who would also go to university.

It means everything to me. It was what I always wanted. When I was a little girl, like I told you, my mum had six boys and six girls; it was a different world when I was little. And my mum loved us all, but the boys kind of got preferential treatment. They didn't have to do things we did. They still have to do things and lots of help but they didn't have to do shopping, or wash dishes or cook. But there was a slightly different regime for the boys than there was for the girls. They were expected to do, it was hard really, because my mum went to university, she was from a broken home and had a terrible childhood, and she still went. And I was always the one who they expected to go to university out of the girls. They always said, 'Out of the girls, you will be the one who will go to university' and

they had lots of hopes. But then I dropped out from school and they were really disappointed. I felt really bad that I let them down but I wasn't ready.

Her fear of 'being away from home', and her personal insecurity, meant almost forcing herself to fail, in quite a surprising way. She 'chose the worst thing' partly as well because her parents were 'quite strict':

I was terrified, absolutely terrified of going to university. Being away from home, of having to sort of direct my studies, not having people tell me what to do and say, 'This is what you have to do. You know, I didn't want to go away to think, I wanted someone to think and to tell me what to do as I was very insecure and nervous of everything. But I couldn't bring myself to tell my parents that's what it was. I thought they'd say, 'Don't be stupid', you know, they were quite strict, so I just didn't, couldn't bring myself to tell them, and chose the worse thing and didn't say anything. I refused to talk about it as a final resort.

It is a bit still there, but I'm excited as well, so I think I always doubt myself and I'm not good enough. But there is something that I'm not afraid to fail, so if I fail it's not like my entire future depends on it. Whereas if you are 18, you are going to university, so it has lots more resting on it than it does for me, so I can just enjoy it – what there is to enjoy – rather than have to worry what career I have to have, so by the time I graduate I'll be 56. It doesn't matter, I can enjoy it and not have to worry about other things. There is a little bit of, 'Is it going to be too much for me?' but I thought about the access course. I know it's different on access courses, but I found that I would be really worried. It's my choice second time and I won't be letting anybody down, and I know that even if people would be disappointed, like my children would say, 'Mum you dropped out', but it doesn't matter because it's for me.

To sum up: her mother also had 12 children but she did go to university. And it turns out that LMT was bound for 'A' levels and for university. Again, the theme of a lack of self-confidence appears: 'You know, I didn't want to go away to think, I wanted someone to think and to tell me what to do...'. So, as we saw, she dropped out, briefly held a job, became pregnant and sort of became a 'professional mother' but with a determination and spirit to achieve along these 'student-as-job', 'internal instrumentality' and 'vertical' dimensions that we've already discussed, and will develop later in the thesis.

4.6 Case Number 4: LMJW

LMJW's is an extreme case of lone motherhood, as she is disabled. In her case, dealing with her disability is the major part of her life. Although she is mother to a teenage daughter, during the interviews she gave much insight into her disability and the problems that she faced in accessing university facilities. The interviewing style was open and empathetic and it allowed many stories to unfold. Lone motherhood was not completely ignored, but it was her attempt to find 'rehabilitation' in Higher Education that was central, hence lone motherhood took a back seat. She was initially included in the case studies as she meets the definition of lone motherhood and is a student. Thus, in a sense she is an extreme justification of the lone motherhood in this thesis, as sometimes subordinate to other aspects of the case. She is an unusual case and presents her own agenda in which lone motherhood as a theme barely appears. However, as will be discussed later, lone motherhood is an aspect of a holistic lifestyle and there was no reason to keep her out of the extended case studies.

LMJW had multiple brain injuries from an immune disorder which caused her blood to clot uncontrollably. That is apparently why she had widespread brain damage which affected her language and memory so she is no longer able to read. However, she can write 'but it gets jumbled up'. She can hear people but it is hard for her to comprehend and most of the time she 'forgets pretty much everything'. The process of making memory which acts as the storage system is damaged along with the retrieval process, but she has visual memory and also auditory memory. She also has other cognitive kinds of deficit that affect the quality of the memory, which is why her condition is complex, but her brain image looks like someone in the early stages of dementia, so while most people have to be treated for issues relating to one part of the brain, she has many needs all over. She is diagnosed with anti-phospholipid syndrome, systemic illness, hypo-mobility, post-traumatic stress disorder, dyslexia and chronic fatigue syndrome.

I have been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder and chronic fatigue syndrome...as the result of a car crash I was in years ago. So I mean that the day-to-day effect of it is very tiring, and [there is] quite a lot of pain, and the anti-phospholipid syndrome has affected the organs including my brain. I've got widespread muscular brain damage, which kind of affects the higher functioning. So I feel quite isolated because it's

difficult to communicate with people. It's difficult to understand other people and its mentally quite exhausting being around other people.

She has been ill since she was seven years old but she didn't find out what was really wrong with her till she was thirty, and for all these years she was misunderstood and reports that she was thought to be making up all the issues. She was put into hospital a lot of the time and even had five miscarriages which were linked to her condition. The diagnosis was eventually made when she visited a clinic in London which thoroughly checked her for brain injuries and heart defects. They realised that she was not suffering from mental illness but had an organic brain disease. She sometimes talks about it in a light-hearted manner.

I have been very ill for most of me life, in fact being put in hospital, and I haven't been treated that well, so to find out what was wrong with me and get treatment before it gets much worse was dead exciting [laughs].

It's good not remembering things: you don't remember bad things and people can tell you some jokes over and over again and you laugh.

She grew up in Liverpool and did her A levels but she never had a 'proper' job because of her disability.

I grew up, apart from the late 18s and 20s, I've lived in Liverpool... did my A levels. I never had a proper job, done lots of training schemes, been unemployed, and I've never had a proper 9 to 5 stable job, mostly because I am disabled so it's hard to get.

She referred to her school experience as 'rubbish, totally disappointing', lacking aspiration to enter university. She remembers at that time it was only about getting married, having kids or trying to get a job.

Rubbish, totally disappointing. There was no aspiration and you felt like....growing up in the 80s and 90s anyways it was quite a depressing situation. There was very high unemployment and people were just leaving in thousands, [it's] one of the reasons why I left. It was just, you just didn't aspire to work or anything and never even considered going to university. It was either get married and have kids or try and get a job.

In the following extract, she again responds in a light-hearted manner

R: So what did you do, get married or get a job?

LM: A bit of both really [laughs]; none of them were very successful.

When she was 30, her doctor suggested getting into a college instead of going to rehab. Thus, education was sort of a special kind of ‘rehabilitation’ for her.

When I was 30, I got diagnosed for an organic brain disease and had about three shocks and it affected me language, communication and memory, and the neurologist suggested that I should go to college rather than traditional rehabilitation, which was for people who were twice my age. He said it wouldn't be therapeutic to go to this kind of rehabilitation, so he called the college and they provisionally accepted me and then I worked up through me course to level five Higher Education course. So after the Higher Education course there was nothing else for me to do in the college other than stop education or go to university.

She mentions that her journey into education had not been plain sailing. It took her about seven years of study to get into university; she was not confident at the beginning of her course and could not even understand people at all, but her seven years in subsequent education has made her capable enough to not only speak up but even to hide the fact if there is something that she does not seem to understand. Higher Education became a ‘treatment’, a ‘need’, which offered flexibility and support to a degree that employers cannot or will not provide.

One of the things that has kept me in education is the amount of support that I received, which you don't receive from any other sector, and it's kind of been... vital in gaining me independence... but of course I... me home... and it just improves the quality of me life in a substantial way....

She connects education to ‘independence’ and ‘quality of life’. Thus, education for her is not a ‘horizontal’ direction to gain employment but is a ‘vertical’ one, which will be discussed later in the chapter.

The only thing that is regular in her routine is taking medicine the timings and also the medicines that she needs to take are written in her diary. She manages or works all other things around these medicines. She explained to me that, before she leaves her bed in the morning, she injects herself with medical drugs and spends an hour or so stretching her limbs and neck, so that she can safely get up without injuring herself, and then she dresses and takes more medicine. She needs to make sure that she does things in the same regular order because if her routine is broken then it might have severe medical consequences.

I take medicine, I inject me self and then take some other medicine. Before I get up, I spend an hour stretching me limbs and neck so that I can safely get up without injuring me self and then it takes me a while before I am

able to get dressed and then take my medicine, and I have to kind of make sure that I do things the same because I might forget. Otherwise there are severe consequences for my life. So I try to have routines around me medicine or around in the morning, so basically I try to reduce me day-to-day living to what I have exactly got to do, coz I've got to eat and I've got to take my medicine, so I try to make my priority and divide routine around that because without doing them I couldn't do other things that I want to do and come to university.

These are the practical effects of her disability on her everyday life. After addressing her health issues, I move on to her support as a student in college. She entered college with a provisional offer because of the recommendation from her doctor and worked her way up through the course to level five. She did her Fine Arts course at a Further Education college. She did it part time and it took her over four years to complete. Her college was small compared to university, which benefitted her because everything was accessible. Geographically, everything from support to welfare was based under the same roof and so was convenient for her to resolve any issues. She felt that her college life was not perfect but she could go to someone's office and ask for assistance and staff would answer her query and would try and solve any problem for her.

Go to someone's office and go, 'I have this problem' and they would go, 'OK, I'll sort that out' and the only time you would see them out is when they come to a resolution or they would come to you and go, 'Sorry, I can't do that, we haven't got the money' or whatever it was..... there were people that used to take care of it.

She goes on to explain further that when she was at college there was a lot of bureaucracy but she did not have to deal with it. The staff members of the college used to do it for her, whereas in university she has to find the 'right people' and contact the 'right people'. Her tutors at college took time to get to know her and were very supportive. They were worried about her coming to Higher Education because life in university is different to that in college. However, she did her level five Higher Education in college and then she only had the options of either leaving education or entering university to work her way up.

It's just been very difficult to get any information about anything, and I don't wait for people to give me information, I go and seek it for me self, and the university website is not accessible until you actually enrol as students. You can't get any information off them; trying to actually apply to university was very difficult. There is no accessible form to actually apply to university and I actually had to ask me support worker to apply for me and now I am quite capable of applying me self on the forms in the

appropriate format, even when I spoke to admissions officer. His response was that, 'I can fill in a form for you', which is totally inappropriate and that sums up my experience of being in university: every second of the way everything is... people are, 'Oh! I never thought of that' and then they would be sympathetic. There are barriers in front of you all the time and the academic work takes a back seat. We spend most of our time trying to overcome barriers – access to resources like the library, access to services.

She explains that applying to university was not easy, either.

Yeah, well, people like me don't go to university. I think that I was the only disabled student that did go to [named university].

LMJW is a part-time student at the university. She receives help from social services. Her course, as with those of other students, is financed by Student Finance England. However, she was unable to get her finances sorted in the first year because her financial application kept coming back due to mistakes made in filling out the form. She is stressed about it as she keeps receiving bills from the university.

Because I am a part-time student I continue to get benefits. I am entitled to have me course fees paid, although there has been quite a lot of difficulty with Student Finance England. I am on me third application, just keep making mistakes...hhhhhm, [they are] very difficult to contact and I've been here a year and I still haven't resolved it, and that just adds to the stress because obviously I keep getting bills from me university for me fees, and being concerned that I have all this money [debt] but no way of paying it.

The support worker [who is sitting in on this one interview session] adds:

[L]ike she said that the application keeps coming back. Yes, it will be paid at the end, so we keep being assured, but it should have been sorted in October last year and it's still going because they keep saying, 'Ohhh! You have left off a signature here or a date there.

The support worker explains that LMJW's part-time course at the university is a five-year course. However, she is only allowed to remain in the university for four years as she has completed four years earlier on in the Community College, thus her number of permitted years in university have been reduced from eight to four. However, LMJW is not sure about the limit on the number of years she can stay in university on a single course and on different courses.

They have actually changed the entire scheduling of the degree because it was meant to be over five years part time but they said that LMJW's already done four years in higher education [and] you can only have eight

in total. She said, 'I am only going to do [it] over four not five.' (support worker)

LMJW is quite upfront in talking about her experience of education and higher education institutions:

Education is amazing but the Higher Education institutes are rubbish.

'Education' means independence for her and she has been in education for a while now because she knows that no other sector would provide her with as much support as she has received in the education sector. Education has improved her 'quality of life in a substantial way', and she was aware that university life would be different to college.

Learned to communicate better. I have basically treated it as rehabilitation because it forced me into situations where the default position was that I had an impairment. There were expectations that I had to meet regardless of the fact that I had an impairment, so it helped me learn to socialise and to learn to find ways of navigating impairment and to be able to articulate what I wanted.

She talks about her future prospects and then shows that she is aware of the relevance of her condition and the level of support available at workplaces.

Although, what kind of job would I get? I have no idea, but I don't expect to live in anything other than poverty for the rest of me life.

Although she is aware that she is 'not a delightful prospect for employers' as she is disabled, sick and her condition fluctuates, she still aspires to work and nevertheless considers that her time spent here is 'improving her employment prospects', and she takes her time spent in Higher Education as the work experience that she would not get access to in ordinary circumstances.

There is also an aspect of the 'vertical' direction that Higher Education offers. It connects with when LMJW talks about the 'horizontal' directions – job prospects.

Well, I feel fine. I know I am not a delightful prospect for my employers as I am disabled and sick and my condition fluctuates and I spend a lot of me time going to hospitals, and I feel that the more I'm able to achieve through education it goes somewhere to negating that and improving me employment prospect because also while I am in education I am getting the work experience that I don't think that I would get access to ordinarily.

She talks about the recent cuts in services that have affected getting accessible transport or a ramp in the workplace or a particular software package that one might need has been cancelled, and she is not hopeful that in the years to come the cuts will not affect this even more so she concentrates on the therapeutic element of the education. With on-going declining support available to her, she brings out the ‘therapeutic elements’ of education, which is again a ‘vertical’ approach towards and in Higher Education.

I don't think that my disabilities would make that a realistic option [for employers] [be]cause in theory the support is there and in reality it's not. So that I don't think that I have got the intellectual ability and it's just that it is very, very difficult to get support and appropriate support and appropriate equipment, like in lots of the system the services that paid for additional equipment you might need to be employed have been abolished, things like you might have needed, like accessible transport or you might have needed a ramp in the work place or a particular piece of software. That service has been abolished now, and on top of that all the cuts to different services and, you know... it's just that I don't really know how I would access employment, realistically, so I try to concentrate on the kind of therapeutic elements of what education has given me, which have been massive. I don't believe that I would have made the kind of progress I have in a traditional rehabilitation hospital.

It is noticeable that the respondent talks of both a ‘horizontal’ and a ‘vertical’ dimension. This was true across the sample. With LMJW it seemed that she maybe knew she had to talk about a ‘horizontal’ discourse involving skills, qualifications, employers and jobs. At the same time, I felt that the ‘vertical’ register was her only real chance of progress. ‘Education’ meant ‘rehabilitation’ and her only really possible career was to try to go up the education ladder, level by level, from college through university. It was of course a short career: the government offered eight years of financial support. There would be no lifelong learning for her.

LMJW does give some insight into her life at home. Her daughter is her only support at home. LMJW’s daughter is also her carer, with whom she spends most of her day organising, arranging and assigning work.

I suppose we spend a lot of time doing, making lists of what to do and prioritising them and trying to put aside time for things, but those schedules get interrupted quite a lot when there is a hospital appointment when we don't have the energy...

This shows that she needs to have the timetable at the beginning of the term so that she can book her medical appointments accordingly. However, she did not receive her timetable beforehand and had to wait until enrolment. Later on, she also mentions that during the term time her tutors sometimes used to change the room or the day, or would not provide all the required material at the beginning of the term so that she could plan and assign support accordingly.

I need all the information for me modules at the beginning of the term so that I can plan me support, assign time to reach the elements of it to complete and so that I can pace me self...hmmmmm... and some tutors do not...hmmmmm.

The support worker explains the 'irregularities':

There have been quite a few irregularities about the timetable, this year. There has been one particular class that it could change from week to week with what time a session was going to be. Sometimes they were announcing and sometimes they weren't. Sometimes we would get an hour's gap between the lecture and a meeting at the museum which we were going to. Sometimes it was even things on a different day. It was mostly in the handbook, except when it changed at the last minute so it's just kind of everything was constantly in flux and it wasn't very easy to plan anything so [LMJ] ended up having to miss quite a lot.

LMJW keeps reminding the tutors and the staff about things that she needs but claims that all is in vain and she feels frustrated with the system. There are so many barriers that she needs to address, which takes much of her time away from her academic work and drains her energy in sorting out the clerical issues related to the course rather than carrying out her hands-on studies.

There's.... I don't feel like there is... as a student I feel like my opinions and needs are not very important as part of the institution...hhhmmm, I just... I don't understand why I am not provided with these things even though for, you know, ... non-disabled students it's a requirement and mine is someone with additional needs, so why is it so difficult? Because I don't understand, I can't offer any solution. I am not interested in going and complaining to tutors, I am interested in resolving situations that are causing me difficulty...hmmmmm, and I just don't feel that it is necessary... individuals creating kinds of unnecessary barriers, and there is an element of that, and I feel that this institution, the structure of it, is very inflexible so it makes it very difficult to respond to a student's needs, and I feel like, because there are not many disabled students at the university and I see that there are less students that have complex needs, every day I am coming up against barriers.

LMJW's support worker narrates an incident where she had a field trip arranged but faced trouble in getting access and information:

Just access to information to like being on field trips. We've asked again and again. Every time we've had difficulty on a field trip or had to go early or not been able to make it. The tutors would say, 'Give us a list of what you need in order to be able to access this and we'll do it'. We've made this list again and again and given them these lists again and again, and all that we really, really need is a contact at the place that we are going to so that we can make our own accessibility arrangement, and information on the itinerary [about] what we are going to do over there. Again and again they have said that, 'There is a ramp there and you might want to do this', trying to interpret and tell us, LMJW, what she will need, instead of just giving.

LMJW explains how this makes her feel:

You know, having disability or impairment does not prevent you from taking part in the world. It just means that like you have to... I feel like that on one end I am treated that I am incapable of doing things but then I am expected to fully participate.

LMJW is in a kind of institutional double-bind where she is expected to 'fully participate' but she is also treated as 'incapable', and she feels 'disenfranchised', for example by the access issues, which are practical issues related to disability, and which she wants to challenge.

I don't think that's appropriate [library access] and there is no reason why I shouldn't be able to do that, the resources are there, equipment is there, the service is there but accessing is impossible because.... It's impossible because it hasn't been done before, it's not because it's not there, it's just because it hasn't been done before, so there is no procedure of doing it and we spent a whole year trying to justify this access.

She talks of the barriers that are in university, and considers that these barriers are not just her barriers but in general there are other students who face similar barriers, and if the university considers and made slight changes it would make a huge difference; however, the 'university treats it as an exceptional thing'.

As has been seen, LMJW has a support worker to provide support whilst she is in education. The role requires the support worker to generally sit down with people who have disability relating to learning difficulties, and to provide support in order to access education, all on a one-to-one basis, which would include accessing material, reading to them, some typing, and some discussion of the work. However, in LMJW's case, the support worker also organises things for her such as making lists of what to

do and prioritising them. She has known LMJW for six years since LMJW started her Higher National Certificate course in college. The support worker feels that her role is supposed to be flexible, meeting the needs of individual students. However, the university expects her to do things on behalf of others, such as helping LMJW to access the library, as LMJW explains:

In terms of accessing resources such as books and periodicals the expectation is that the support worker will go to the library, look through a number of books and choose a few and then find appropriate passages and then come to me and read them, and I don't think that it's appropriate, as part of my course is research and I expect to have access to the library just as much as any other student and I don't have that.

LMJW also claimed that the electronic library search engine did not allow the search engine to virtually browse the library catalogue by subject, so all students can do is search by term and not by category. In that case, LMJW needs access to the library herself so that she can make the decision about what is more relevant to her topic in the search engine instead of relying on her support worker.

And I am forced to [rely] on [SW's] interpretation rather than my....own interpretation.

At times the support worker also helps LMJW in commuting between home and university. This happens when LMJW needs her wheelchair, although most of the time she uses a walking stick.

4.6.1 Support Network

Her family life is very stressful because she had to deal with her fluctuating condition, her teenage daughter who has her own aspirations, her finances and also the additional stress of university.

It is mostly unpleasant... university and the additional stress that it's brought has made it very, very difficult at home and I've felt... thought about leaving [university].

LMJW's daughter is nineteen and is the only support that she has at home. She fears that her daughter might be suffering from the same disability as herself.

R: Tell me about your daughter, who looks after her?

LMJW: She is 19, at college, she is my carer...'

R: Your daughter, you mentioned last time that your daughter might have the same disability as you?

LMJW: She might have what I've got.

Later on she talks about her daughter going to university. Although she did not talk about her daughter extensively, I do find that in this excerpt below she talks about her 'missing' of herself, 'I can be me and not mummy', which is similar to other lone mothers in the thesis.

Being a parent does impact your studies obviously, psychological impacts, and I think it does affect women more than men because if you have taken a lot of time off away from your family to study you feel a little bit selfish, and particularly if your children are younger and still need your support. One of the reasons I am relieved is that [if] my daughter is going away to university, it removes the pressure; it will just be me at home and I can be me not Mummy.

LMJW has a mother who is ill as well. She also has a sister but the sister has to look after her son, who has a life-limiting disease.

My mum is very ill and my sister is caring for her son, who has got a life-limiting disease.

She is the 'stable element' in her family. This seems to be a family that does not have to seek its troubles.

You have all the responsibility and usually because you are present. In my family like I am the stable element. I am the one who has always been there, so I am the one who gets all the anger and aggression and frustration as well.

R: What do you mean by 'lone mother'?

LMJW: You are always the baddy.'

Explaining what the label means to her, she talks about her two roles of being a father and mother and, since she is the 'stable element' in her family, she has to face all the aggression and frustration. For her just like other lone mothers the role is challenging and involves taking decisions on behalf of the missing father and so may involve being strict at times, which would then make her a 'baddy'. The term is described by her as

... quite loaded, you have a picture in your head and you are usually a woman and quite poor, low education, benefit scrounger – not a positive image even though it's very hard work.

The term 'single mother' expresses a 'mixture of pity and revulsion'.

People expect you to fit in a box, you are disabled, you are a single mother and a student, you can't be all of them and it's like I am all of them. It's like wrapped up together, so I decided to be a mature student because I don't want people to go through what I have been through, but I know that most disabled people don't even aspire to go to university because society doesn't even send that message out to achieve and that's like you are Paralympic and that's alright. The heroic disabled triumph over adversity [laughs].

However, if I look at her circumstances, a picture emerges where 'lone motherhood' is not a single thing, not usefully open to definition or status, and not the most important aspect of the case. It is indeed a 'box' rather than a way of being, or a separate role.

4.6.2 Support from Social Services

LMJW narrates that she is unable to get social service support for herself because the threshold is too high and she does not meet it. She wants support from social services, but they do not facilitate assistance in the way she gets it in Higher Education. She is 40 years old and the closest social services could get to her needs is by providing her with sheltered accommodation, which is limited to people aged over 55.

The threshold is quite high for care; also, the care that they provide is not appropriate. I don't need somebody to tell me what to do or how to spend my money. I need someone to facilitate my independent living, and social services don't provide that kind of care, and the kind of assistance that I get in education is not available in social care.....The closest thing to it is like sheltered accommodation, say like a light bulb goes you call a warden and she will assist you... only for someone over 55..... We are waiting another 15 years so that if a light bulb goes off I can get some help to change it.

What is distinctive about this case is the degree to which it centres not on the child but on the parent's disabilities and the obstacles that Higher Education offers.

4.6.3 Social Isolation

[R]eally kind of...I don't think about my experiences as a mature student and how being a mature student and being a parent affects my experience of being in university because we don't even socialise with the rest of the class. I don't even know the names of most of the people [even if] it's only a small group, I only see them in lecture and then they go. I don't see them otherwise and you know there is a big gulf between you, and it is sometimes to do with age and it is also to do with experience. I am not really interested in going out and getting drunk every weekend, which seems to epitomise the student experience. Especially when you have left home for the first

time and when you have just got a big loan and yeah you do [want to] do stuff like that. When you are a teenager or when you are in your early 20s. There is no attempt by the university to try and reconcile the different experiences of students, although there are a lot of mature students in university. There are a lot of part-time students, there are a lot of mothers, there are probably some single-parent fathers as well.

I think you do feel very isolated from my class. I feel very isolated from university because I am not the stereotypical student. I am twice the age of most people. I am part time. I am part time because of my responsibility and you just can't follow that quite narrowly prescribed student experience where like, you know, where you probably live very close to campus or you live with other students so you are socialising with other students outside the lectures. I don't see the other students outside the lectures so there is very little communication, if there is any.

You have to be, if you don't fall within the expected demographic, you would have to be very, very determined to succeed and although it's not a deliberate attempt to prevent you from succeeding, it can quite often feel like that, but you just have to be determined and keep reminding yourself why you were doing it. You need to have a good reason for doing it for yourself and not for anyone else. Part of the problem I think that I have of being here is that I can see in the future that [I am] going to have to get a job that's going to be detrimental to me health, so I am at university to try and widen the scope of the kind of job I can get. It's one of the good reasons for being at university. The kind of pleasure and self-expansion is very much secondary to all that. This is purely about employability for me.

It is notable that she offers that 'horizontal' motivation, expressly emphasising 'employability', although she earlier commented that employers were unlikely to see her as a 'delightful' prospect. Elsewhere she shows considerable 'vertical' motivation. There is a further 'horizontal' theme, whereby being a student is a kind of preferable 'job' in terms of activity, interest, identity and of course additional financial support. After reading all her data, it is surprising to hear the claim 'purely about employability', and I will say more later about the inherent contradictions in the horizontal/vertical nexus. It obviously is not an 'either-or', a simple dichotomy. We now turn to a consideration of the emerging themes from the other respondents before moving more fully into the 'analytical' phase of our initial approach to case study via the rationale of 'voice, reflection and analysis'.

CHAPTER FIVE: ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS PART 2

5.1 Introduction

Thus far I have offered a few ‘extended’ case studies, showing how respondents perceive their ‘lone motherhood’. These illustrate the complexity and diversity of their experiences, and they also undermine the idea that a ‘lone mother’ can be usefully defined, given the extreme range of experiences. This chapter looks at the rest of the data, identifying a range of themes. These themes make up some of the findings of this thesis, but it is important to note that they are not a taxonomy or classification of what goes into being a ‘lone mother’, or even a ‘missing father’. They are themes for the 13 respondents, and they may or may not be generalisable. The research claim is not that they are generalisable, but that they are ‘grounded’ in the perceptions of the respondents, as reported in a series of interviews that express what was, over-simply no doubt, the elements of ‘voice, reflection and analysis’. The first category is ‘lone motherhood’ itself. How do they feel about that label?

5.2 Lone Motherhood

A number of themes were identified in this category, and each will be discussed below.

5.2.1 Heterogeneous Category

The most obvious theme here is that it is not a homogeneous category but a heterogeneous one. The idea of a specific definition points us to the homogeneous category, and the literature generally follows that (Kiernan et al., 2004), identifying types of lone mothers – divorced, single, solo, etc. This is the conventional scientific approach to names, a kind of labelling.

All 13 lone mothers were living without a partner at the time of the interviews. There was only one lone mother, LMS, who was married and she had a husband who visited her from abroad. However, she was recruited as a participant in the study because she lived in the UK as a single mother and gave birth to her child without the support of her family or husband. Her husband was largely absent (working abroad), but also not very supportive: ‘I was alone, my husband was not here’ and ‘he is not very

supportive'. However, by the end of our interviews she did become a 'lone mother' as per the definition available in the literature and in official discourse. Thus, I began interviewing her when she was not 'officially' a lone mother but had the lived experiences of a 'lone mother'.

R: Do you think that you are a lone mother?

LMS: Yes, I think so [she weeps again].

He [husband] comes after 3 months and even then I thought I was alone because he was not helping. And now this situation that was, I was alone at that time and more, you know, more alone this time because there is no ah.... [husband]. If you are doing everything alone and you have to take care of everything, about baby, about study, about house matters alone, so you are a lone mother.'

There is something quite desperate about the repetition of 'alone' – five repetitions in one short paragraph. It shows that she felt the 'loneliness' of lone motherhood at the centre of her student life.

Sometimes he doesn't call us for months and weeks, so I am used to it. This is the reason that I know that I have to take care of my baby alone, so I think that I am alone.

The sample had very different approaches to the label of 'lone mother', 'single mother', or 'single parent'. If there was a dominant theme, it was possibly that 'lone' pointed too firmly at the notion of 'lonely'.

Lone mother, it just reminds me of the word 'lonely'... single parent I think is a better term...' LMF

I think lone parent sounds a little bit lonely... LMA

I say I've got a child [...], if they ask, I say 'I haven't got a partner'. I wouldn't ever say that I am a single parent. LMV

Almost all lone mothers had family or friends around to support them, so they did not feel that they were 'alone'. They did not associate 'loneliness' with not having a partner. As LMM puts it:

I prefer the term single mother. I think 'lone' means... but I don't feel like a lone mother because, although I am not sort of sharing responsibility with a husband, but you know there are people around who are helping, like my parents have got her [child] this minute in time... that's what I had to do in past. Where she would go down South to stay with my parents when I was working during summer holidays or so.

LMM is in two minds about getting a divorce from her husband or giving her marriage a second chance. She has been 'separated for seven years', is 'Christian' and so of the view that 'marriage is for life and divorce is not good'. However, after some deep thinking, she decides on 'divorce' because she 'can't have that life back'. She has disclosed that her husband was abusive to her in the past.

There were also a couple of 'lone mothers' who found 'solo' to be a more appropriate term, or 'lone parent', instead of 'lone mother', probably because it was not filled with the stigma associated with being a woman. However, it was clear that the understanding of these terms was unclear for lone mothers themselves.

Probably solo because it describes [me] better. Single for me means that you are not married, so I suppose really you could have a partner, even be living with the partner, and not be married, so you technically would be classed as single but really you are not single. Solo mother is probably better than lone. LMK

I think there are a lot of single parents that are, like, men and we shouldn't just like stigmatise women. So I like more the term single parent than single mother. I think that they always blame single mothers. LMA

It's just the stigma around young single mum, doesn't wanna do anything.

The word lone mother makes you think like of lonely and, yeah, it's a bit derogatory [...] a source of leaning towards it. Just because you are bringing up your children on your own doesn't mean that you are lonely. Where I suppose some people could find it that there be times that it can be a lonely experience but, yeah, I think solo is probably better. LMK

For LMK her age and her appearance (looking younger) all add up to the moral judgement that she thinks people make. She felt stigmatised for becoming a mother at a young age and even had people being abusive towards her.

And I say he is 12 and they sort of look at me and I can see that their eyes roll and doing maths in the back of their head [...] People judge you.... LMK

[L]ike complete strangers coming up to me on the street and giving me abuse and, you know, say that I am stupid and I've ruined me life, and people are throwing things out of car windows. LMK

She feels paranoid due to being seen and treated in this harsh manner. Thus, for her it may not be only about the 'label' that people use to describe her or women in her situation, but it is much more a targeted prejudice for becoming a 'teenage' mother.

Sometimes people just see me with, and look at Jamie calling me Mum, and have been looking at me and must be thinking that, 'That girl must have had him when she was 10 or something' so, you know. So, yeah, I do feel like turning around and just saying something... I am 29. I am not like 18 years or... Yeah, I think I feel like a bit more... I don't know that if that something is like really there or is it just because I am a little paranoid.
LMK

LMK also felt that some of her friends were racist in this regard, which was apparently not directed at her, but she takes this as an opportunity to protect other lone mothers who are in a similar situation as she was:

I've got friends that say like, 'These stupid girls' and I'll be like, 'Don't be saying things like that' and even like me friends turned around and said, 'No [LMK]... but you are different' And I would be just like, 'Why am I different? Is it because I am your friend so I am different? but they like say, 'Well, no, you are really good with your son' but that doesn't mean to say that another 17-year-old wouldn't be and they might be awful.

To me lone mother means a kind of sense that you don't need a man and a sense that you know sometimes you are better off without a man, more content. LMP

LMP seemed to have a different opinion about 'lone' and 'single'. However, later on, she seemed to contradict herself 'I don't like to be categorised as lone mother because of the association of it.' LMP

There is another aspect of stigma:

To me it means a mother who hasn't got support so I technically wouldn't call myself a lone mum because I've got great amount of support.

LMV has her mum and other family members such as an older sister and a younger sister who are there to support her. Here theme is the 'great amount of support' and it recurs elsewhere in the data too.

None of the settled definitions fit the idiosyncratic nature of the lone mother stories.

5.2.2 Lone Motherhood as a Pejorative Term

A second theme, one held by the majority of the sample, was the perceived stigma of many of these labels. Media, government, family, and an undefined ‘they’ were felt to be responsible for this. The stigma sometimes felt like a criminalisation of ‘lone mother’ status. For LMC it’s almost like being called ‘benefit scroungers’:

Nobody wants to talk to each other so I am this middle man trying to tell everybody. They make you out to be some sort of fraud or criminal, you know.

LMA feels stigmatised by her family members, although her parents were not there for the most part of her life as she was brought up in care homes. However, she is judged for raising a child without a father – *‘not only stigma from the term single parent but definitely from people in my family. They are quite racist in a way that it’s ok to be coloured but not near me and in my family’*. Her son is mixed race, but she receives criticism from her parents, *‘Oh my God... that’s tragic... tragedy’*. LMA was not raised by her parents but was brought up in care homes. She explains that she is judged by her parents: *‘I am on benefits so [they say] “You are down there with murderers and rapists”.’*

Some lone mothers who were studying sociology, social work and social studies became aware of the UK’s media and government stereotypical talk surrounding lone mothers.

Sometimes the government you know, they all are banging on about single mothers and stereotypes. They have no idea what’s it’s like being on your own and trying to cope with the demands of a child, because you are only one person but you know you are expected to like be able to look after a child full time, get a career, not be on benefits, and I don’t think that people who make policies have any idea of what they are talking about. LMF

One of the lone mothers from the extended case studies also expressed similar views about not being seen as a person.

When people see us behind the pram they see us as a mother not as person.
LMT

The thing that I wanted to add...maybe will help but this is from a social worker’s point of view because we always try to challenge oppression and discrimination. When I first got to apply for the income support, the label they have in the benefit system about single mothers is that they are sleeping around and they get pregnant and they have children to claim

money and sit at home and claim money, or that you are just not bothered. It's all bad, bad stereotyped. LMN

This perceived injustice (the label itself and the stigma attached to it) led some of them to reject the pejorative implications and even – in one case – assert themselves as ‘proud’, engaged with their child, ‘managing’ the situation:

I think that's why I want to be a social worker. I just wanna back people up and I don't back them up when it's wrong. You know, you look at the situation from every angle, and if you can do something then go [on]. I used to do voluntary [work] and I volunteered quite a lot and this is how you build the experience, and I worked with asylum seekers from Iraq because we speak the same language. It was so much easier for them to say what they want than me telling them.... how things go. I felt so good then because whoever you know... I am actually saying what she wants, what she is saying, like if she has three children and a husband, very educated man but they are in the middle of nowhere. Their country is destroyed. They are not here to take your money again... the fight forever is that we are here to take the jobs. They are not here for money. Everybody is entitled to have a better life, so this is what has always been my fight, to speak up for people. LMN

The above quotation also shows that lone mothers wants to give back to the community. Later on, LMN does not see the term as pejorative. Presumably this is a rare case.

Believe it or not, ask me, I say, 'I am single mum'; funny enough, I think I am proud in a way that I am managing, although I get help, but still if I don't wanna help myself nobody else would be able to pick me up. You can try and pick me up off the floor as much as you can, but if I don't wanna get up you won't be able to get me. So, yes, I got the support of my family and good network of people here who, when they have the time, give me some attention. But I am also proud of myself that I didn't let go. You know I got the energy. LMN

This reveals that lone mothers are at times probably more engaged with their children than perceived notions would allow. It is quite opposite to the perceived notion of ‘lazy’ or ‘feckless’ held by politicians and media.

I was just thinking the other day, when I go to the park with my children, I am there on the swings, on the slides, up the climbing frame, on the monkey bars and on that thing that spins you full and makes you dizzy, and I look around and I see the other parents and they are sitting on the bench with the paper. I think 'What you doing? Your kid is here with you, play with him. You are not interacting with your child and your child here is interacting with other people. You are not doing it yourself'. LMC

You are basically the bread winner of the house and it is so hard, especially when you are by yourself. LMN.

This was a common theme, though, how hard it could be.

It's hard work and hard work. You need to be firm and soft at the same time. You need to be the mum and the dad. You need to be the bank. You need to be everything, and I don't think it's an easy job. LMN

These final quotes from the data show vividly how busy and engaged with their family these lone mothers turn out to be. This impression of industry and discipline is strengthened by LMC: TV is banned from the house because 'the children are brought into adulthood so soon...' and it's all 'commercialism'.

We don't watch the telly because I want to protect them from adverts, you know. The media and the sexiest attitude that's on the telly and, you know, the whole commercialism. Children are brought into adulthood so soon, I think, through the media. So I wanna protect their childhood innocence. LMC

5.2.3 Typical days

In considering this theme I have tried to represent 'typical' days to show how busy and stressful are lone mothers' days.

Study days would be the craziness in the mornings, getting myself ready, getting Suzie ready, packed lunches, getting to school, doing lessons, picking her up, coming back home, chilling, dinner, TV [...] We have like church in the evening, so that's typically it. LMM

Almost all lone mothers had similar sorts of typical days, which revolved around their children and their studies. Interview data also revealed that younger children (under eight years) needed more time and attention from their mother than the older ones.

My God, I wake up around five o'clock in the morning. I do my prayers, prepare breakfast for Imran. If I've got the energy to iron in the evening I will. If not I will do it in the morning. I read the news because it's very important. Especially with my degree, you have to know what's going on, and then I start waking Imran up because Imran is a very slow eater. He likes... to take his time... because I don't like shouting at him, because I believe as a person if you spoil your morning your day is gone. So I don't like to get agitated and I don't want him to get upset either. So I give him plenty of time to slow down as much as he wants and then we leave the house around quarter past eight, drop him to school and then I go to my placement or to university all day, and on my lunch break I am in the library and in placements. I've got like books that I am going around

[with] all the time so that I could go through them. I work on my portfolio online. I finish at five o' clock and I go and pick Imran up ... LMN

What was clear from respondents' interview data was that the waking-up time and bedtime remained broadly the same across all lone mothers. Their activities during the day also had similarity, such as dropping off children at school, picking them up and putting them to bed; this was especially the case for lone mothers with younger children.

I get up early in the morning about seven or eight o' clock and then after breakfast I have time and come to my computer and try to work. I can't work nowadays, but I try to work and I leave Ahmed to watch TV and I try to work with my research and everything. But due to distraction, he is a little boy, he always comes to me as we are in the same room. He comes to me and distracts my mind so I can't pay full attention to my research. Earlier I tried to spend some time with my research and after that I take Ahmed at least somewhere outdoors, like we go to the park. We go for some shopping and, after spending two three hours out with some friends or in the park, when we come home it's Ahmed's bedtime. He goes to bed at 7 - 7:30pm. When he goes to bed after dinner then I start working with my research for four to five hours continuously. I try to work on my computer with my research. LMS

Quarter past 7[am]. Leave at 8:30[am], get school for 9[am] and then four days I am in the uni and Bill is in his school and [I] go there at 3:30 [pm], pick him [up], go home and I cook. Do his chores, then we eat, do his homework, then we play for an hour and then it's bath, bed, then I clean for two hours, and then I do homework for three hours. LMA

The hard work schedule is well illustrated in the excerpts below, which show stress, hard work, and long hours. LMH, a participant from the extended case study, also expressed a very tiring morning routine, as mentioned earlier.

It depends. Sometimes I go to bed at 9:30[am] if I am tired but I have been known to stay up to 2 or 2:30 am studying. If it needs doing then I'll drink coffee to keep myself awake and I'll stay up half the night. I don't really care if I am tired the next day. If an assignment has got to be done it's got to be done. LMF

I am up from six in the morning and my brain doesn't stop till about half nine, 10 at night. LMV

It is interesting that the respondents tell very similar stories, with a few differences in start and finish times. They also rattle off that busy schedule without pausing for breath. It is like a 'to-do' list that is already deep in the memory.

5.2.4 Society's Expectations and Personal Guilt

The extreme busyness of the lone-mother student does not prevent feelings of guilt. It has various sources. Sometimes it is about not being a 'good enough parent' and a perception that others will see the student career as a selfish thing, putting the parent before the child. This can lead to internal arguments for the lone mother and a need to rationalise away the idea of a 'perfect parent'.

Well, it's weird coz it's kind of contradictory because sometimes I think, you know, I shouldn't beat myself up and feel guilty about not being a good enough parent or something, because at the end of the day none of us are perfect. I am trying to do a good thing by getting an education but I don't know. Sometimes probably society makes you feel guilty because you are not home all of the time, but then if you were home all the time you would be stereotyped as lazy and you need to go out to work. Whatever you do somebody will criticise [laughs]. You know, it's like you can't be the perfect person. So sometimes you feel that but other times you think, 'No, I shouldn't feel guilty, Am not a bad person, we are not perfect, so...'. LMF

LMTs from the extended case studies also felt the guilt of not giving enough to her children.

What I would say is, I still find at times it's really the time... the time. I don't have enough time because I would have loved to be there for my kids as almost giving them supervision... LMTs

Sometimes the guilt is elsewhere, allowing the child an 'electronic baby sitter', or promising treats at the end of the week, or feeling that the parent's mother is doing too much.

I get pre-occupied with what I am doing and sometimes I forget I need to spend a bit more time maybe engaging with him, because children if you let them... they stay on PlayStation and Xbox. There is like a massive criticism... what do they call it? Electronic baby sister [laughs], so sometimes I think it's bit too much Xbox. LMF

I feel guilty spending money on going out. Maybe Imran needs money later. LMN

The data also revealed that doing personal things also evoked guilt. For LMN, spending more money on herself leads to her feeling 'guilty', whereas for LMF there is also guilt in relation to spending more time on her studies.

I did go through various periods over the last two years of feeling guilty because I am devoting so much time to this degree that me mum has done his homework with him, and what she has done is his Maths with him,

although I know that I am doing this for his benefit but I can't help but feel a little bit guilty. LMF

[S]ometimes it's kind of him saying, 'I want to play with you', but I have to say, 'No'. LMA

'At the weekend I will take you to swimming' [...] he does understand but I do feel a little bit guilty about that. LMF

The 'missing father' adds more responsibilities onto the mothers and here we get a sense of the extent of the pressure that lone mothers' experience – 'guilt kills me'. This double responsibility gives them sleepless nights since they feel the need to perform their duties 'properly'.

Because I feel like the responsibility has doubled on me because his dad is not there. So anything that I feel like I am not doing properly doesn't make me sleep properly. I think 'Oh, I should have done this, and I should have done that, and then the guilt kills me'. LMN

I think it was the first couple of weeks I was away from Harry for a long time and I was feeling guilty, getting upset and crying as well because I didn't want to leave. Now I know why I am doing it and I feel much better about it. LMV

Thus 'guilt' and shame have both internal and external sources. Stereotype and stigma are societal in origin and nature, carried by a popular culture that, as we saw, readily divides the poor into 'deserving' and 'underserving'. With the help of the mass media, and many politicians on all sides, the 'lone mother' became a scapegoat. Respondents resisted these labels but nevertheless felt personal guilt. An expected finding was that lone-mother students often felt guilt for being busy with studies – 'selfish' self-accusations, neglecting being with the child, helping with homework, playing, going swimming, and so on.

5.2.5 Juggling

Part of the stress and guilt of the lone-mother schedule was caused by the constant 'juggling', as respondents put it, between different and conflicting priorities.

It's bit of juggle, juggling family life. LMC

The kids, they usually tell you about ten to nine in the morning when you are just about to leave the house and they go, 'You got my such and such?' or 'Where is my library book?' So I just keep up with remembering all those things all the time, but we will muddle through. LMC

Across all the participants there was a sense of juggling, whether directly expressed or merely inferred. Mothers with younger children had much more juggling to do compared to older children, as noted by one of the lone mothers.

You juggle it. I don't know, I've got a big calendar and I always write what I need to do and I walk around with sticky notes and I put them everywhere. You know, with the car insurance. I nearly forget everything and I don't wish you to go in there [a room in her house] because it's so crowded. So if there is something that I need to do desperately, I walk around with the sticky notes. I bought some in the house, I honestly put it everywhere [we laugh]. LMN

Data revealed that juggling for lone mothers had 'got to be organised' and they had to 'keep on top of everything', be it in the form of 'sticky notes' for LMN or 'bend your claims' for LMK

It's tiring [...]. You got to be organised, you got be flexible as well and be able to bend your claims for a little bit and get to fit in other things, and sometime things just happen and they just come and go and it's just that really, and it's trying to be organised and keep on top of everything. LMK

It also involved last-minute changes and seeking help from family members to pick up or drop off a child.

[I]t's always a juggling thing, it's always depending on the time of the lectures. I am always texting, 'Is this ok?' And she [mum] texts back that, 'It's ok'. LMF

This year it's difficult to say because we haven't started our programme yet but last year there was a set plan, a timetable for life that we tried our best to stick to but that could change – child sick, phone call from school – come and pick child up – that means walk out of university there and then, go get the child, so the plans constantly change and my daughter does Brownies and three of them do gymnastics as well during the week. LMC

I can't sit in my house and concentrate on something like that, like if I got a sink full of dishes and mountains of washing that needs doing and the stuff that I normally have to do, like up and down and trying to do bits of cleaning and keep on top of everything ... LMK

The data here confirming juggling is also found in Hinton-Smith's (2012) research.

5.2.5.1 Complexities of Management

There were different types of management issues that lone mothers in the data faced. The most common was time management, as they had a lot going on in their lives and thus had to learn to manage all the changes happening around them. It was difficult.

My aim is to be in bed by 12 or 12:30pm but quite often I find that I am still ironing, like 1 o'clock in the morning and stuff like that, so I am trying to get like more organised. LMK

They also faced the struggle of managing to learn independently and even also managing to learn at all in a new, academic environment. LMM offers a good example of that.

It took a while to get used to the best way I could work because when I did these studies before I used pen and paper [giggles], so this time obviously it's all – you don't do pen and paper – it's PC and printer and stuff, so the computer I had at home was oldish. It was actually my son's so didn't have privileges, so I couldn't use the computer and I didn't have money to buy a computer. It was quite difficult to manage my coursework, so I would have to come into university, but it was hard because I had my child so I tried to [manage]. There were times that I had to come in the evening so my child would be with me, but then you can't... it's hard to do the assignment and sort of eyeball your child, so I didn't know how I managed it, but I obviously did manage it. But then in January I bought myself a laptop, so it's much better [...] it was a nightmare. Then it was to work out the best way to study... I tried to study through the night, but I just can't do that anymore. I used to be able to do that.

Lone mothers found themselves always on the edge of switching roles from mother to student and then back to mother, and managing the switching roles. They had to work it out in their head which role to play and when to play it. It is almost like switching one side of them on and switching the other side off. At times they find switching difficult, whilst at other times the switch is quite natural. When I asked LMC about switching roles, she explained:

I don't think you do switch all the time. I got a lot of time in the morning getting the children ready and thinking all the time what we got to do today. Whereas, performing as a parent, thinking as a student, and then when I am here I generally don't think about the children at all. That sounds really horrible. I am not thinking about home life; all I am thinking about is the lecture. The transition time for me is when I am in the car: as soon as I walk out, I get in the car – 'What do we need to do? Do we need to do shopping? Have we got enough stock [of food]?' You know, that's my transition time in the car and when I see them and we do stuff together it

is good to relax from all the uni stuff. I found it quite hard last year when I had coursework which was really, really hard. It was supposed to be group work and the other members of the group were holding back, so it felt like I was doing everybody else's course work for them. So they [her children] did have to listen to me about that quite a lot. Sometimes I had to bring them in the uni as well to do work, so that's not switching off that's combining, combining, and we sat at the computer and obviously doing what I had to do, and I got some of the DVDs and headphones and they all sat next to the computer and watched a DVD and so were entertained whilst I got to do [my work]. LMC

Here we see LMC carrying out all three roles. She is performing as a student and then switching to mother and she also has a transition time and place to do the switching: it is on her way to the car and when she is in the car. 'Transition' means picking up all the domestic issues, from socks to shopping.

It is hard, it is hard to get back into the family role because I spend so much of my head in academic land, you know. It is hard to sort of think about things like, 'Oh, do the kids need something for school?'. LMC

5.2.5.2 Issues Arising in the First Couple of Months on the Course

This study found that the first couple of months were 'scary' and 'stressful' for the lone mothers, who also felt 'fearful' and isolated. The first weeks were filled with financial worries, complexities in childcare arrangements, managing their time between studies and children, settling into the university, national-international fees issues, registration issues and timetable issues.

[S]cary, and it was very stressful because we weren't given set times until we came, so I had no idea what was happening with money, what was happening with Harry, and where I would be at certain time. It was quite stressful for someone like me because I need to know where I would be at what time so that I can tell... so Harry has structure to his days. So the first couple of weeks were lots of migraines and stress. LMV

[U]ni was full-time Monday to Friday and that was quite hard. It was not only Harry had to be in nursery at a set time, it was then we had to get him in time... LMV

It's not been easy; there have been difficulties in the first year with finances, because they decided they were not gonna pay for my tuition fees because I had already been to university before. LMP

LMP went on to explain that the issue at the beginning of her course was that, 'They were not ready to pay my fees; they will pay my maintenance but not my fees', as she was moving from income support to student finance.

[N]one of it [funding] came through till December so I struggled a lot for the first few months. LMM

She joined university through clearing so everything was ‘delayed’. She used up her previous month’s wage and later on was given an emergency loan by the university.

[I]t was horrendous... last year, finance was really quite difficult. I find that harder than university work. LMM

I have done the diplomas. I thought, ‘I know how to and I’ll be ok when I start the Master’s’. But I was so wrong because it’s a different world. LMN

These initial fears were mostly administrative, as university and other funding bodies took much of the students’ time in communicating with them about entitlements. In addition, LMJW expressed funding issues where the university failed to communicate with the funding body on the number of years that she could study on the same course. Apart from these and many other administrative issues arising in the first couple of months, lone mothers also reported initial fears in regards to their ability.

I was really, really nervous thinking, ‘Am I clever enough to come here [university]? Is everyone going to be dead brainy?’ And you do panic a little bit. LMF

5.2.6 Lone Motherhood and Culture

As noted earlier the ‘lone mother’ status has very different meanings in different cultures. In the data it was Muslim mothers who felt the least control and felt that they were in the deepest anathema. As I put it myself in Chapter 3, lone motherhood was something that never should have happened. As we saw, LMN chose extreme words to express her feelings: ‘*the guilt kills me*’ and ‘*I lost the house, lost the job and lost everything*’.

I am 36... just turned 36, been’ divorced four years now. Imran was nearly three when I got divorced and I lost the house, I lost the job. I lost everything when I got divorced. LMN

In our area females are not going out for studies, they are a bit shy. They have to overcome obstacles, they don’t have control of their life, their control is in their fathers’ hand, their brothers’ hand, so we are not doing what we want to do. LMS

If I say am a lone mother in Pakistan it would be a terrible life. I see my life as terrible, you are no human being [...] they do exist in Pakistan, but maybe with more insecurities. LMS

There is no life for a lone mother. I told you that that would be a terrible life, and there is no life as a lone mother in Pakistan, either she lives with her family, you know. If you go through the news, you will certainly know about some mums are [committing suicide] or giving poison to their children. That is a life of a lone mother in Pakistan because they are lone mothers. LMS

This is somewhat familiar to me (see Chapter Three) and to LMH (see Chapter Four), but LMS is anticipating a return to Pakistan, which might be good in job terms (e.g. becoming an Assistant Professor) but a kind of social death in personal terms – ‘you are no human being’, ‘there is no life’, and some lone mothers commit suicide or poison their children.

...either [living] in university [accommodation] or [with] my parents. I can't live alone in Pakistan, like [how] I am living here. LMS

This thesis is about lone mothers, and the stigma around the label has been noted. However, the lone mothers accessing UK Higher Education as international students access faced a double problem, as did some of the minority ethnic British: they were seen as ‘immigrants’ or at least ‘outsiders’, as the following extract vividly portrays.

I was treated horribly to start with. I was like, ‘People, since I came to England I worked my butt off and I never ever claimed any benefits and I paid my tax and everything. Now, this is not the right time for me to go to work. So don't you be looking at me like that, like I am a foreigner who comes to England to take your money. That's not right. I've been living here for a while so I've had a couple of conflicts. So the first one was about my background and like, ‘Where are you from? and why you are applying for this? and where is the father of the child?’ It's just the way they spoke to me and I didn't like that. My English then [was not good], although I went to English school in Egypt, but you still struggle a little bit. I couldn't say what I wanted to say clearly and I was so frustrated but, you know, I was hurt because there was no need for the attitude. You don't know me, don't judge me. And the second conflict that I had was about me wanting to stay at home and do nothing and they pay me the income support, again. LMN

This kind of cultural rejection of the status of ‘lone mother’ was added to by a more general hostility to ‘immigrants’, tinged as usual with the implications of ‘benefit scrounger’.

5.2.7 Lone Mothers in Paid Work or Volunteering Work

Lone mothers were working part time or were engaged in voluntary work or working long hours as part of placements during their studies. Interview data revealed that

almost all lone mothers made their choice of work around ‘flexibility’ and child-friendly hours – 9am to 5pm. The lone mothers in this study are quite different to the stereotypical image created by media and politicians: they volunteer, work part time or have been working as lecturer, retail manager, social worker, administrator, accountant, etc. They want to give back to the wider community by working. For some lone mothers working in an environment which provides help and support to other women who are in similar circumstances such as theirs is a better way of giving back to the community. For others

I've got a job with the university which is just called Student Advocate, and it's just when you help out at open days and talk to prospective students and stuff like that. LMF

I did some voluntary work with Women's Information House, one day a week, only because it fitted in with picking up and dropping off. LMP

Volunteered, not paid job [in the Citizens Advice Bureau] three hours a week. It's a lovely job.... made friends in the office, so that's good. LMN

LMP also volunteered ‘peer support counselling’ for breast-feeding mothers, which formed her placements. LMK mentioned that she previously had a lack of job satisfaction despite the good pay:

[G]ood job but it was just so boring, the same thing over and over. It was alright at first but it just started to get too much and I was like getting depressed, and feeling like forced to... really stuck there till retirement. It was just not bearable.

One of the lone mothers interviewed, LMJW, objected to placements as she could not cope with having to go on a placement whilst having caring responsibilities. It did not fit with her everyday needs and life. As a disabled lone mother, who cares for her dad and her daughter, she feels that she does not have much spare time to go on placements. She emphasised that she could do only placements as part of paid work.

These work roles and activities of lone mothers may surprise some people. Lone mothers do not deserve their stereotype. They have altruistic ambitions far away from the image of the ‘benefit scrounger’.

5.2.8 The Missing Self

Almost all the respondents reported the end of their social life – dancing, movies, music, rock climbing – and for some it is their ‘sleep’ that they miss the most. The

language in which they repeat these endings is extreme ['I am a machine ' stated LMTs] and points to a quite fundamental loss of identity: 'I miss me because I haven't got the support' observed LMN. Things that make them feel human disappear.

I was fond of watching movies and listening to songs but I have left everything for my baby and for my work [education]. LMS

I used to sleep more than 12 hours but now my sleep is only 3 to 4 hours... LMS

I miss me because I haven't got a social life at all. I can't remember the last time I went out. I think it was about two years ago. You know when you dress nicely and go out... that doesn't exist now [laughs], so it's a hard life, even if you want to, and my mum is here and I can. LMN

Lone mothers also explained the reasons behind the end of their social life, 'not enough hours' and 'no time to do it'. The theme was not so much 'time-management' as 'time starvation'.

At the moment, I [have] stopped everything because its time-consuming. There are not enough hours in the day. I am in university all day and, because I want to educate myself, there is a lot of research needed and the reading and the references are very important and finding what is relevant to the subject, and it's very time-consuming looking through the book, so basically all the activities that I used to do have stopped....totally stopped. I have no social life at all. I am a machine. LMN

I socialise sort of based around church activities and to be honest I quite like to be home and I quite like the quiet life. LMM

I don't have time for social life [...] my social life consists of play groups... LMP

I was doing rock climbing and dance classes but I have just called those things off now, so I haven't got much social life now. LMC

I think a lot of the time your social life sort of takes low side [a back seat]. LMK

There were a number of aspects to the 'missing self'. The most obvious one was the loss of a previous identity and role. The second was a severe contraction in social activities. The world was reduced to student work and family work. Ironically, these 'omissions' were accompanied by building of new selves, first in relation to a student identity that generated confidence and greater self-esteem, and secondly in relation to the children. As we've seen, family solidarity could be very strong, as could a more political identity as a lone mother in a hostile environment.

5.3 Role of Father

Throughout the interview data lone mothers usually expressed clearly that there was either little or no support from children's fathers. In many cases the father is completely 'missing'. He has either never met the children or has no interest in meeting them (e.g. LMH from the extended case study).

[H]e [child's father] was a Nigerian guy, didn't show very much commitment... LMP

He is not very supportive....he says that [other] ladies have children and they are going to university and they are doing their own work and they do not get depressed [she cries]. LMS

[W]hen he [her son] was around six [years] he knew his dad had kind of lost interest [in him]. LMF

[H]e [child's father] stopped phoning and for ages he said, 'When am I going to see daddy?'. LMF

In our extended case studies LMH also had no contact with the child's father. He was completely 'absent' from her son's life.

His father is not an issue to him in any way. He [father] doesn't know whether I have a child and he doesn't care whether I live or my son lives.' LMH

[T]o say the least, he [father] sometimes wants to be Dad and sometimes don't. LMV

LMM is a mother with two children from two different fathers. Her older child is a boy and he does not have any contact with his dad. She explains in the interview that when the child was small his dad used to make some effort. However, as the time went on 'his [son's] dad hasn't made any effort'. However, it is different with her daughter and her dad.

My daughter sees her dad a lot [...]; he visits the house, that's what he has always done... LMM

During the interviews lone mothers sometimes spoke about having some sort of meeting arrangements between the children and their father. For some lone mothers it

was an organised weekend arrangement whilst for others it was a much more casual arrangement, once in a while.

LMC's ex-husband lives in Worcester whilst she lives with her children on the Wirral so she travels to Worcester at weekends.

[T]hey live with me most of the time and they visit their father over the weekend. LMC

I was finishing uni at 3'o clock, jumping in the car, having spent all the day in the uni, then driving over the water to pick the children up from school, hit the motorway, get them down to Worcester for about 7'o clock.. LMC

[H]e actually sees his dad now. LMF

It went from his dad being crap, doing nothing and me being really upset... because I have a child who is upset because his dad wouldn't phone and then Luke is obviously getting a bit older and decides to phone his dad, and for whatever reason his dad decides, 'Ok, come and see me. I'll pay for the flight ticket.' Now everything is different... LMF

He [father] likes to drink although he does have contact [with child] but...I have to keep a close eye on him [father] to make sure that like if he turns up and he has been drinking or [is] drunk.. where I try not to let Jamie see him. LMK

There is much evidence available in the data of the constant involvement of mothers in pushing their children's fathers to meet and to be more responsible towards their child(ren). They act as mediator.

It would be co-operating and realising that they [father] have a role to play. LMP

I would phone his dad and say, 'Look, Luke's upset. Will you phone him?', coz he lives in Tenerife. So then I would be upset because Luke was upset because his dad wasn't phoning him. I lost my temper with him and said, 'Look, try and make more of an effort with your child'. LMF

[H]e is not taking care of Imran, I have to take care of him... if he is crying, he [dad] is saying that, 'Take care of Imran, look he is crying. I am working on my computer..... take care of the baby, take baby to the other room'. LMS

I don't want the children to have to pick between their parents. No child should have to do that. LMC

[H]e's been again at Christmas for 10 days in Tenerife and he is going again in summer to see his dad, and now that he got attention from his dad, I am happy. LMF

It is evident from the above quotations that lone mothers were actively engaged in making their child happy as their child's happiness leads to their happiness. In a couple of cases, the paternal grandparents stayed in closer touch than the father:

[B]ut his grandparents keep in touch. We found a lady who translates the letters for us... so the grandparents write to Luke a little card'. LMF [letters are in Spanish]

[A] little relationship with the grandparents [...] because this is half of his culture... that's important that he knows the other half of his family... LMF

There is some 'presence' of the absent father in LMV's case, as she rationalises it.

Dylan's got his dad's family who are really good with him so that's good as well. So I've got a lot of support so I am lucky in this sense as well. LMV

As the above quotations suggest, there is a big variety in the reaction of the 'missing father'. Sometimes the arrangements formed are regular, but more often the father is seen as absent, neglectful. In the interview data, only one mother spoke about explaining the problem of the 'missing father', and the fault was attributed to the father's refusal to 'take responsibility':

Oh well, I try to make him sad by telling the truth... you know, 'Some people aren't responsible and [are] too selfish to be in a relation or take responsibility and sadly that man is your father'. They don't want to stay. LMF

5.4 Children

A number of themes emerged in this category, including the ages of the children and unexpected illnesses, and the demands that childcare put on the mothers' study time, as discussed below.

5.4.1 Older Children

Older children were more independent and therefore opened up more study time for the lone mother.

I would let him alone, walking around in the shops, now that he is nearly 13. He is getting that much more independent and if he wants to go shopping with his friends, or go to McDonald or go to Subway.... LMF

[T]hey like to go and look at the games in the game shop and the CDs in HMV. LMF

The girls are getting older anyways so they can look after themselves a bit better. They are less of a handful I suppose, better way to put it. LMC

LMF's child was nearly 13 when I conducted a follow-up interview in 2012. Her son was independent in certain things, for example, going out with friends after school. She along with other lone mothers in the research talked about leaving their children who were at secondary school at home on their own for around half an hour or so. In most cases this happened after the children returned from school and before the mother arrived home. LMTs from the extended case study also pointed towards leaving her daughters alone at home whilst she was in the library.

I think it's about an hour, but yeah, you are not... I think if they are under 16 you can't leave them for any longer than that. Yeah, I wouldn't sort of leave him for the evening or if I was like working at night, I would make sure that there was somebody in the house and like usually me sister. LMK

In the interview data lone mothers with children in secondary school expressed the help and support that they receive from these children.

We had to do a presentation actually for history. My IT skills aren't that great and Rosy knows how to do a PowerPoint presentation. She helped me how to put together a PowerPoint presentation, so anyway it's good help. LMC

They are always cheering me on and asking lots of questions about university life [...] I can see that it's something that they are thinking about themselves. LMC

Again, we see here evidence of the 'modelling' aspect of the 'vertical' career. It is also true for LMTs (extended case). Her daughters are her emotional support and she has quite an open relationship with them.

I came and lived with my kids and we have bonded so much that we talk about anything and everything, most of the time when I get very alone because of pressure. Mainly because you hear something from home [Zimbabwe]. At times I think my brothers and sisters are not doing what I think they should be doing to give support to my mum and my dad. My daughters, because we are so close they are more mature and grown-up than their age, that they at times talk me out of it. It's important that we talk together... LMTs

There was also sharing of computers between lone mothers and their children.

Charlotte is 11, she goes to high school, so we fight over the computer at night now – who gets the laptop to do their homework first. LMC

[W]e have actually got two computers but the other computer... that I have I've got has not got wireless so it doesn't pick up, so there is only one that's linked up to internet and I am always on it and my little boy always complains and moans about that. LMK

Whereas most of the lone mothers revealed the positives of having an older child whilst gaining education, there were also a couple of participants who opened up about the troubles of dealing with the older child. LMK talked about the 'revenge side' or in her words 'attention-seeking' side of her child.

He asked me for snacks [...] I said, 'I'll do it in a minute. I am trying to finish this piece of work because I need to hand it in tomorrow'. He said 'AHHHHH all you ever do is work'. LMK

He can be quite demanding, I think sometimes he just plays up for attention. LMK's son is 12 years old.

He'll sit on the couch and I could be upstairs and doing something but rather than getting up off the couch and getting in the kitchen and getting it himself, he'll shout 'MUM, MUM, Mum can you get me a drink?' I'll get him the drink but even if I ignore him and say, 'Get it yourself', he would just go and carry on moaning for about 10 mins, 'Oh get me drink, get me drink'. LMK

He doesn't do anything really. He comes back from school, throws [his] coat on the floor, throws his bag on the floor. Uniform will be at the bottom somewhere, and I got everything that I need to do and then I am trying to run and make sure that he has got a clean uniform for next day and any other stuff that he needs to have... LMK.

We've already seen how families could be strengthened by the 'lone mother' relation, developing a mutual ambition about education and 'getting on'. Here we see a more negative approach from children (boys), who seem to act against the mother by not cooperating, and by demanding attention and failing to offer any help. Arguably, this was an act of resentment at the busyness of the mother. This was in contrast with mothers of younger children.

A final theme with regard to the children of lone mothers was about 'protection'. Lone mothers could be over-protective because they are solely responsible for the child in most cases and thus take extra measures to protect their child:

Whenever we went to the cinema, I never wanted him to go to the men's toilet on his own. I wanted him to go to the female. As a worrying mother ...

I don't know who is in there. So [I] am like, 'If you are not out in two minutes I am coming in' and he goes, 'Mum, stop being over-protective'... there's paedophiles and weird people everywhere, but you do want to protect them [children] because they are only little ... LMF.

5.4.2 Younger Children and Illnesses

It was quite noticeable from the interview data that lone mothers with younger children, especially children under eight years old, reported frequent illnesses in these children. For example, the children could be suffering from long-term illness, such as LMH's son. As noted in the case study, LMH spends much of her time with her son, bathing him, changing his clothes, and keeping a close eye on him when he is inside or outside the house, as he does not have a 'sense of danger'.

There were a lot of appointments [medical] that I needed to take. LMH

It is also evident from the interview data that most lone mothers with young children also reported occasional health issues of their children. Whilst LMH's child had ongoing, long-term health issues, other lone mothers reported ongoing health problems such as infections, fever and sickness related to weather changes and other changes. The children were prone to illnesses and these on and off health issues interrupted the lone mothers' student life, such as through missing classes, taking days off from university or coursework, hiring taxis to travel between places (doctors, university, house and so on), asking family members to look after their child when s/he was off school due to sickness, so that the lone mother could attend her university or course.

Imran's got asthma, ok, and the first year after I split up with his dad, he had a lot of trouble because the first house I moved into had a lot of mould, and I didn't realise that because it was behind the furniture and I am not gonna really move the furniture. Nobody really moves the bed and the wardrobes, so he had like attacks, regular attacks. It was disgusting, and walking around with him and running after the buses. If I wanna avoid running after the bus I get a taxi, but the money is not enough. I actually pay seven pounds and set aside fourteen pounds a day. I was thinking to myself I need to buy a car. I was close to crying and looking at people in their car and thinking that I can't do this to my son anymore. He is not doing very well and he is suffering with me... LMN

... Luke is a child that's been off school a lot from different illness. He [child] either had something called ear pain or he had some infection. You know, he was just catching everything... LMF

We home-schooled for a while. LMF

He was a premature baby and he was in an incubator so I had to take extra care, like more than other people take care of their baby. LMS

He was facing some low level of haemoglobin so I had to take him to the doctors, meanwhile I had to prepare for my viva... LMS

...would have had so much more work to do with the child off being sick or not happy at school, because at that time he wasn't happy in primary school. LMF

[I]f it wasn't for my mum looking after him when he is off school, it would be me and I wouldn't have been in university, and my attendance would have been terrible and I would have been missed so many lectures and probably not got a good mark. LMF

What type of job is gonna accept you?.... No job. They are gonna tell you to go, if you carry on like that because usually... I swear to God when he was little he was always ill. I mean, he is getting better now but I still run when I see my phone bell rings, maybe just in case he is not well or something. LMN

The above quotations also highlight the mother's real worry whilst her son is off sick as, even when he is recovering, she still fears that he may become ill again. Managing child health issues is combined with managing work and education. Again, the need for flexibility is evident, and LMN points to the clear difference between what employers will expect, and what the 'student as job' will do to help lone mothers.

5.4.3 Childcare Priorities and Course Demands

All 13 lone mothers faced various forms of priority issues throughout their studies. Although they always analysed and put their priorities in a very linear order, they were forever balancing them.

He got into trouble in school on Wednesday and I started in March, and it must have only been the first or second week that I started, so that was on Wednesday and then on the Thursday – he was not suspended [or anything] like that – but they said that they don't want him back the next day. LMK

There was no specific priority order that they followed. However, they were quick in assessing the various situations and prioritising them accordingly. If a child was unwell they prioritised looking after the child first and then continuing with their own studies.

I left [class] because the hours were just too long and she [daughter] was suffering as well and also she was missing me a lot. LMM

It is becoming a bit difficult, it is becoming difficult. But in my early days... but I don't find myself [able] to work more like that. I have no interest in studies now because I am busier with my child, to think about him... as I am alone now. I have to look after Ahmed and give attention to Ahmed and think about him. With my studies, I make sure that I do not neglect him, so he is taking more than half of my time, which I was meant to give to him so I am switching from balanced life to kind of imbalanced life now. LMS

If I write to my university to extend my scholarship, they are not going to do this because this is not their headache to hmmm think over this, that I have a baby and I had to take six months off. So I will think over it, that how I will continue for the 4th year, because I am planning to complete my PhD in 2012. It will take.... Writing-up [thesis] will take almost one and a half [years] for me because I don't find time at home. When I am home Ahmed comes back and Ahmed doesn't go to bed until 10pm or 11pm, and after 11pm I have to offer prayers and it is about 1 o'clock [before] I start studying. LMS

And I felt quite... it was very quiet but I really felt very conscious that, 'Oh my god, I brought three kids and how people are gonna react' but nobody was really bothered to be honest. LMC

In all these quotes it is quite clear that lone mothers have childcare issues and they work to fit in their course demands and their children. For example, some managed to take their children to the university library in order to complete their coursework. Lone mothers who did this quite regularly were LMS, LMC, LMF, and LMN. Others used to them in only when the need arose, such as last-minute printing or coursework submission.

5.5 Higher Education

In Higher Education and on access courses, lone mothers were divided between 'extrinsic' and 'intrinsic' motivations.

5.5.1 Extrinsic Motivation

Generally speaking, extrinsic motivation represents the 'horizontal' aspect of lone mother motivation. As the data indicates, the women wanted to 'cash in' their degrees in the world of work, and indeed were strongly encouraged by their university to do so. People listed such extrinsics as: 'proper work', 'own house', 'better district', 'three bedrooms', 'garden', 'finish this and get a job'. The notions included getting a life, 'career', 'good job', go to new places, and even 'develop business skills' with a view

to starting their own business. Occasionally, a more strategic line was taken. Following the ‘chaos’ of 2008, LMF decided to stay on and do a Master’s, and then see if there were any jobs available. Several others recognised that the jump from education to work would be hard, and it is difficult to know to what extent the lone mothers were doing ‘wishful thinking’, or even just repeating the sorts of ‘WOW’ story that one of the universities featured in the study promoted [WOW means ‘World of Work’].

For many of the lone mothers in the study, university was a route to getting a well-paid job, which would in return make them able to afford a better life for themselves and their children. That kind of ‘us’ is quite common in their reasoning for gaining Higher Education. For many lone mothers in the study it was envisaged as a route out of poorly paid jobs and also out of benefits.

So I am hoping to get some work, some like proper work. And me house where I live is rented, it’s nice but I’d like to have me own house. I’d like to get a mortgage like [on] me own property, something like in a nicer area than where I am now, not like too far away, just maybe something a little bit [better]. It’s a little bit rough where we are, [although] it doesn’t bother me. I mind me own business and a lot of the time I am left alone but, yeah, I think I wouldn’t mind maybe three bedrooms, bit of a garden, all kinds of things, just starting proper job – money. LMK

According to the interviewees, education is the step forward towards ‘proper work’, owning a house, being able to get a mortgage, living in a ‘nicer area’ and so on. LMK also had her son on board, sharing her goals. For the son the driving force is to move out of Bootle, as it seems like a deprived area, and also many of his friends live in ‘nicer houses’ with gardens.

They live in a lot nicer houses than we live in, they’ve got gardens and stuff like that. I think he’d just love to get out of Bootle really and just be in... just a nice environment, really. I think it’s a shame though that by the time I will be in a position to be able to move out of there he is gonna be about 15 or 16. So, although we will still benefit from it, it would have been nicer if we could have been in a better environment when he was younger. But, yeah, it’s just the way things turn out really. The main thing is that he just desperately wants to move, so I think he does understand that once I finish this and get a job then we will be able to do that. LMK

I also note a small amount of regret in her statement for not being able to move out of Bootle a little earlier. What surprises me is that she was in a stable job before entering

university. However, it seems like it might not have been well-paid enough to move out of Bootle.

He understands that it's for Mummy to get a job, it's for both of us. LMF

He is content in nursery and I am content in learning [...]. I am actually building a future for him, and in a year I'll have a job and I'll be bringing in like 20 grand basic LMV.

The latter quotation contains both 'vertical' and 'horizontal' approaches to education, as earlier conceptualised.

Other respondents also expressed similar reasons for joining Higher Education: it was to 'get a good job' or 'the job'. As per my interpretation, a 'good job' means one that is better paid and offers flexible working hours.

It's about having a life, it's my career, it's my future with Imran. It is more than just a certificate [...] I am here to get a good job and be able to pay for me and Imran. LMN

It's the competition in the job sector. It's really fearsome at the moment. You have to prove that you can get the job [...] Any regular job isn't gonna pay you [i.e. pay enough]. LMN

Like other lone mothers LMA also wanted a 'well-paid' job. She has her brother modelling the instrumental gains of Higher Education whereas for LMV it is her dad doing the same.

Because my brother was trained [as an adult] to be an accountant. He went to night school when we were in Liverpool and he has moved to Australia now, and he is nearly qualified and he has already got a job and he is so well paid. So you know you'll get there in the end. LMA

The last sentence of the above quotation, about getting there 'in the end' is similar to sentiments found in the literature (Reay et al., 2002).

My dad's a policemen and I like that sort of up and go job... LMV

I feel like maybe I would just like to get a job and then spend more time with [child] and have some money and take him out places, and because being a student all the time you hardly have any money [laughs], so some of me would just like to get a job instead of doing a PhD. LMF

Again, that 'some of me' points to an individual split between 'horizontal' and 'vertical' motivations.

One lone mother's extrinsic motivation for joining Higher Education was to be able to start her own business (*'I want to be able to have my own business'*, LMM). She was previously employed in a full-time job in the health sector but was now looking to equip herself with entrepreneurial skills.

She expresses instrumental reasons for joining Higher Education: it is to *'develop business skills'* (LMM).

A couple of lone mothers used the 'delayed' approach to moving out of education. The fear of 'chaos in the world' affected their decision and they chose to stay at university for another year. Later on, I will discuss one of their attempts to try to stay longer at the university in order to undertake a PhD.

Obviously, at the end of 2008, everything was happening with banks and there was lots of chaos in the world so I thought, 'Alright, I will stay on and do a Master's and see if there are any jobs after that'. So I decided to stay on another year, so I am doing criminal justice for one year. LMF

Some lone mothers also tried to inculcate in their children the instrumental benefits of Higher Education. In the excerpt below LMN is explaining to her child the material gains: *'study, get a good job and... buy whatever you want to'*.

[I say,] 'Imran, what I am doing now is for us because you asked me last week to buy you a Wii for 30 pounds. How am I going to get the money, if I am not studying, get a good job to get money to buy what you want and this is what you gonna do in the future when you are older? You are gonna have to study, go to university, get a good job and then you will be able to buy whatever you want.' He loves..... and I always say you are gonna get all you want. LMN

I just want my son... I want to set an example for Imran. You just gonna fight for what you want, don't just sit there. If you want to be better, you just gonna have to fight and it's a battle [out there] anyway. LMN

We are poor but, you know, we are used to it and we cope. It's a sacrifice, but at the end of the day we can have money if I go to work or if I stay in education a bit longer and have money in future, but I will be doing something that I enjoy and also spend time with the kids. Hopefully it will be the best of both worlds. LMC

I am happier because I can see some light at the end of the tunnel with education, with a possible career ... it's a little bit more positive with being in university. LMF

For one of the international students it was a direct promotion from Senior Lecturer to the post of 'Assistant Professor' (equivalent to a 'Reader' in the UK) at her university

in Pakistan that meant financial security. It was also true for lone mothers on placements who were enrolled on a course with a guarantee of a job after finishing their studies or who had been promised an interview at university after completion of their access course.

I am just hoping that when I finish there is some kind of job out there for me. LMN

Once I've got this diploma I can turn it to a degree, and [then] I've got a higher base and then I can go higher and higher, and then I can keep achieving what I wanna do. LMV

If you ask me, 'What do you actually want to do?', I want to be a social worker because this is where I find myself useful. I like to help people. LMN

Flexibility of work hours was expressed as a priority by almost all the mothers as they wanted to work more child-friendly hours between 9am to 5pm.

...have to be realistic and have to have a 9 to 5 job [...], work in a theatre or archive again as my proper job, pay job, to put a roof over my children's heads. LMC

I realise the thing [is] that I need to go and get a proper education to have any sort of real opportunity to succeed in life, financially or career-wise, to have any sort of career where I felt like, you know, I'm gonna get up today and go to work. LMP

The above is LMP's first realisation of the role of university in developing the hope of a better life.

Childcare would cost me just as much but with being a social worker, they have something called flexi-hours where you can work around the two of them [job and child]. LMN

I thought that only thing that can get me out of debt is if I start looking into education and getting myself some qualifications. LMF

[W]hen you haven't got the education you work in retail jobs, McDonalds and cleaning jobs. I've done cleaning some time ago and it was so depressing having to go and clean others[' houses] and then come back and clean mine as well. LMF

The experience of low-wage jobs led to some forming an instrumental reason for accessing HE and achieving well-paid jobs.

A whole range of extrinsic motivations can be seen in the narratives of the lone mothers. First, there are ‘push’ factors. They want to get out of poverty, poorly paid jobs and undesirable living places. These factors push them towards HE as a kind of ‘rescue’ device. The role of HE as a ‘rescue’ is vivid in most of the accounts. There are also ‘pull’ factors involved in the respondents’ motivations. They want a better future for themselves, like a ‘proper job’ or a ‘career’. They want more in terms of job satisfaction, salary, and a way of life. What emerges here as a theme is university/degree (and so on) as a kind of ‘magic wand’. The narratives seem to have a utopian resolution that degree status will lead to a solution of those ‘push’ and ‘pull’ motivations. The respondents seem to have bought the dream that the university, and HE in general, has promoted (Brown with Carasso, 2013). It is the case that the university with which the majority of the respondents are involved has a slogan of ‘Dream, Plan, Achieve’. In a more sceptical and neo-liberal reading of that slogan (see conclusion) it might be more realistic to reorder that sequence – Plan, Achieve, Dream.

5.5.2 Intrinsic Motivation

The majority of women from the data also had ‘intrinsic’ reasons for joining Higher Education. Throughout the interviews they placed much emphasis on personal gains. ‘*It is personal*’, ‘*it is safe because of the 2008 recession*’ (LMF). It is role modelling for their children and ‘feeling human’. Role modelling education to the children emerged as a recurring theme, and the following quotation provides a vivid account of this.

[L]ast night I was lying there and reading my history book and Lisa was lying on the bed reading Little Miss Mischief. It is hard to concentrate but at the same time I was testing her, ‘Are you listening to me?’. I read aloud my history and then I asked questions on it, like, ‘Where was the War of Independence? In America’. She writes it down, so it’s not really study but where they feel that they are involved and they are getting in... showing some interest in what I am doing. LMC

LMC’s girls are very supportive of her studies. They understand about their mum’s university life.

They do and they are very supportive of me. They are very good and understanding about uni and they enjoy their own education, so I suppose these things feed into each other. LMC

I think it's really important that my children see me studying, so it's what they see. They know this is what you do and this is how it is and it's a good practice to get into. LMC

They tell me [to] chase my dream because I have always said to them to, 'Do whatever you want to do and be whatever you want to be, just keep going for it. Don't give in'. So I can't tell them that and then give in myself. LMC

[S]he is doing really well at school because she is seeing Mummy sitting and studying and, you know, concentrating on something. She is reading adult, you know, some topical books and, yeah yeah, I think it's about getting the balance between getting at their emotions and having that positive influence. LMP.

The final quotation above (from LMP) is an example of vertical modelling, which was quite common in the data.

The study found that women were aspiring for their children to work hard and enter university. It is rather similar to the 'student advocate' job in university, where students from secondary schools are given tours around the campus and are shown different facilities to aspire them.

We went to the library and I said, 'Oh, I'll just show him where I go', and he had quite a nice time looking around so it was nice being able to take him there [...]. It shows kids that whole world of education. LMF

A number of women made remarkable comments on 'self-determination', discipline, motivation and having a goal to aim for.

I am really interested in... so you see, that's also a really very important lesson for the children as well, you know, follow your heart, follow your desire. If you want to be a zoologist, be a zoologist. LMC

'[S]o keep going, keep going, keep going' (LMP). It shows determination, a discipline similar to the 'positive, positive, positive' comments earlier from LMH.

[B]e organised, think through properly and make the right decision because you need to in order to keep your child safe and stable. LMV

This was LMV's advice to lone mothers considering accessing Higher Education. What also emerged from the data relating to intrinsic motivation is that education was also a source of raising self-esteem and a sense of personal worth.

I enjoy work, I enjoy study, I enjoy the achievement I get when you get good grades. LMC

When I manage to put a smile on somebody's face, even for two minutes, that for me is amazing. LMN

It is of course too simple to simply contrast 'intrinsic' and 'extrinsic' motivation as if they were opposite and mutually exclusive categories. As I saw it, respondents had at least two trajectories in mind – I called them 'vertical' and horizontal' – and they let me see that there is often a mix of motivations, which will be discussed further in the Conclusion chapter. However, what none of the orientations really convey is the depth of the respondents' commitment and the ways in which they completely cancelled the stereotypes of 'lone motherhood'- a descriptor this thesis has grown increasingly sceptical about.

It's kind of become a mission to finish this degree. LMP

So today I'm just got the last little jewel to finish by Friday this week and I have done it. You know, I can kind of sit back and look to what I have achieved, look what I have done and be proud and then move things again and see when things happen. LMP

There is a sense of achievement against all the odds.

I think I am showing him [that] to get a future you have to work for it and I am quite proud of that, because I don't want him to grow up thinking otherwise. LMV

The information pack that I got before I applied for the course was kind of all about being an advocate for disadvantaged people and [being a] voice for disadvantaged people [...] and it kind of turned me on... LMP

Intrinsic motivation opened up much more personal, social and even political reasons for being in Higher Education.

5.5.2.1 Instrumental Gains from being in HE: It's a 'Job'

Distinct motivations of the lone mothers have been identified from the study sample. First, there were extrinsic motivations, women wanting to use their Higher Education to advance their career, or get a 'job', or have better wages. Second, there were intrinsic motivations, to 'become a person', to 'enjoy work' and to build a 'future'. An unexpected finding was that quite a few lone mothers saw themselves as 'modelling' good attitudes to education, and also achievements, in the spirit of 'If I can do it, you can do it' rationales, to their children. I theorised those different motivations in terms of horizontal and vertical dimensions. The horizontal dimension (HE → work) was

very much the rationale of the university and of the policy goals of the Conservative government (Esson and Ertl, 2014).

The vertical dimension (HE ↑ self-realisation), child and self-motivation via ‘modelling’ was in two parts. The first related to various kinds of self-realisation, the second towards child development and progress through ‘modelling’. It was perhaps surprising how altruistic mothers could be about their ‘vertical’ motivations.

Being a student is a better paid, less alienating kind of work. Their ‘educational labour’, the sample seemed to suggest, was more rewarding intellectually and emotionally. It seemed that HE was a better ‘job’ than the alternatives. This is a kind of unacknowledged, hidden instrumentality. This is a ‘job’: student as ‘job’.

I am planning to go ahead and do a PhD, [which] means being poor for another three to four years [laughs], you know. We've managed to quite successfully be poor for the last five years, so what's another five? I don't know. LMC

I know that I made the right decision and it makes perfect sense to stay on. Stay in this environment, stay with the staff.

In the second quotation above, LMC talks about further ‘student job’ motives for staying at university. Here we see that LMC has ‘vertical’ ambitions: she is ‘poor’ but is still ambitious to stay at university. Her decision is made because of the organisation’s positive ethos (which will be discussed in detail later in the chapter). In her words it is ‘perfect’.

Not only was ‘educational labour’ better in financial and personal terms, it was also flexible about deadlines, willing to take a case-based approach to individual problems, and generally thought highly of in the sample, although this was certainly not how the disabled lone mother experienced or reported it. The quotations below provide vignettes into the experiences of lone mothers in Higher Education as ‘financially stable’, the positive effect on child’s behaviour and ‘student as a job’.

I don't have to pay council tax now... I am exempt for three years. LMF.

When LMF was working part time she still had to pay £60 council tax per month, after a reduction of 25% for being a single household. However, as a student she is exempt from it.

I seem to be ok now and budget everything but it was before uni that I was struggling [and getting] into debt, so I think that the maintenance loan and the parents' living allowance and all the rest of it is helping me an awful lot. Before uni I was struggling. I've said to people that I was worse off working than being a student. LMF

I get child benefit and child tax credit. I mean financially I consider myself quite well off because I got more money than I used to have, more money to spend in my pocket, but yeah I get quite a lot. LMP

It ties in with the idea that being a student is a better 'job', at least at the time.

[Y]ou actually get more money in your pocket on a daily basis than you would working doing a menial job or on income support. You get treated much better, you also develop focus. Basically, the emotional benefit far outweighs the financial benefit, and financial struggles are long term. LMP

Here the lone mother is comparing the financial benefits of being a student to being in a low-paid job. It is a constant theme that appears in the data where women find the role of the 'student as a job'. The quote also depicts the lone mothers' extrinsic motivation.

I know that they [council] are a lot more flexible with your working hours. They are a lot more child friendly. I've worked with the council before so it's something I would do again. Uni and study is one thing that I can do at home and manage my time with the children from the last three and four years. I know I could do that. LMC

I am not looking on going on back to the job market anyway. I want to carry on and do a PhD. There is no way that I could work and have three children by myself and do a PhD, so it's really not that relevant... LMC

When I am in uni I treat that as a working day, so when I am here [uni] I do my work, do my study, and when I go home, 3 o'clock or five o'clock whenever, pick the girls up, switch off and then... so I can just focus on the children then till they go to bed and then I could do my personal reading and whatever it is then. LMC

Friday is my little 'day off' to run around and, you know, [...] [fix] the Hoover and iron and wash up. LMC

It is worth looking at the language the lone mothers use to describe their 'student hood'. It has 'working hours', 'work', 'day off', 'doing something', 'doing something really great', it is about 'love', it is 'good' and an 'eye opener'. On the surface this 'student job' is what I think I can call a 'labour of love', where both of these notions are important. Of course, not all the lone mothers expressed themselves in this way, but it was a recurring theme. This is all the more surprising when other commentaries and

tutors' remarks seem to point to the student as a consumer, interested in grades/degree classifications for which they have paid via fees and loans – a much more instrumental and cynical view based on the neo-liberal discourses of government, HEFCE (Higher Education Funding Council for England) and university mission plans (Brown with Carasso, 2013).

Being a student also raised lone mothers' confidence, and family and friends' attitudes towards them seemed to have changed and they were now perceived as a 'person'

So once that [uni] started, the turn in people's faces, you know like, 'Ohhh, she is doing something'. LMN

[A]bsolutely, my level of confidence has gone high. LMN

Their reactions makes me feel, 'Hold on. Am I doing something really great?' So it's the continuous appreciation of what I am doing kind of boosted my.... And obviously the educational part as well. I feel like I have done myself a favour with the amount of books that I have read on child psychology. I love psychology in general, and how you help people and how the brain works and things like that, obviously knowing more about the system in England. How the welfare system works and what needs, you know, challenging and what does not. It's all good. I feel like it's an eye opener. LMN

Higher education also had positive effects on some of the women's children. For example, they were making progress in school, and several respondents pointed to this kind of educational 'multiplied effect'.

...coming to university [...] huge change in her [daughter] behaviour at home and school as well. It's the right choice to make. LMM

It has brought me more time with my kids, not less time, because if I was going out to work and not coming home till after 6 that's less than I am doing now. At the summer holidays, Christmas, reading week, where I was working full time, I wouldn't have those times with me children. So try and look for positives, benefits and everything I suppose, and I cherish this time because I know in a year or two, when I do go to work, I won't see very much of my children, so I am making the most of it now. LMC

These quotes reveal the benefits of being in Higher Education, and it is no wonder that lone mothers find being a student a much more 'flexible job' than other sorts of 'work'. The interview data emphasised the women's desire to stay longer in the university. Although in the initial couple of months they found it really hard to manage and also during the course they struggled with childcare arrangements, this had not put them off university – quite the opposite. It gives them a chance to constantly compare the

difficulties that they are facing as a student with the difficulties faced working in low-paid jobs. At least for the present they found themselves in a better place and thus emphasised the ‘vertical dimension’ rather than the ‘horizontal’ one.

It has to be something that I really wanted to do so, you know, to go and get on the graduate course for Aldi and go and, you know, learn how to manage a supermarket. Yeah, great money, but it’s not something I would like to leave my bed in the morning to go and do, and it’s not worth a sacrifice of missing out on the children for. LMC

After gaining an undergraduate degree and an MRes degree from the university, LMC is working on the decision to move out of university. Later on, I found her applying for a PhD and looking forward to another three to four years in the university, like LMF.

5.5.2.2 Emancipation, a New ‘Critical’ Language

When analysing the interview data, it was found that some lone mothers were using the knowledge that they had gained on their courses to ‘unpack’ their everyday life circumstances. What they were doing was being reflexive. This application of uni ‘theorising’ to their own circumstances was a somewhat new finding which struck me greatly.

Politicians want to ‘fiddle the numbers’. ‘I am really suspicious because sociology [her subject] is like a really critical subject. LMF

LMF is well aware of the political discourse and she is also applying academic knowledge to reflect on LMA’s situation during a visit to a job centre where LMA was pushed to get into work rather than gain an education.

It’s a ‘political spin’ to tell us that people are better off working [...] working and are still under the poverty line. LMF

Why not get parents into education and anybody really?....When you widen out you need to widen out to everybody, and this business about not allowing childcare for overseas students while [there is] discrimination as well, why are we saying to some people ‘yes’ and to some people ‘no’?... this is just not right. LMF

I am kind of getting how it’s working now, kind of labelling theory. What happens when you kind of label various groups, but I think that may be years ago, yeah, there is a bit of stigma attached to being a single mother but now I like being on my own. LMF

In all the above excerpts, LMF could be seen working out the labels used by politicians or by the media about lone mothers. She is resisting them and in a way it is a direct application of knowledge gained on the course to her circumstances. There are other lone mothers in the data who are working it out as well. For example, LMT, a mature student, also does a similar kind of thing. However, for her it is almost a newly opening world, as she mentioned earlier being seen as a ‘mother behind the pram’ and not as a ‘person’. Thus, for her it meant first gaining a sense of self and then a sense of worth against the pejoratives of ‘lone motherhood’ (discussed earlier).

[I]n my course it was about racism and all about white supremacy and creating this hierarchy about who is better and not. It's a lot of nonsense and, yes, I can relate to that because I was brought up with some racism, but I am teaching Liam quite the opposite and I am making sure that he doesn't judge people by anything about what they look like, whether they are black or white [...] I am talking about a while ago on my course... it's what they teach in history is from a certain point of view of white supremacy. It's all this great Christopher Columbus who discovered America... LMF

Here, LMF is making a personal reflection from the knowledge she has gained through the course and she is making an informed analysis.

[T]he way education work is almost like their ideology is kind of teaching our kids from an early age and I think unfortunately that we need to balance it out with other histories, other than this white view of history. LMF

[W]hat are you going to get apart from being racist and moral panics about immigration, and my mum and dad read The Sun... LMF

[I]t's almost like they make it as awkward as possible and I am sure it's for statistical purposes, because as long as you are not registered as having that benefit then that looks better for them that there are fewer people on these benefits. So that's why we must be all working and doing really well and that looks better for government statistics, so I am sure that it must be something like that is the reason that they just really have to drag things out. LMC

But what I found really interesting from this course [was] that all my life experiences I had up until that point, since 2000 – 2008, were in that course. So what I found was what I was really doing was putting a theory into my life experience. LMP

It is reflexive as she applies the course knowledge to her life. It is also intrinsic at the same time, as she has entered education for personal gratification.

There is more to this ‘structural discrimination’, as LMP calls it. She is applying theory to her life and at the same time she is reasoning with herself as to ‘how it happened’ and ‘why these things happened’. *[Y]ou know this patriarchal system needs to change*’ LMP. Note the language; of course, she is doing an undergraduate degree in social studies.

I’m thinking for myself, I’m doing the course here, I’m learning about the nature of discrimination, I’m still dealing with it on a personal level. LMP

[A]bsolutely disgraceful; the systematic demolition of the public sector is a disgrace. I think that David Cameron needs locking up. I think that the way they are trying to maintain the traditional family and put women back in the kitchen thing, you know, but this child benefit thing it just maddens me... LMP

‘*More purely and simply ideological...*’ This is an example of the language that LMP has picked up from her course.

I would really like to work with the empowerment of women in areas of abuse. There are different types of abuse. Yeah, that’s what I would really like to do, because that is how I have based my whole degree on kind pulling apart the patriarchy system and offering the feminist perspective in its place. In this degree you can focus on whatever you want really, but for me, probably because of my own personal experiences, that’s what I have done. Pull apart the patriarchy system, say what’s wrong with it, and say ‘look’ instead of competing with each other. LMP

It’s has given me the insight to know why things are the way they are, you know, the underlying attitude of the structure, the social structure, you know, the fact that they think that if you are on welfare this is kind of a residual thing. LMP

LMP’s study has helped her to understand the treatment she has been receiving. Later on I found her and other lone mothers in the data talking about education as an ‘armour’ which has given them a sense of ‘determination’ and ‘empowerment’.

I have gained a little bit of armour coz I know why it has also helped me, coz we have done a lot on welfare and I have loads of experience on the welfare system; it kind a made me more determined really to get off it [...] it’s empowerment [...] separating myself from it, emotionally it has helped me mainly.

5.5.2.3 Single Mum as Feminist

The study found a lot of optimistic, determined talk from lone mothers on being a single mother. They stressed their ‘independence’, the positivity surrounding them and

‘women’s empowerment’. It is quite opposite to the labels discussed in much of the literature on lone mothers.

I very much do like being a single mum and I am happy with my life as a single mum, and I send a positive message to my girls that you can be an independent woman and you can succeed. LMC

LMC expressed happiness attached to her being single as it helps her make her own decisions and it also helped her to apply for university admission. She mentioned that her husband was not cooperative and was also not keen on her or their daughters’ [mother to three girls, no boy] education. Now after her divorce from her husband she feels ‘empowered’:

So I have a different opinion of what a parent’s role is towards their children, which was one of the main reasons why I left him, because I didn’t have that support and I did want to come back to education and I did want to have a career and I couldn’t do it with a husband so had to do it by myself with three children [laughs] and it’s working for me. LMC

And from a women’s empowerment perspective, this is my house and I am quite financially independent and I like that. LMP

These themes of ‘empowerment’, things being more ‘worthwhile’, ‘independence’, ‘armour’, ‘social structure’, ‘ideology’ and ‘patriarchy’, were strikingly expressed by LMP as ‘putting a theory into my life experience’. They add to the notion of ‘intrinsic’ motivation by giving it a political meaning as a kind of emancipation that is also implicitly feminist, although that last term did not often appear explicitly in the data. An optimistic reading of that might be that this was feminism-by-practice rather than theory.

5.6 Support

This theme covered a number of areas as the women saw support as meaning different things: their tutors provided support, there were the issues of financial support and childcare support, and other supportive factors, such as counselling services and friends. All of these are discussed below.

5.6.1 Tutors as Support Network

Tutors in general have been reported as ‘approachable’, ‘understanding’ and ‘flexible’. Lone mothers in the study expressed positive views about their tutors being helpful in regards to childcare needs or other last-minute changes.

I got me personal tutor who is like dead nice [...] He is quite approachable.
LMK

I don't have to come here so I can meet up with him... we will have our session in a café or somewhere when it's convenient for me, so he is quite understanding and flexible in that way. LMC

Tutors were found generally to be quite empathetic towards the women in the study. If lone mothers needed an extension, which most of them did during their studies, personal tutors or tutors from their respective courses were helpful in providing these, since they knew about the women's childcare commitments.

Sometimes they know if you're a parent as well because you get talking to them in lectures and I've had a couple of extensions and they have not asked me for a medical note or something. They said it's fine because they know that it is either something to do with the children or they know that you have got other demands. LMF

As an undergrad you had a personal tutor [that] you had for a certain year and they get to know you and they say, 'How are you?' and you say, 'Oh, I am alright, but I've got problems with the kids' and they are really, really nice and they always email you back, straight away. My personal tutor was lovely and he emailed me back at weekends, always really nice, and if you need an extension, he gives you an extension. When I did my undergrad dissertation, which was on education in university, and I interviewed three students from the Sociology course, and one of them was my friend who was a single parent and she said, when I said, 'What would you change?', she said 'I would get automatic extensions for single parents'. I think people need to realise that we have got a lot more to deal with than the average student, who's got no children. LMF

Thus, lone mothers were generally appreciative of the support that they received from their tutors, and were full of praise for them. Through the interview data I found that tutors were regarded as an important point of contact for lone mothers to share personal information. It seemed obvious as tutors were available and alert to listen to lone mothers and also had the power to extend an assignment deadline.

I had arranged with my tutor when I finished at 3. If at 3 you are not finished, I am leaving anyway because I have to pick up the children from school, so I would just get up and walk out. LMC

They are very supportive. Either placement or in university, they say, 'You need to go, go, just let us know'. LMN

[V]ery understanding [and] absolutely brilliant without doubt. LMV

[H]e [tutor] always says to me family comes first. LMV

[The tutor says, 'D]on't worry about the deadlines, you'd rather give in a decent piece of work than be stuck to a deadline', so, so I don't feel guilty.

LMC also found her tutor receptive towards her, especially when her husband and children had a terrible road accident

...my ex-husband lost his job, crashed his car, lost his driving licence and had a car crash with the children in which the other man was killed. All this happened in the space of a week and it was very traumatic time for us all as a family, so I emailed the tutor and said that, 'Can I get an extension for a week?' and she just emailed me back, 'Oh, yeah'... we still had that home in Worcester and we were up and down and she said, 'I can't believe that you do all that and you are still managing to come to uni and you are still coping and all you want is a week.' [Both laugh] LMC

In one case the tutor had gone to the extent of dividing the coursework for LMP from two years to three years after the death of LMP's father, as she needed some extra time to do the coursework.

[S]plit the third year between two years [...], giving me a deadline to finish [...], really flexible and understanding and really, really good [...], nobody said, 'No, sorry, you can't do it'. LMP

[S]he [tutor] helped me all the way through, she helped me stay in the first year, she helped me to finish it really. She made it realistic for me, she gave me realistic targets with my circumstances to finish it and complete it, and she has been fantastic... LMP

For one of the doctoral students in the research, a change in the Director of Studies had a reverse effect in her performance. She lost interest in the research.

She [previous tutor] went to another university, you know, it was terrible at the time. We became almost friends and she was very cooperative and she helped me a lot. And she was very quick and efficient, whenever she was, you know. I can't say much about her except praise because she was very, very good, and she was helping me a lot with my work and my research proposal at the time. I was very quick at that time and she was very appreciative but after that, the change of supervisors and change of circumstances, that was not.... I lost interest in my research with the change of supervisor. LMS

Such support was not universal, although criticisms like these were uncommon. There was one incident reported by one of participants where one of her tutors was not so cooperative towards her. The tutor made her feel that she ‘should balance’ her work and her child ‘on her head’ and that it was the lone mother’s responsibility to manage her family and her studies. There was ‘no practical understanding’ of her situation.

I had no support, no help... [poor] attitude from this tutor. LMP

5.6.2 Financial Support

In this section I quote extensively from LMK in order to illustrate what was obviously a highly complex range of possible supports. Her case is not untypical; the account reflects fragmentation of support and resources and the difficulties of accessing information, and was quite general across the board.

I get income support and my council tax is paid still because I am still a student and the kids get free school dinners, so I also get a bus pass.’ LMC

LMK: I get like a bursary and like a NHS bursary. I get a small maintenance loan like a student loan and I am due to get that in September but, yeah, that’s all really, and I don’t have to pay me council tax and that’s brilliant really. I’ve just got me rent and ordinary bills about me. The bursary covers the majority of that and I can claim any travel which is like more than coming to uni.

R: And how about your housing and maintenance? Are all these paid through a bursary?

LMK: Yeah, I get child tax credit for me little boy and child benefit as well.

When I conducted the first interview, LMK was only a few months into her course at the university and she expressed that she was managing financially. However, when I met her a year later she had a different story to tell.

I would see that, mostly financially, that’s been hard, and sort of like a difficult thing really, just trying to like manage on my bursary, really.

I just get over 800 pounds a month but my outgoings are just probably over 600 really, so it ends up that if I need anything or if Jamie needs something it puts all the budget out then. I have ended up being fallen out [in debt]; that’s quite difficult, really.

And then we see that she goes to student welfare and has two different experiences.

[F]irst time they lent me some money straightaway, which was quite good of them, which I haven’t paid back, yet. But then when I went back to speak

to them, the lady was nice and everything but she [was] a bit abrupt with me, for which I was quite upset.

She was going to apply for the Access to Learning Fund; however, in her words, ‘*just the way she was with me so I thought that I can’t be bothered.*’ Later on, she gets into much deeper financial worries.

I got to the point that now I got that much debt that it got piled up that I reached a point that I had to go ask them [student welfare], that I had to apply for the Access to Learning Fund.

LMK faces pressure from her child in regards to not being as financially generous as she was when working:

His problem is money, that he doesn’t understand that prior to doing this course I worked, and it wasn’t exceptionally well paid but it was quite a well-paid [job] that I was in.

He plays [football] and if he needs football boots or a kit or anything I was in a position that I could just go out and buy, but now I can’t do that anymore, and I don’t think that he can quite understand that your money can only sort of stretch so far. LMK

Thus, what we understand from LMK’s financial worries is that she takes the status of ‘student as a job’ but it is not a well-paid job. LMC calls it ‘living in poverty’. What is the official definition of poverty? In the UK, a household is defined as living in poverty if its income is below 60% of the median income. Median income has apparently declined by 6% (Bradshaw and Main, 2013), making poverty an even more testing condition.

LMN also gets financial support from her parents.

It’s sad, but my family do help me top up the rent. I am paying £580 for the rent. The housing benefit pays me £420.’

The childminder was charging me £10 per hour. There is a friend who was looking after my baby, she was taking £10 - 15 per day. A day means for 4-5 hours. She was bit cheaper but she is not always available; the child minder is always available but she is charging more £10 per hour – costs me more, costs me a fortune. LMS

LMV’s course fee is paid by the university and she receives a bursary for her son’s nursery fee. She is also ‘guaranteed’ a job as a paramedics at the end of her course, a singular advantage among the lone-mother respondents.

They pay 80% of it [nursery fee], which is helpful because the fee is nearly 800 pounds a month. LMV

We are guaranteed a job if we pass the interview and there are places for [us], which they promised us in the beginning. LMV

In the upcoming sections I aim to address the findings related to support. As discussed earlier, some of the lone mothers do not feel ‘lonely’ or even ‘alone’ as they have family and friends around who share some of their responsibilities. The interview data gave a picture of the support networks that these lone mothers have. The first and foremost element of them are childcare.

5.6.3 Childcare Support

The majority of women from the data relied on their family for childcare. Childcare involved ‘pick ups’ and ‘drop offs’ to and from school, spending nights at grandparents or asking sisters to stay with the child/children overnight during exams or as when they had to submit coursework.

My mum helps me. When I am in university, she picks him up from school. She gives him tea and if [he] sometimes have a guitar lesson at her house then I come back from university, pick him up, come home.... So it's similar to two years ago, still mum is helping me out, still single parent, still focusing on education. LMF

And my mum and dad are quite good and they help out in picking the kids up from school on Monday and Thursday. I said, 'I finish uni at 5' so my mum and dad pick them up and give them their tea and I get home at 6. LMC

My mum is teaching. She lives, works, on the other side of the water, Pleasant Street School, which is just round the corner from here. So sometimes I would get a lift. In the first year I used to come over with my mum in the morning and my dad would have the car and take the children to school and back, and I would come over with my mum in the morning and get a lift with her. LMC

Around the exam time that's quite hard the pressure is hard. The girls are eating their breakfast and there are piles of books. They get a bit tense, but I had exams last year and the year before I went to stay at my mum's for a couple of days. I just had that little extra space to focus on study. LMC

LMP states that her ‘sister is brilliant’, because she will come and look after her daughter so that she can ‘sit down properly and focus on writing’.

It changes when exams have happened. He is more with my mum so when the workload is crazy, at the end of year three, when I was writing exams

and my coursework was due in, he was more at my mum's house, whether I asked him or whether he wanted to or not. He had to go for extra nights there because I just had to do all of the work. LMF

I couldn't cope without my mum. LMF

LMF's mother does a lot of the school run, and when LMF had a 9 am lecture her son spent the night at her mother's house so that LMF could get to her lecture on time.

For lone mothers on placements, such as LMV and LMK, they also had to work night shifts in hospitals, and that meant that family members would spend the night with their children. In LMK's case her sister provides this support, whereas in LMV's case her mother or sister would look after the child during her placements.

If I have to do a late and haven't asked to do any night shifts, but when that happens and I've got to do that, my sister will come and stay. LMK

I live with my mum at the moment, I did live away [... I] had severe depression so moved back to my mum's. LMV

I've got more support from my mum than I probably would have from a partner. LMV

[H]e [son] is nearly two and [there are] too many people around him. LMV

[M]y mum, if I am on working shifts, which we do on the ambulance, my mum will take him and pick him up, so she is great help. LMV

I think I am a great mother [...], he's well looked after, he is fed well and he is cared for, he plays well. [...] Harry, you know, is looked after; it's not me, it's my whole family unit. I think I am a good mum because of my family unit as well. LMV

In contrast, international students and other women of British nationality belonging to minority ethnic groups had less family support as their extended family members were not resident in the UK. LMN's case, which specifically addresses the issues of lone mothers without parents or extended family in the UK, is highlighted below. LMN's mother and brother even used to fly from Egypt to help her out with childcare. They used to take turns to support her.

Although they are all in Egypt, they all take turns: my mum goes, my brother comes, my brother goes, my other brother comes. LMN

Before starting the course she had friends and family pushing her to get into education, but when she started her education she needed physical help for her child. I can relate

to her experience, as I invited my father a couple of times and my mother once on visitor visa to help me with childcare as I needed to focus on the PhD. It did not turn out as anticipated as my father is in his early 70s and my mother is in her mid-60s. They could not cope with the weather and used to become unwell, so I had to take time off to look after them. However, this may not be the case with LMN as her mother and brother had no health issues and so were able to help her out.

I had lots of support from my friends and family to do this because I had no energy, brain-wise, I was so stressed. LMN

A childminder was the solution for a lone mother from an ethnic minority.

No nursery was accepting him. When he was eight weeks old, the nursery refused to take him [...]. I took six months off from university when he was seven months old. Then I went to university and hired a childminder for him. LMS

Now I am a bit used to it that Ahmed is going to a childminder, although I am a bit worried when I leave him. It's always hard to leave him, when I saw him crying after me and [Tears started to roll out of her eyes]. LMS

LMTs from the extended case studies explained that since her daughters were old enough to look after themselves at home she did not need a child minder, whereas, for LMH either she or the child's nursery provided the childcare; she did not have any family members or friends to help her with it. She eventually dropped out of college to care for her child.

One lone mother placed a lot of stress on her friend being her most important support in continuing with the studies. They planned their studies together and LMA cannot envisage doing the course without the support of her friend.

5.6.4 Other Forms of Support

5.6.4.1 Counselling Services in University

It is worth noting here that, although lone mothers from ethnic minorities expressed feelings of isolation (discussed later in the chapter) and had less support for childcare from family or friends, they were grateful for counselling services. A typical evaluation:

Positive thing in the university was the counselling service in the university. I went to see the counselling service in the university.... When I was

stressed... I felt a lot of anxiety and I went and used the counselling service and I think that they are a really, really good provision for the university to have... LMF

5.6.4.2 Friends

Interview data revealed that friends helped one another in sharing information, mostly electronically, through emails or other electronic sources. Lone mothers also carried out cooperative learning; however, this is mostly true for women on placements, as they used to spend a great deal of time together doing similar work throughout the week and thus interacted much more than other lone mothers. It is mainly these lone mothers who have reported some interactions, sharing and networking.

[W]e got a little Facebook group, a cohort, we've got a student rep. He is alright and he organises like some nights out and some like days out and stuff, but I am gonna like try like going to all that and getting involved a bit. But, yeah, just like that really, we have our own little Facebook. LMK

We [classmates] all mix together and we all mingle with each other, none of us dislike anyone. We're a really good cohort. LMV

She has a network of friends which includes classmates also on placements with her, and they also carry out cooperative learning.

We had an exam the other week, so we all sat down and tested each other. I've got support from them as well. LMV

A couple of lone mothers emphasised the role of religion as a support for them. It is noteworthy that LMF points to 'the help' that religion offers and the important role it plays in providing support to her. However, she is not too particular about a specific religion.

I believe in God and stuff like that and pray to God and stuff like that, so I think that helps you sometimes, and my undergraduate friend she was Muslim and she was quite religious, so we had that in common. We were different religions but we were still religious and the other friend, Melena, who we were friends with, she was religious as well so, strangely, we gravitated [together] even though it's different religions... LMF

[C]hurch friends are actually here studying so it's nice to bump into them. LMM

As an undergrad my other friend was a mature student and she was a single parent, so she was in a more or less the same position, and we used to talk and it used to help us because we understood each other's situation. Both single parents, doing the same degree. Both had boys, similar age

and we had a lot in common. I used to speak to her. I don't know if anybody else would understand it. LMF

5.6.5 Positive Organisational Ethos

The majority of women felt Higher Education organisation was 'positive', 'child friendly', 'considerate' and 'flexible' in regards to domestic issues or welfare issues, and also helping out financially, by issuing small loans or grants to help them keep their heads above water.

[The o]rganisation has been brilliant, absolutely brilliant. LMP

Lovely women [welfare advisor] there in IM Marsh [...] helped me to apply for financial help. LMP

I spoke to the module leader and said, 'Look, can I swap group', so that is all. My lecture finishes in time to pick her [daughter] up. LMM.

Again, the above quotation illustrates the flexible nature of the organisation.

I think it's a very working class university. It's very inclusive, it's diverse. Where sometimes I get the impression with [pre-1992 university] is that it's a bit snooty and a bit snobby [laughs], so we decided to stay here. LMF [Interviewed 2012, at that time she had been at university for four years].

In this section I have focused on the findings relating to the 'positive ethos of the organisation', and now turn to a less positive response: to 'skill classes' not being organised during the daytime. These skills-based courses focused on things like 'Harvard referencing', 'IT skills' or 'how to use specific software', and were run during the evenings. It is the time of day when lone mothers have to be settled at home with their children and the children are either getting ready for tea or are too tired to accompany their mothers to these classes.

I know there are classes that I could go to do Access, databases or do other stuff [but t]hey are all in the evening and I can't go to them because I got kids and stuff. LMC

[T]hose skill classes, you know. How to write dissertation and improve IT skills, that kind of thing? They all seem to be in the evening and around tea time, and it's just an impossible time for me. It would be better for me if they had [them] during the day. LMC

There were also some other limitations. However, in respect of the interview data, women generally expressed the flexible and considerate side of their institute. They

considered that libraries were child-friendly and allowed their children to accompany them during the usual working days and also during the summer holidays.

I've had not had anyone look after her and I have spoken to the lecturer and asked them that, if I could bring her [daughter] in the lecture, and they said yes. LMM.

This quotation again shows the flexibility offered by university staff.

One exceptional case was highly critical of her university's management, where she did not expect much from the university.

I wouldn't expect anything off the uni...it's, I think it's badly managed... maybe because it's the cheapest way to run a course [that matters most]. LMA.

Nevertheless, most of the lone mothers expressed the positive ethos of the institutes in which they were studying.

5.7 Boundaries

Across the interview data lone mothers compared themselves with younger students. They described themselves as mature, 'not necessarily into drinking', 'grounded', 'responsible', 'think about the future', 'go to the library, you get your books and then you go home' 'attend mature student society' and highlighted the 'age difference'. As we saw, lone mothers in the study treated studies as serious 'work'.

The quotes below explain the 'boundary' that lone mothers perceived between themselves and fellow students. It is a self-created social isolation, or self-created boundary. They look at themselves as the people they were before they had children and thus this is something that they are not now. Putting it in LMC's words:

Anyways having children is very, very good for me because it grounds me. When I was in university first, you know, I had no responsibility and just nothing to stop me from going out drinking and partying and all that kind of thing. And nothing, just me going anywhere, children focus you, make you think about your future, what you want or not. You know you have to because you have such responsibility to them, so you can't go out drinking and you have to think about the future because you have to think about them... LMC

He [her son] made it very hard but it's bound to be hard when you got a child, coming to uni and plus being alone is even harder. It's not changed the experience, well it has changed the whole fresher's week and things like, but to be honest it sort of like grounded me a bit more so I am able to go home and study more. LMV.

I am not going to crazy pub and get plastered. LMM

Whereas they explain the younger fellow students as 'pub crazy', the 'Facebook generation' and as 'quite irritating'.

R: Do you socialise with your classmates?

LMF: No, because they are all so much younger. I socialised a little bit but we never went to pubs or anything like the younger ones because they go back to the halls and then they go out drinking. When you are a parent you go home after lectures or you go to the library, you get your books and then you go home because you got to get back to your children. We socialise and we meet up for lunch, maybe three of us, have lunch... that would be it, nothing else for a few months, or we would send emails and things like that, so we kept in touch more than going out type thing.

For lone mothers on placements it is a different experience as their time in the university is divided between placements and coursework, and so the course is a small part of their student experience, as much of their time is spent on placements in the health sector. This keeps them rather separate from the rest of the student body.

We are not like a proper university course because we are paid to do it. It doesn't feel like we are students because we are only in two days and it's not a heavy study. LMV

During their days off from their placements, they visit libraries to print off their work or borrow books. For LMK during busy days, it is hard for her to get hold of a computer, and she sees younger students as the ones to blame.

I find the Facebook quite annoying; if you want to use it go home or use your mobile phone. Please don't use the computers that are for people who want to study. They are not there for social networking and having a cup of tea with your mates. I am like too old for being a student. I am 30 now, so I think a lot of that Facebook generation is wasted on me really. LMK

I don't actually have much of a social life, to be honest. LMK

I don't go out drinking or anything but just with household bills and problems with the car and the... you have to pay out, things like that... so money is going quite fast. LMF

Isolation of lone mother students from the rest of the student body seems to be based on factors of age, time, maturity and circumstances, as discussed above. It is almost a self-created isolation in the case of LMC. This is quite common in the interview data. Lone mothers have socially isolated themselves from the others.

Yes, I had another friend, Samiya. She was a lot younger and she was 21, so she will be like....what...22 now, but she was very much mature. She was with me and Lisa, who were in our thirties. There was another girl, Helena, and she was very mature for her age as well, so us four, we tended to get on very well. The rest of the people in the class, we spoke to them and we talked to them in lectures and stuff, but I don't know that we had much in common with them because they were busy going out drinking and we were not necessarily into drinking. LMF

Like last year there was my other friend who was a single parent, same age, with a boy and I could talk to her because she had a very similar situation to me. Without her I think I would have felt more isolated, definitely more isolated. This year on the Master's degree there are more mature students. There is another girl who is 25. She hasn't got kids but she is pregnant with a baby. There is another guy, he is about 40, and he's got two kids, and couple of other people who are in their 30s, so there are more older students, so I feel fine, but I think that if I was the only one, like the only mature student or the only single parent, I think I would feel more isolated. LMF

5.7.1 Personal Isolation/Depression

Personal isolation and depression are quite common among lone mothers in the study. For women from minority ethnic groups the isolation came from not having family around or support to deal with things, and there was also a lack of moral support for respondents such as LMH, LMN and LMS. It was also harder for them to recover from depression.

I know that I have to take care of my baby alone so I think that I am alone. When I was in Pakistan I took alone....my baby alone to Chillas with my sister, it's not a safe area. You know Swat area, there is war or something, and it is very close to Chillas. I had only three months there and I had to spend it in Chillas in my field, so he [husband] was not agreeing to come along with me. I took my sister with me and she used to keep my son in the hotel and I used to go and collect data. He was not helpful and so I don't expect much from him; if he is not supporting me this time, then what will he do next time? LMS

For LMS depression is related to her being 'alone' without the so-called partner. She uses the word 'alone' four times in one small paragraph. For LMH (see Chapter 4) it was the unexpected birth of a child after being raped. LMN also had depression for

years after her divorce from her husband; she used words like ‘lost everything’ (discussed earlier in the chapter).

Now I feel that I need to do more socialising and need to meet more people to come out of this, you know, you can say, this drama. Because I am not studying and I can't study at home, so if Ahmed sees me that I am distressed, he becomes distressed and that makes me more depressed. So I try to socialise with people but, yes, there is a difference that people are saying that, 'You were very happy and what happened to you?' LMS

For other lone mothers there was depression rather than isolation. For example, LMF had continuous depression and was on medicine. LMV had depression caused by living alone and so she moved back to her mother's residence. LMA reported a severe case of depression throughout her life, probably because she was brought up in care homes. LMP lost her father and became pregnant during her studies and so felt depressed. We find that almost all lone mothers went through depression and isolation through their student life, although this is not to contradict their more positive statements. Perhaps I need to think about lone motherhood as an emotional roller-coaster (see Bibi-Nawaz, 2012 Appendix K).

In this chapter I have discussed lone motherhood, the role of the father, children, Higher Education motivations: extrinsic and intrinsic; the determinations, vertical dimension, support networks and boundaries. The next chapter provides the thesis's conclusions, future research and recommendations.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter I intend to discuss the research objectives in relation to the findings, address some of the changes that were made to them i.e. during the course of the research study, and explore the new knowledge that has been produced by this study. Recommendations for future work are presented at the end of the chapter.

The overall aim of this study was to report the lived experiences of lone-mother students. A holistic approach has been used to understand these experiences, and, in order to achieve the aim of this study, some initial objectives were established:

1. To examine lone mothers' experiences in undertaking Higher Education, paying particular attention to the relationship between personal circumstances and educational attainment.
2. To explore current provision for socio-economic support within Higher Education¹.

The above objectives were achieved, as both chapters five and six highlight lone mothers' experiences and their relationships with their children, extended family, friends and with education itself. The socio-economic support has also been discussed at length in earlier chapters. Thus, it is more important here to say something explicit about the 'new knowledge' and the changes that affected the study.

What changes were there in the research design, as it was implemented over time? As discussed in the Methodology chapter, it proved extremely hard to locate and recruit lone mothers. Only one group interview was conducted and thus the initial aim of conducting more group interviews was dropped. Many different strategies were employed to recruit participants. Snowballing was also used, as suggested in research on lone mothers (Standing, 1993). However, it did not prove effective and thus I started trying other sampling techniques for recruiting them, such as leafleting outside

¹ There was a third objective at the beginning of the study. It was decided to give that objective less of a priority and to concentrate on a longitudinal understanding of the 'lone mother' experience and its various and complex contexts.

libraries and different departments, putting notices up on different student notice boards in the universities, emailing faculty members at the institutions to help spread the ‘recruitment call’ (see Appendix A and B), and sending out emails to students through student unions. This approach was initially helpful, as some lone mothers emailed me expressing their interest. However, only a few were recruited through this process. Many of the lone mothers showed interest through Mature Student Society events (see Chapter Two) and were thus recruited. The data gathered from the 13 participants was rich and it provided an opportunity to explore the issues surrounding lone mothers in Higher Education in considerable depth and over a long period of time. It enabled me to produce detailed cases that brought the experiences, provision of support and relationships to the surface. It also gave me a better chance to conduct more than one interview with the same participants and also interview them again after a year, or in some cases up to four years after the initial interview. In this way a range of interviews were conducted meeting lone mothers at various stages in their trajectory, from being new to the university to almost reaching the end, and in some cases like LMV, LMTs, LMH and LMC even after the course had been finished.

So today I just got last little jewel to finish by Friday this week and I have done it. You know, I can kind of sit back and look at what I have achieved, look what I have done and be proud. LMP.

[I hope to feel the same!]

The iterative nature of this kind of ethnographic approach – adapted from Spradley (1979), Reissman (1993, 2002, 2008), Stronach (2010) and Bibi-Nawaz (2016), etc. – also helped develop in-depth knowledge about the relationships that these lone mothers share with their children, studies and also with others.

The depth, range and longitudinal nature of the data allowed me to see contradictions or contrasts in the data (e.g. extrinsic/intrinsic motivations), as well as changes and developments over time (anxiety/self-esteem). Such data meant that initial theorisations could be modified (e.g. intrinsic/extrinsic → ‘vertical’/‘horizontal’ motivations). They also enabled emerging theories and concepts to develop and to be tested over time (e.g. ‘modelling’, ‘utopian’ narratives). Thus, the ethnographic approach enriched the possibilities of ‘grounded’ theorising, and also improved the possibilities of extending previous studies such as Osborne, (2004), Wainwright and Marandet (2010) and Hinton-Smith (2012).

The approach enabled me to narrate changes of heart. For example, LMS felt at one point that she would not be able to complete her PhD as her priority had to be her child, *'I have no interest in studies now because I am more busy with my child to think about his.....as I am alone now'*. However, we see that she has recently passed her PhD viva exam. These stories were formed and revelatory because of a much more interactive and empathetic connection created over time between the interviewees and myself. We stayed in touch after the interviews and, since I was also a student at the university, we used to bump into each other and catch up. Thus, casual interaction helped fill in the gaps between more formal interviewing.

6.2 'New' Knowledge and 'Originality'

There are at least five claims which can be made for the 'new knowledge' criterion that this study has added to the literature and research surrounding lone mothers, as elaborated on later in this chapter. At the beginning of this study the literature review and the 'preliminary' research highlighted that there had been scant research conducted on 'lone mothers in Higher Education', especially using an ethnographic interviewing approach. Since then, Hinton-Smith (2012) has conducted a 12-month, email-based dialogue with lone mothers in Higher Education. Thus, it became clear how rich and extended the data was. It became an emerging priority to develop detailed case studies, an aspect that was not part of the original research intention. It was also felt that the policy arena was not likely to offer new insights. Nevertheless, the case studies provide telling details on policy as perceived by the women. Furthermore, as will be discussed later, the women's knowledge of these various supports varied considerably. However, useful as Hinton-Smith's study is, it involves no face-to-face interactions and it is much less longitudinal than this ethnographic account. As a result its theorising of motivations is largely restricted to an intrinsic/extrinsic dichotomy.

Phillips and Pugh (2005) have drafted 15 definitions as markers to check the originality claims in a doctoral research project. It would thus be wise to explore these definitions and see which have been fulfilled in this research project, as Khir (2014) did in his thesis (see Table 6.1 below).

Table 6.1: Checking the Originality of this Research based on Phillips and Pugh's (2005) Markers

1	Setting down a major piece of new information in writing for the first time.	At the beginning of this research literature was reviewed and it confirmed that there had been little qualitative work done on lone mother students in Higher Education.
2	Continuing a previously original piece of work.	N/A
3	Carrying out original work designed by the supervisor.	N/A
4	Providing a single original technique, observation or result in an otherwise unoriginal but competent piece of research.	N/A
5	Having many original ideas, methods and interpretations all performed by others under the direction of the postgraduate.	N/A
6	Showing originality in testing somebody else's idea.	N/A
7	Carrying out empirical work that has not been done before.	It contains knowledge about various minority groups who are living in their lives as lone mothers. Their stories are brought to the surface, reflected on, and analysed.
8	Making a synthesis that has not been made before.	N/A

9	Using already known material but with a new interpretation.	Data on mature female students is usually analysed in terms of 'intrinsic' and 'extrinsic' dichotomies (Osborne, 2004). In extension of this I offered a 'vertical' versus 'horizontal' scheme and the notion of 'vertical modelling'.
10	Trying out something in Britain that has previously only been done abroad.	Much research has been done in the USA on single mothers in Higher Education (Weikert, 2014; Helen, 2004; Nelson, 2009; McMullan, 2012). However, this has not been the case in the UK.
11	Taking a particular technique and applying it in a new area.	Reflexivity has been a resource for qualitative studies for some time. However, developing a 'reciprocal reflexivity' between student and supervisors is a new departure in this field.
12	Bringing new evidence to bear on an old issue.	See 9.
13	Being cross-disciplinary and using different methodologies.	This study is interdisciplinary in nature as it involves Education and Social Science.
14	Looking at areas that people in the discipline have not looked at before.	Lone-mothers-as-students accessing Education is rarely looked at as part of a qualitative research project. It has mainly occurred as part of bigger

		projects where lone-mother students were interviewed in small numbers. This research project is different as it looks specifically at lone mothers as students in Education and Health, taking into account longitudinal and contextual factors.
15	Adding to knowledge in a way that has not been done before.	The study fills a gap in understanding of developing relations between poverty and employment.

Thus, the research has the following five claims for a new contribution to the body of knowledge.

6.2.1 ‘Empirical’ Knowledge

It contains knowledge about various minority groups who are living their lives as lone mothers. Their stories are brought to the surface.

6.2.2 Grounded Theoretical Approach

A complex lone motherhood context sits around their life experiences, their children, their studies, etc. The more we enquired into that, the more we found that lone mothers’ status was not the most important thing in many of the women’s lives. Other grounded notions included the ‘vertical’/‘horizontal’ motivations, as well as ‘vertical’ modelling’ in the parent/child relationship.

6.2.3 Lone Motherhood Concept

The lone motherhood ‘phenomenon’: the question ‘What is a lone mother?’ is not something that you start with, it is something that you end up with.

In broadly right-wing newspapers, LMT fits the perfect scenario where a ‘lone mother’ of 12 children has lived most of her life on benefits. In that kind of context lone motherhood has become a bit of a favourite media sound bite. That circumstance is clearly noticed by LMJW and also by LMF and LMP. A lone mother is a sort of ideological target in a neo-liberal world which is full of ‘immigrants’ and ‘benefit scroungers’.

People expect you to fit in a box: you are disabled, you are a single mother and a student, you can't be all of them and it's like I am all of them. LMJW

They [council] make you out to be some sort of fraud or criminal, you know'; [I]t's almost like being called 'benefit scroungers'. LMC

Another problem is that conceptually the notion of ‘lone motherhood’ cannot be taken for granted. At times the concept steps forward in lone mothers’ lives, sometimes it steps back, and in some cases it disappears as well. In the case of LMJW it disappeared as disability issues took over, at least in the sequence of interviews that I conducted with her. In LMH’s case lone motherhood is a fairly small feature. At least, it is not something that can be defined. It does not have a core or central meaning which can join all the different aspects; it is very disparate. It follows that the initial research design for this study had to be changed. The identification of ‘objectives’ and the search for a ‘definition’ of lone motherhood implied an initially unacknowledged positivism of the research rationale and method. However, it became clear as the data accumulated that an ethnographic approach required less initial certainty and a willingness to encourage focus and issues to emerge. Part of this conclusion would be that a study that starts off with the ‘lone mother’ as a single focus is in danger of the same kind of labelling that it later seeks to criticise.

It was earlier argued that Malthus/Marx/Weber and Murray were ghosts that stalked lone mother debates. I selected them because they established, historically, a moral and political polarity between morality and politics, individualism and collectivism, family and society, autonomy and responsibility. These dichotomies made up a frame on which to locate the ‘lone mother’ phenomenon. It is in the gaps, spaces, and connections between these various strands that the ‘lone mother’ is constructed and judged.

‘Lone mother’ was a label rejected by most of the respondents, who often felt that ‘lone’ pointed towards ‘lonely’. In several of the cases, they were not at all alone and had extensive support. That support could range across family, friends, former partner (very occasional), ex-partner’s parents, neighbours (occasionally) as well as fellow students and other lone mothers, and also take in formal provision in institutions – like the counsellor and personal tutor.

Dylan’s got his dad’s family, who are really good with him, so that’s good as well. So I’ve got a lot of support, so I am lucky in this sense as well.

LMV

As we saw, support networks were very important. They were of two kinds, looking back at the data in Chapter Four and Chapter Five. These were emergencies like child’s illness, getting class times wrong, lone mother’s illness and child’s behavioural issues in school. Additionally, there were ‘normal’ supports, like end of school pick-ups and drop-offs, after school clubs or holidays. As a result, there was a very wide spectrum of experiences involved in being a ‘lone mother’. It could even be a preference – or it could be seen as a stigma, as we saw.

Sometimes people just see me with... Jamie calling me mum and have been looking at me and must be thinking that, ‘That girl must have had him when she was 10 or something’ so, you know. LMK

Nor was the label really improved by renaming strategies. As studies of race suggest, names can cross a range of descriptors – ‘coloured’, ‘black’, ‘African-American’, ‘person of colour’, etc., but in the end there is a very temporary relief. Each succeeding label inherits eventually the underlying stigma and stereotype which is structural rather than semantic. Labels for the ‘disabled’ show the same tendency (Stronach and Allan, 1997). Therefore, it is not surprising that semantic markers like ‘lone’, ‘single’, ‘solo’ are subject to the same problems. The deeper problem is the negative labelling underneath, though several of the respondents were spirited in defence of their way of life.

Yet reality is very different from stereotype as the women tell their story. The lone mothers in the sample ‘worked’ longer hours than many of the employed. They were incredibly busy, pressured but ambitious for the future, waking up early in the morning, as LMF and LMS remind us: ‘*Typical day is get up 7 o’clock, get ready....*’ (LMF);

'Get up at 5.30am for prayers' (LMS). In a recent study, Hinton-Smith (2012) reached similar conclusions about the gaps between stereotypes and realities.

6.2.4 Extrinsic/Intrinsic and Horizontal/Vertical Modelling

Theorising their lives and factors, I identified a 'horizontal' definition of the relationship between Higher Education and lone mothers. The UK government's target of pushing students into work and universities' targets are in-line, 'They [courses] must lead to jobs' (university targets). However, this did not appear to be in-line with the lone mothers' approach to Higher Education. As the data suggested, Higher Education was also seen as what I called a 'vertical dimension', which was concerned with self-esteem, self-motivation, empowerment, 'becoming a person'. In the data these themes were vividly depicted: 'positive, positive, positive' LMH and 'keep going, keep going, keep going' LMP

They also included 'vertical' commitments to education as an intrinsic 'good', including the political education of the student, the intrinsic nature of the subject or discipline, as well as 'modelling' such commitments to their children. This 'modelling' was an unexpected finding and was quite common in the data.

They are always cheering me on and asking lots of questions about university life [...] I can see that it's something that they are thinking about themselves. LMC

We began with the notions of extrinsic and intrinsic motivations, then we realised that this was too much of a dichotomy. Respondents often offered a mix of 'horizontal' (i.e. instrumental, job-oriented, career-concerned, or material incentives) and 'vertical' (i.e. intrinsic or expressive) motivations. Focus and priority changed within interviews, where apparently 'contradictory' motivations were expressed. Even more so, over time the motivational focus would shift. It was never very clear how 'real' or how 'rhetorical' these changes were. It certainly seemed that LMJW and LMT might be offering an 'official' story of a 'horizontal' exit to a paid job, perhaps thinking that this is the kind of 'ending' to their stories that I needed to hear. It is somewhat similar to LMJW's 'box' theory, where you are walled in. However, in reality we are never as structured as 'walls' are and never a definite self as a 'number' or single entity. The data provoked the thought that identities are not tangible and definable; rather, they are individualistic, complex and shifting in nature. Thus, lone mothers can have both

extrinsic and intrinsic motivations and so there was no one way of thinking about the ‘horizontal’ or the ‘vertical’ dimension in Higher Education. I found them doing both extrinsic and intrinsic talking. Hence, I thought about discussing initially extrinsic motivation and then about the ‘vertical’ dimension to Higher Education. The process almost felt like they were re-writing themselves.

I thought that the reason I am not getting a good job is because I don't have a degree, so I get a degree in three years and I get a good job, that's the end of it... LMF

In the above quote, LMF is talking about her plans to finish her undergraduate degree in three years' time and move into a 'good job'. However, she stayed on and applied for a Master's degree and here is her justification for this:

[O]f course since 2008 the economy has crashed and everything, so that's what led me to a round two of the degree thing. Maybe I need a Master's degree, stay on for the Master's degree.

Who wants to go to university for four years and borrow lots of money and then come out [and] maybe have to go and work in a supermarket? Who wants that to happen? Yes, there is a lot of anxiety and I do worry about it.

Here I note the Great Recession closing off perceived chances of a ‘horizontal’ exit to a ‘proper’ job, especially in regards to getting a ‘graduate-level’ job. It was noticeable that the North West universities with which we dealt were keen to publicise the percentage of graduates in employment after six months, but made no mention of the actual type of job.

...95.2% of its graduates in work or further study – higher than the national average. (University, 2014)

Some 240,000 students responded to the annual survey, conducted by the Higher Education Statistical Agency (HESA), which returned a national average of 92.1% of graduates in work or further study. (University, 2014)

As already reported, ‘modelling’ good attitudes and achievements to their children was an unexpected finding. So too was the notion of ‘student-as-job’. The ‘vertical’ rewards made some see being a student as intrinsically and financially – occasionally – a rewarding occupation, in contrast with the junk jobs of their past or the even more ‘bare’ existence on ‘benefits’. This was most vividly illustrated by LMF and LMA.

Work in retail jobs, McDonald's, cleaning jobs. I've done cleaning sometimes ago and it was so depressing that I had to go and clean others[' houses] and then come back and clean mine as well. LMF

Had job after job after job... rubbish jobs, lasted like a month or few months. LMA

Such a notion makes problematic the 'horizontal' and the 'vertical' axes of lone mother motivation since it joins them together in a kind of dialectic –each notion is separate but joins the other as in opposite poles. The concept of 'student-as-job' emerged quite strongly from the data. Their 'benefits' were higher, their 'employers' were flexible and generally sympathetic. The 'labour' was interesting and motivating. The 'rewards' were considerable, in terms of success, recognition and self-esteem. Therefore, the external and 'horizontal' motivation could be imported into the 'vertical' arena as 'student-as-job' and indeed as 'best job ever'. This might help explain the determination of some to stay in Higher Education and keep climbing the academic ladder.

6.2.5 Neo-liberal World and the Role of Education

There is a further deployment of the vertical/horizontal distinction. The cynical view of education in a neo-liberal world is that it is all about acquiring skill sets, soft skills and employability. Students, in this account, are highly instrumental. They are customers. They want to be paid in terms of level of awards. They see 'fees' as part of this economy, and consequent jobs as part of the rewards (Woodall, Hiller and Resnik, 2014). The data would identify and confirm that, to a small degree. However, there is, as we have seen, a stronger 'vertical' dimension. The theme here is emancipatory, but there is more to it than emancipatory – freed from the old self, realising that such interests are infused with notions such as 'empowerment', as well as a new critical language-'patriarchal system' by LMF and sometimes with actions such as LMT helping her child in her GCSE exams and also giving her essays to her older child to read, which could help her in her own studies.

[S]he [the daughter] has her GCSE coming up and she asked me if she can read my essays, and she liked them and said it's a big help. LMT

Thus, this was a kind of mutual benefit for the mother and the child, and part of the ‘modelling’ concept. As earlier suggested, ‘vertical modelling’ set off a ‘multiplier effect’ in the family, and both parent and child seemed to benefit.

Several theorists have pointed to the enduring difficulties in escaping the wider poverty trap. The ‘rubber band’ (Jenkins, 2008) effect suggested that escape was difficult, temporary and seldom final. In addition, the women’s attempts to ‘escape’ via HE had a certain utopian feel to them. Beck’s (1992) analysis of ‘risk’ might however suggest that the lower the socio-economic status, the higher the risk of enduring poverty, and also the lower the likelihood of cashing in that degree for an enduringly successful outcome. It was almost as if they had to end their narratives with a happy ending – proper job, degree, bigger house, garden, luxuries for the children, and so on. In that sense, they offered redemptive narratives. However, the indicators from the UK economy do not necessarily point to such positive outcomes.

Single mothers will be hit hardest as a group by the cap – constituting 59% of those affected will be aged between 25 and 44. (Guardian, 2015)

The respondents were aware of aspects of this financial dilemma:

Well, from like a working-class point of view I feel like it’s going to hit the poor students much harder and everybody else thinks that as well.... I just think that the middle-class people will be OK, but it might prevent working-class people from applying because they are just going to think that, ‘How am I ever going to pay that back. LMF

Only LMF and LMT articulated a certain sense of a future of enduring poverty, but I had the feeling that it was an underlying concern for quite a few of the respondents such as LMC, LMJW, etc.

6.2.6 Unhappy School Days: The Theme of Redemptive Narratives

I argued that these lone-mother stories were redemptive and even perhaps utopian. What were they redeeming themselves from? I have already shown the junk job/benefits face of their poverty, but it also had educational and psychological origins. School, for many, was an unhappy experience and knocked their self-esteem and provoked a notion of education as ‘not for the likes of us’, as LMF said: *‘I was very unhappy when I was at school... [It] was to do with my home circumstances and great*

upheaval there. There is also a failed school theme in LMK's story and also a failed relationship with her mother and her partner. Thus, I would like to argue that the 'vertical' dimension was redemptive. The data is clear about how fulfilling, motivating and rewarding the women's educational recovery had been. A concluding thought might be that for the lone mothers a 'vertical' redemption is much more likely than that 'horizontal' redemption wherein a good job or a better house in a nicer district is posited as an economic ending for their story.

... me attendance was not the best and that led to me [leaving] the school and I didn't get any GCSE or any qualification or... but me attendance wasn't high enough for them to enter me for exams, so they just didn't enter [me] for anything. LMK

Being a single parent [laugh] to a small baby and do an Archaeology degree, which in fact was hard – it was a lot going out on the site and things and taking a small child, as such, really hard. I left after one year. LMV.

Thus 'school failure', whatever the cause, was a common starting point for many of the lone-mother narratives. On the other hand, the contrast between those failures and their upward trajectories into Higher Education no doubt boosted their sense of achievement, and several pointed to a reinvention of the self, a new persona, as LMT puts it: 'becoming a person' rather than the woman with a pram.

6.3 Future Research and Recommendations

The study has brought out some of the intimate and detailed views and experiences of lone-mother students. This in-depth insight may form a basis of relevant knowledge in exploring support needs and issues surrounding lone mothers in Higher Education. The study will hopefully create a ripple effect to conduct further research into different aspects of lone-mother students in Higher Education.

Hinton-Smith's 'Internet research' (2012 p. 24) on lone parents' experiences as Higher Education students discusses the policy development required for lone-parent students. I am in agreement with her recommendations on the need to improve information and advice services in Higher Education, and to provide better inter-agency collaboration and better counselling access. However, since Hinton-Smith's study was a rather mixed approach (quantitative and qualitative), which involved surveys over a 12-

month period, hence it does not fully recognise the shifting and contradictory statements that case studies revealed.

This study found the positive nature of the ‘multiplier effect’ in which children see their mother ‘role modelling’ the gains and positive effect of gaining Further and Higher Education. However, since the aim of the study was to explore the experiences of lone-mother students only, the children were not directly approached or interviewed. A future study looking at children’s perceptions of mother-as-a-student could give further insight into the effects on children of lone mothers being in Higher Education, which Wainwright and Marandet (2010) also suggested as ‘engagement with children of parents in learning’ (p. 463). They also make the following suggestion:

As social mobility takes [the] mainstream political position in the UK there is need for more research that moves beyond statistical measures to explore, qualitatively, perceptions of its inter- and intra-generation dimensions. (p. 461)

It could also be helpful to explore the effects on children based on their gender, as this study catches a glimpse of different reactions from children of different ages and gender. For example, differences in perception towards mothers accessing Higher Education were clearly seen between boys and girls. There is not enough data to be sure of a gender difference in lone-mother support from their family, but there were occasionally signs that girls were more supportive and boys could oppose their mother’s HE in a way that could be called ‘passive aggressive’ – as is clearly seen in LMK’s case: *‘He’ll [son] shout, ‘MUM, MUM, MUM can you get me a drink?’ [...] and carry on moaning for about 10 mins, ‘Oh get me drink, get me drink!’.*

In addition, the position of lone mothers on benefits and the likelihood of that position improving is unlikely. It is less likely that lone mothers can access better jobs and move out of their current living conditions to bigger homes, or move to a better area, have a better life, car, garden – things for which most lone mothers expressed a desire during their interviews.

This study also recommends similar ‘technical fixes’ that Wainwright and Marandet (2010 p. 462) suggested in their study. The ‘technical fixes’ involve improving induction, providing mentoring and support schemes for these students, compiling

appropriate information, for example, through a 'parent pack', and ensuring timetables are available earlier in the year.

There is also a need for handouts containing information on the availability of funds such as hardship funds, emergency funds and other grants available for lone-mother students. These information booklets must be provided well in advance so that lone mothers are prepared before they embark on the course. The study found that lone mothers were unsure of the availability of financial support available in case of an emergency or when the funding bodies did not release bursary cheques or financial support on time. Timetable arrangements and childcare availability information needs to be better structured and presented so that women can organise childcare arrangements well in advance. Counselling services and other welfare services available to lone mothers must be properly signposted.

6.4 Final remarks

There are many outcomes from the thesis. The thesis is about the heterogeneous category of lone motherhood and the study highlights that the Lone motherhood concept is disparate and it does not have a single core meaning which joins up all the aspects. As mentioned earlier, it is not something that you start with, it is something that you end up with. The study brought out the grounded notion of Extrinsic/Intrinsic motivation, and further developed that polarity by offering the concepts of Horizontal/Vertical modelling in the relationship between the mother and the child. The thesis elaborated the concept of the 'student as a job', as well as the role of culture in lone mothers' lives. The role of 'emancipation' and a new 'critical' language, addresses the notion of the self, boundaries, redemptive narratives and the context of these in a Neo-liberal world and the broader role of education. The thesis highlighted the diversity in lone mothers and the different experiences of lone mothers accessing Further and Higher Education. These arguments are based on the strengths of case study which highlights both the unique and the universal understanding of lone mother student experience. The detailed portrayal of cases, which are similar as well as different hopefully, stimulate the reader to gain a richer understanding of their own perspectives. The reader can then generalize from the case instead of the case being a representative claim of the population.

The study is an in-depth analysis into the lives of lone mothers. The analysis has tried to stay faithful to the concept of groundedness and has tried to bridge the hermeneutic gap between poverty and employment on a macro level, as Labour, Conservative and Coalition governments promoted. The purpose of the study was also to establish a link between poverty and employment as mediated by Higher Education. The study clarifies that the jump from poverty to employment is not horizontal or direct, rather it is complex and highly individualized.

The study opens up pathways for new research on women from various ethnic origins in Higher and Further Education. The study gives insight into the complexities of dealing with divorce and envisaging life after the breakdown of marriage for women from ethnic minorities, and especially muslim women. A further study could yield in-depth understanding of women from such background going through family breakdown.

The study is also distinct as the position of the researcher is unique in itself. She is the 'unenculturated' ethnographer (one who does not carry culture, values and behavior appropriate to that culture) (Please see chapter Three) studying a culture unfamiliar to her. According to Spradley (1979) 'the most productive relationship occurs between a thoroughly enculturated informant and a thoroughly unenculturated ethnographer' (p. 50).

According to Gaynor (2009), for many, the path to success is lengthy, confusing and filled with obstacles. This research journey for me has been filled with never-ending competing priorities; it has been iterative in nature and has engulfed most of my time and resources for more than four years. However, when I look at the other aspects of the journey and the process, I am delighted that this process has helped a novice qualitative researcher like me to gain enormous knowledge, confidence, experience and expertise in conducting qualitative research. The acquired tools will help me carry out further research as a qualitative investigator. I really hope that in future this study will create a ripple effect for others to conduct further research into different aspects of lone-mother students in Higher Education.

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APPENDIX A

LIVERPOOL JOHN MOORES UNIVERSITY



Letter to potential gatekeepers requesting assistance with recruitment of participant

Dear X,

By way of introduction, I am Sajida Nawaz, a full-time MPhil/PhD student based in the Faculty of Education, Community and Leisure. I am carrying out a piece of research which aims to investigate experiences of social and institutional support for lone mother student in higher education. The study takes an Ethnographical approach and involves semi-structured in-depth face-to-face interviews with participants. It also involves observing participants in their daily life routine to explore their experiences. This will only take place with the complete consent of the participant and all information collected will remain confidential. There are no associated risks associated with the study and ethical approval from the Research Ethics Committee at Liverpool John Moore University has been granted.

I am writing to you to see if you might be interested in referring suitable students to the study; I am seeking to recruit lone mother students. I would appreciate if you could approach them to see if they may be interested in participating in the study. I have attached a Participant Information Sheet which you could pass on to them. It gives the background and aim of the study and details what their participation would entail. Alternatively, you could ask them if they would be willing for their contact details to be passed to me so that I could take the initiative in making contact with them.

If you would wish to have further information about the study, please do not hesitate to contact me. My email address, which is given below, is the more expedient way of contacting me (though feel free to contact me whichever way is convenient for you).

I believe the type of experiences lone mother students are having needs to be recorded and the referral of those students as potential interviewees is therefore a key part of the study. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Sajida Nawaz

Room H203, Faculty of Education Community and Leisure,
Liverpool John Moores University,
Holmefield Hse, I.M. Marsh campus
Barkhill Road
L17 6BD
Email: s.nawaz1@2009.ljmu.ac.uk

APPENDIX B

Calling all Students!

Are you a single mum in Higher Education? Do you know someone who is?

I am carrying out **PhD** research investigating the experiences of social and institutional support for single mothers in Higher Education. As a single mother and student myself, I would really like to speak to any others out there who are in a similar situation to share your views and experiences.

This study will involve having an initial interview with me. Full details and participant information forms are available on request.

I do hope you will want to be involved. For more information please contact me.

Sajida Nawaz
H203, Holmefield I
M Marsh
LJMU L17 6BD
s.nawaz1@2009.ljmu.ac.uk

APPENDIX C

RESEARCHER VISIT FORM

TO: Director of Studies	FROM: Sajida Nawaz
COMPANY: Liverpool John Moores University	DATE OF VISIT: XX/XX/XX
START TIME OF VISIT: 00:00	END TIME OF VISIT: 00:00
MOBILE NUMBER XXXX	MOBILE NUMBER : XXXXXXXX
PARTICIPANT'S NAME: XXXX	PARTICIPANT'S HOME TELEPHONE NUMBER/ MOBILE NUMBER: XXXX/XXXX

Participant's address for home visit:

XXXX

Details of visits to participants will be emailed from Sajida Nawaz to supervisor by 12:00 the day before the scheduled visit. Supervisor will receive a text message from Sajida Nawaz once the interview has finished and she has left the participant. If supervisor has not heard from Sajida Nawaz within 1 hour of her expected reporting back time she will make contact in the following order:

- Sajida Nawaz's mobile phone: xxxxxxxxxx
- Participant's home telephone/mobile
- Local Police:

APPENDIX D

LIVERPOOL JOHN MOORES UNIVERSITY

Letter to potential gatekeepers requesting assistance with recruitment of participant



Sajida Nawaz
Faculty of Education, Community and Leisure

1. Title of project: Investigating the experiences of social and institutional support for the lone mother student in Higher Education

2. Invitation

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Do ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Please take your time to decide whether or not you wish to take part in this study.

3. The purpose of the study

Lone mothers' faces difficulties in being a student and a mom. They may need support while being a student in order to ease the pressure of their double life. The aim of this research is to examine (a) the barriers and constraints in provision to social and institutional support for lone mothers at higher education. (b) and how do they cope with these barriers. I therefore want to interview some lone mothers to help to explain this

4. Why have I been chosen?

I am inviting lone mothers who are currently students at Higher Education Institution to participate. For the research purpose a lone mother is defined as a mother who cares for one or more children

without the assistance of the other biological parent in the home. She is mostly responsible for the day to day responsibility of the child/children in raising him up and she may or may not be living with other adults in the households. The intention is to include approximately 30 participants and interviewing will stop when no new information is coming out of the interviews.

5. What will happen to me if I take part?

With your permission, I will audiotape the interview and then transcribe it later for analysis.

6. Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part in this interview study. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time (that is before, during or after the interview) and without giving a reason. If you withdraw during or after the interview, any data collected on you will be destroyed at your request.

7. How long will the research last?

It is an MPhil/PhD research and will last for three years only.

8. Are there any risks involved in taking part in the study?

There are no anticipated risks involved in taking part in this study.

9. Will there be any benefits to taking part in the study?

There will be no direct benefits to you from taking part in this study, but the information obtained will develop our understanding of the experiences that lone mother undergo during their studies. This information will be valuable in promoting the social and institutional support for Lone mothers at higher education.

10. Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

All the information collected about you during the interview and diary writing will remain completely confidential, and will not be discussed with anyone else. The only people who will have access to information about you will be the researchers involved with the study and you. The tape of your interview will be transcribed within one month of being made, and later deleted. The transcript will be marked with a code number, not your name. Recordings and transcripts will be stored securely in locked filing cabinets and destroyed after the study has been completed and written up. You will not be identifiable in any reports of the study. Data collected on you will be stored, handled and destroyed in accordance with the Data Protection Act of 1998.

11. What will happen to the results of the research study?

We aim to tell people about our findings through academic channels, such as conferences, publications, and workshops. Your name will not be used in any publications or any other information about the study. If necessary, details will be changed to preserve your anonymity.

12. Contact for further information

If you need more information before you decide whether to take part, or if you have any questions which you want to ask, you can contact the researcher by post or email using the contact details given below:

Sajida Nawaz (Researcher): Faculty of Education, Community and Leisure, Liverpool John Moores University, H203 Holmefield House, I.M. Marsh Campus, Barkhill Road, L17 6BD. Email: s.nawaz1@2009.ljmu.ac.uk

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

APPENDIX E

LIVERPOOL JOHN MOORES UNIVERSITY



Letter to potential gatekeepers requesting assistance with recruitment of participant

Sajida Nawaz
Faculty of Education, Community and Leisure

Investigating the experiences of social and institutional support for the lone mother student in Higher Education

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information provided for the above study.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and that this will not affect my legal rights.
3. I understand that any personal information collected during the study will be anonymised and remain confidential.
4. I consent to interviews with me being audio recorded and transcribed.
5. I consent to the use of anonymised interview quotes.
6. I agree to take part in the above study.

Name of participant Date Signature

Name of researcher Date Signature

APPENDIX F

**LIVERPOOL JOHN MOORES
UNIVERSITY**



Demographics Questionnaire

Participant ID No: __ **Date of Interview:** __ / __ / ____

1. Date of Birth: __ / __ / ____

2. Sex: Female

3. Ethnicity: with which ethnic group do you identify?

Please tick one box

White	British
	Irish
	Other
Asian	Indian
	Pakistani
	Bangladeshi
	Other
Black	Caribbean
	African
	Other
Chinese	
Other (please state)	
Prefer not to have this recorded	

**5. Who do you live with during
period of study?**

Partner and children

Parents
Alone with children
Other

6. How many dependants do you have?

Please state number

No dependents	0
Children under 5	
Children over 5	
Elderly relative	
other	

7. Educational level prior to this study:

No qualifications
GCSE/O'level or equivalent
A level or equivalent
Degree or equivalent
Postgraduate
Other (describe)

8. Are you a full-time or part-time student?

Part-time Student
Full-time Student

9. Date when study commenced: __ / __ / ____

10. Date when study is due to finish/finished: __ / __ / ____

11. Do you currently work?

Yes

No

Full-time
Part-time

APPENDIX G

Qualitative interview schedule

Coping alone: Investigating the experiences of social and institutional support for the lone mother student in Further and Higher Education

Brief Introduction

- Can you tell me a little bit about your self? Such as where you grow up and where you went to school?

Past Education experiences

- How was it like being a student at school?

Motivation

- What were you doing prior to starting your course of studies? (prompt: working, studying or mothering)
- How did you come to the decision to start a course at higher education?
- How did you imagine being a student would be?
- In what ways have your experiences turned out as you imagined?

Initial stages of study

- Can you tell me what it was like in the early stages (first week, First month, first assignment) of your studies?
- How was it incorporating your studies into your family life?
- Were there other aspects of your life that you had to work your studies around? (Prompt: work, friends, hobbies, socialising, holidays)

Problems encountered

- What are the advantages of undertaking a higher education course while being a lone mother?
- Can you think of a time when you found the going particularly difficult: what was it that made things difficult at that time? (Prompt: what was the issue(s)? Was it resolved or not? How was it resolved?)

Lone mother meaning

- What does the term 'Lone mother' means to you?
- How do you think that you fit in this term as a lone mother?
- Do you feel strange about being named as lone mother?

Being a mother and a student

- What's it like being a mother and a student?
- Who looks after your child/children when you are in the University?
- What's it like for your child...as you have these two roles being a mother and a student?

Management

- How do you travel to University? (prompt: walk, bus, car, bike, train)
 - Talk me through your typical kind of day?

Support

- When do you have classes? (Prompts: Saturday, Sunday, afternoons, evenings)
- Have you ever missed your class? If yes, what were the reasons behind it?
- How understanding is your tutor in regards to your caring responsibility?
- Do you ever feel that your parenting figures in your interaction with your tutor?
- What support do you get in order to accommodate your caring commitments with your studies? (Prompts: onsite childcare, nursery provision, child care bursary, child-friendly events)
- How supportive is your family and friends whilst undertaking your studies?

Environment inhabited:

- Is there any place where students gather or get together outside of teaching/lecture times?
- Do you spend much time there?
- Why/why not?

Social contacts:

- Are there people that you spend a lot of time with at the college/university?
- Is there anything that prevents you from getting together with people from the college/university more often?
- Have you made many friends since you started studying?

Social/extramural activities on campus

- Do you make use of any college/university facilities such as special interest clubs, gyms and so forth?
- Why did you get/not get involved?
- Have you made much contact with people there?

Being a student

- What does it mean to you to be a student?
- How do you see yourself now compared to how you were before your studies?
- Do you think your studies have changed you?
- What changes do you think your studies will bring to your future life?
- What impacts do you think your studies will bring to your child/children?

Advice

- What advice would you give to someone considering becoming a lone mother student?

APPENDIX H

Participant's Code for Transcript: LM04

Age: 25-40 years old

Interview Venue: Interview at University

Researcher: R

R: When we met last time you were doing your bachelors isn't it?

LM04: Yeah, I was doing the undergrad last time sociology and was in my second year when you interviewed me?

R: No, third.

LM04: Right, we did that and I got my first...first class in it. I was so pleased. I worked really, really hard and then...

R: Oh, Great!

LM04: Obviously at the end of 2008. Everything happening with banks and there was lots of chaos in the world so I thought alright I will stay on and do a Masters and see if there are any jobs after that. So I decided to stay on another year, so I am doing criminal justice for one year.

R: So when did you start your course?

LM04: Straight away in September...

R: Two thousand...

LM04: Two thousand and eleven and started the post grad few months later.

R: That's good.

LM04: That's really, really good. Its four years now.

R: Good.

LM04: Yeah, so I really, really like it. Really like it.

R: How was the whole experience, tell me about it.

LM04: I think I've got...I did consider may be going to University to do my master's degree but I decided in the end to stay here because I've been here three years and everyone was really nice and I like the lecturers. I think it's a very working class university. It's very inclusive, it's diverse. Where sometimes I get the impression with [name of uni] University is that it's a bit snooty and a bit snobby (laughs) so we decided to stay here.

R: To do your Masters?

LM04: Yeah.

R: Tell me about your child?

LM04: Well he is nearly thirteen and he is got used to me with books everywhere in the house, reading all the time so he is Ok, he is alright. I've moved schools with him because he wasn't happy in one of the primary school. So he moved couple of times in primary schools. He is now in big school, he was in primary school. He is in high school now.

R: Is he in Year 7, now?

LM04: He is in Year 8, yeah so he is Ok, more or less the same as last time where my mum helps me. When I am in university, she picks him up from school. She gives him his tea and if she sometimes have a guitar lesson at her house then I come back from university, pick him up, come home and do whatever with him, watch T.V with him or whatever, so it's similar to two years ago, still my mum is helping me out, still single parent, still focusing on education.

R: What are you planning to do after this?

LM04: I am planning to, because this year I've been doing Criminology. It's a lot to do with prison and drugs and alcohol and stuff like that. I would like to be either a mental health support worker or a drug support worker, to do with the Criminal Justice system may be. So that's the kind of job that I am applying for... that come through on the job email alert. But I was also thinking of may be doing a PhD but I don't know whether I could do it full time because I feel like [son] again would not get much attention because already this is my fourth year in University and its all books, everywhere paper work, all over the house and I feel like maybe I would just like to get a job and then spend more time with and have some money and take him out places and because being a student all the time you hardly have any money, (laughs) So, some of me would just like to get a job instead of doing a PhD.

R: [son], he doesn't get much of your time then. How much time do you spend here (University)?

LM04: Well, I am only in this year on Tuesday and Thursdays. So like I said before when I am off I'm always studying so when he comes home from school I spend some time with him but then sometimes he'll go on Xbox and play games and talk with his friend on phone coz they have the head set on and I'll go and study for few hours. Like you said, you've always got studying to do and you tend not to take days when it's a full time course and it's a Master's degree. I have noticed that it's a little bit harder than the undergrad, it goes up another level so if I wasn't doing I could probably give him a little bit more time and attention but he understand that it's for mummy to get a job it's for both of us and stuff like that.

R: Do you come to the library to study or...?

LM04: No, coz I've got computer at home so I mostly study at home apart from Tuesdays and Thursdays when I got lectures all afternoon but... The house looks like a library (laughs).

R: Ok, Is it coz you can focus on your studies whilst he is in school?

LM04: Oh, yes I can do because he is in school all day but sometimes I feel that even when he is there I get pre occupied with what I am doing and some time I forget I need to spend a bit more time, may be engaging with him because children if you let them they stay on play station and X box. There is like a massive criticism... what do they call it like electronic baby sitter (Laughs) so sometimes I think it's a bit too much X box.

R: When u are at home, does your mum picks him up?

LM04: No, no when I am at home I'll pick him up from school and he comes with me and everything but on Tuesdays and Thursdays she picks him up and everything like that...but sometimes he wants to go to her house because he's got friends who live in their area so sometimes he will go there anyway and stay the night. Other times he stays with me, it's just whatever he wants to do really. Sometimes if he's had argument with me mum. Only something really silly like if she wants him to tidy up and he doesn't want to and he wants come home or... you know silly children things like that and he comes back.

R: Do you still live in Bootle?

LM04: Yeah.

R: Ok. How do you commute?

LM04: Train, yeah.

R: And your son's school is nearby.

LM04: Yeah, ten minutes in the car.

R: How about your funds?

LM04: Well, I have got graduate development lone for this year, obviously because they don't fund the Master's. They only give you three years for the undergrad, so I got seven and a half thousand so three and half thousand for the course fees and then the other to just like live on for the course and I wanted to do the Master's degree as well before the fees go up because I have just missed the fees increase so I though that's a good idea to get a Master's degree before it goes up to maybe seven thousand or something like that...hmmmmmm so I spent it quite fast , to be honest, not that I have been going out. I don't go out drinking or anything but just

with house hold bills and problems with the car and then you have to pay out, things like that... so the money is gone quite fast so I had to apply to the university social fund which you can apply to if you are single parent or if whatever reason and they gave me some money recently and I've got an overdraft, student over draft but I need to get a proper job because you know the course is probably finishing in August because I've got to write 20 thousand word dissertation over the summer but I got to get a job before then. I can't sit back. I got no money in the summer so I need get a job.

R: Tell me about how you are managing a typical day? You told me earlier as well. Is it any different now?

LM04: In University?

R: Yes.

LM04: In university on Tuesday and Thursday the typical day is get up probably seven O'clock, get ready, take [son] to school, come back, walk the dog and then I will probably have an hour and a half on the computer or reading before I leave...before twelve O'clock to come here. The lecture starts at 1'O clock until three, that's what lecture is.... Drugs and Alcohol and then there is another one from three to five and mom will pick him up because he will finish at quarter pass three and then I will get home at 6'O clock and then either she will drop [son] back off with me or I will go and pick him up and sometimes he is eating at her house but if not. I will cook him something then he will go and have a shower or something and I will carry on with some paper work or talk to [son] if he had a bad day in school or whatever and before you know it the nights gone. He is going to bed and I will carry on studying or watch the 10'O clock news (laughs).

R: What time do you sleep?

LM04: I would like to go to bed at 11 but sometimes I might go to bed at 1, if I've got a lot of work to do and then I will be tired the next day.

R: Yes, that's for sure.

LM04: because if you don't have a lot of sleep then you are just tired.

R: Yes, you would.

(Both Laughs)

R: Are you seeing someone, as a partner or relationship?

LM04: No, no. It's funny that you ask me that because my mum is always trying and encourage me. I am like Mum I haven't got the time when I was doing the

undergrad degree. When I finish studying [son] is my next priority and then after that I haven't got the time. The most important thing is your child then your education, get a job and then if I meet somebody, I meet somebody but at the time... at the moment I haven't got the time you see... going to pubs, meeting man... I don't want it (Laughs).

R: Or through other means?

LM04: (Laughs) yeah, no I think that I've watched other friends, not in university but other friends and sometimes it's nothing but trouble. Finding boyfriends, sometimes they are possessive or controlling and time consuming and I think that may be later on but first I need to get a carrier. Some kind of employment, you know.

R: How does your plan work?

LM04: For career.

R: No, everyday plans. Last time you mentioned nothing is fixed everything changes.

LM04: It's more or less the same, I think.

R: Ok, so no last minute changes.

LM04: I've got a job with the university which is just called Student Advocate and it's just when you help out at open days and talk to prospective students and stuff like that. If an opportunity comes up, like this Friday I am working from 11 till 4, so that's like a last minute thing so I will ask my mum "Are you Ok, getting [son] to Friday?" and she knows that it will help because I am getting paid for this. Its only four or five hours and I am getting paid for this so that's fine, no problem, that's like a last minute thing.

R: What is your mum to you? She is around, helping, supporting you, how do you feel about that?

LM04: Hhhmmmm, that's the only reason I've been able to get a degree and get a master's degree without any support from family, there is no way because [son] is a child that's been off school a lot from different illness but sometimes his attendance has not been good and if it wasn't for my mum when he is off school looking after him, it would be me and I wouldn't have been in university and my attendance would have been terrible and I would have missed so many lectures and probably not got a good mark because I got a first class which was really hard work but only because I've had support at home, without the support at home, No. I may be have passed it and may be got, something, because I would have had so much more work to do with the child off being sick or not happy at school, because one time he wasn't happy in primary school. We had problem with the

teacher and we took him out of school. I don't know whether that had happened after I spoke to you last or... I can't remember. Its couple of years ago and we home schooled for a while, me and my mum together and he was at her house, when I was at Uni and then he was at my house when I wasn't in Uni. We've had lots of problem with schools, without her I wouldn't have been able to do a degree and get an education. Because being a single parent, unless you got someone to help and support you with child care you can't go anywhere. There is no body and I think it's ridiculous. Sometime the government you know, they all are banning on about single mothers and stereo types. They have no idea what's it's like being on your own and trying to cope with the demands of a child, coz you are only one person but you know you are expected to like be able to look after a child full time, get a carrier not be on benefits and I don't think that people who make policies have any idea of what they are talking about. (Laughs) You know the reality of how hard it is and you know I've been very, very lucky that I've had somebody close by because obviously a lot of people aren't fortunate enough to have support from a family member. She is a massive part in any success that I get is probably because I've got support from her.

R: Are you the only child she has?

LM04: No, there are five of us but one of my brother's is in London and one of them is in Australia. One brother doesn't have children, my sister has three children. She still lives on the Wirral but she has help from her partner's parents but she doesn't really need my mum's help so that's why my mum's been able to help my situation but without her. I can't tell you... I just.

R: What sort of bond do you share with your child? Does he ask about his dad?

LM04: Yeah, he actually sees his dad now. I can't remember whether a couple of years ago he wasn't seeing his dad because we'd broken down with communication and stuff. [son] was very upset, he wasn't seeing his dad and he was asking me like "When is daddy gonna phone?" I would phone his dad and say "Look, [son]'s upset. Will you phone him?" coz he lives in Tenerife so then I would be upset because [son] was upset because his dad wasn't phoning him. I lost my temper with him and said "Look, try and make more of an effort with your child. I realise you are in another country but can you not at least phone him." We had lots of problem like this happening but since then [son], he is a bit older now. He is nearly thirteen and a year ago or something like that. He decided to phone his dad himself and said "Dad when can I come in and see you?" Between his dad and himself, he said "Well you can come any time you want?" and within a month his dad paid for his ticket and arranged for [son] to go to Tenerife and... was it ten days or two weeks... and spend time with him and his girl friend and he came from Tenerife to Liverpool Airport picked him up, took him back and had a really good hmmm holidays for ten days or two weeks and [son] was so happy from seeing his dad. He looked after him really well, took him to restaurant, took him to the zoo, took him to the beach

and he had a fantastic time so everything's changed. It went from his dad being crap, doing nothing and me being really upset, because I have a child who is upset because his dad wouldn't phone and then [son] is obviously getting a bit older and decides to phone his dad and for whatever reason his dad decides "OK, come and see me. I'll pay for the flight ticket." Now everything is different...

R: Yes, because earlier you told me that grandparents were writing to [son].

LM04: Yes, yes and they still write and [son] has an Italian lesson with a teacher and she, if we don't understand it, quite often we don't because it's all in Italian. She interprets it, so we are still doing the same thing so he still has an Italian lesson but his dad speaks perfect English so he is fine with his.

R: Ok, tell me a little bit about your exams. How do you cope with exams and [son]?

LM04: It changes when exams have happened. He is more with my mum so when the work load is crazy at the end of year three, when I was writing exams and my course work was due in. He was more at my mum's house, not whether I asked him or whether he wanted to or not. He had to go for extra spending nights there because I just had to do all of the work.

R: Do you used to do all the work from home or from library?

LMS: I would come in and get lots of books from the library but then go home and study at home.

R: You don't use library too often?

LM04: No, I don't stay here all day. No.

R: What about exams? Do you have exams?

LM04: With this Master's degree there are no exams. There is all essays, all five thousand word essays or four thousand word essays.

R: How is the support work, now? Are tutors helping you?

LM04: I think that they know that if you are a mature student probably because you look a bit older because majority of the students are like twenty one or something or in under grad they are like eighteen or nineteen. Sometimes they know if your parents as well because you get talking to them in lectures and I've had a couple of extension and they have not asked me for a medical note or something they said its fine because they know that it is either something to do with children or they know that you have got demands.

R: Is it the understanding between you and your tutor and who else knows about it?

LM04: When, it would be the undergrad you had the personal tutor you had for a certain year and they get to know you and they say “How are you ?” and you say “Oh, I am alright, I’ve got problems with the kids and they are really ,really nice and they always email you back, straight away. My personal tutor was lovely and he emailed me back at weekends, always really nice and if you need an extension, gives you an extension. When I did my undergrad dissertation which was education in university and I interviewed three students from Sociology course and one of them was my friend who was a single parent and she said when I said “What would you change?” She said “I would get automatic extensions for single parents, I think people need to realise that we have got a lot more to deal with than the average student, who’s got no children.

R: Yes.

LM04: If you got no children you can do what you want. You can get up and work when you want. If you have got children you have to see them first and fit the work in around it. So she had much, less help than me. I had a lot more help than hers, so she struggled. She is the one I asked that if she would but she doesn’t wanna for whatever reason. I don’t know why but some people just don’t like to be interviewed (laughs).

R: Oh, yes.

LM04: But yeah...

(Silence 30 seconds)

R: What happens now, when you have [son]’s holidays such as half term break or Easter holidays?

LM04: He either...well normally if it’s just two days in university I am Ok for the Monday, Wednesday and Friday. It’s just the Tuesday and Thursday so I just drop him off at my mum’s house or now he is old enough. He likes to go to town with his friend and they like to go to shopping and I give him some money and he can have lunch in McDonald’s and they like to go and look at the games in the game shop and the C.D’s in HMV and so and when he is finished, if I am in uni he can phone my mum and she would pick him up or if I am at home studying I’ll go and pick him up in the car so he is old enough that he is like twelve and a half now. He has got a bit more freedom than few years ago, I would let him alone walking around in the shops but now that he is nearly thirteen. He is getting that much more independent and he wants to go shopping with his friends, or go to McDonald or go to Subway. Even if he was off on holidays he can go out and meet his friends so that I could still study coz he is getting a bit, more older.

R: So do you still feel scared? Earlier you were about providing him the support and looking out for him?

LM04: Well, it's weird coz it's kind of contradictory because sometimes I think you know I Shouldn't beat myself up and feel guilty about not being a good enough parent or something, because at the end of the day none of us are perfect. I am trying to do a good thing by getting an education but I don't know. Sometimes probably society makes you feel guilty because you are not home all of the time but then if you were home all the time you would be stereo typed as lazy and you need to go out to work. Whatever you do somebody will criticize (laughs). You know it's like you can't be the perfect person. So sometimes you feel but than other times you think "No, I shouldn't feel guilty, Am not a bad person we are not perfect, so..."

R: These ups and downs in your emotions that you have.

LM04: Yeah.

R: Who do you talk to when you have these?

LM04: I don't know (Silence of 10 seconds). Nobody really, unless on the undergrad my other friend she was a mature student and she was a single parent so she was in a more or less the same position and we used to talk and it used to help us because we understood each other's situation. Both single parents, doing the same degree. Both had boys, similar age and we had a lot in common. I used to speak to her. I don't know if anybody else would understand it.

R: Do you socialise with your class mates?

LM04: No, because they are all so much younger. I socialised with her, a little bit but we never went to pubs or anything like the younger ones because they go back to the halls and then they go out drinking. When you are a parent you go home after lectures or you go to library, you get your books and then you go home because you got to get back to your children. We socialise and we meet up for lunch, may be three of us, have lunch... that would be it, nothing else for few months or we would send emails and things like that so we kept in touch more than going out type thing.

R: With your class mates during those three years of your undergrad as well. Did you get mix up with them?

LM04: Yes, I had another friend Sumaira. She was a lot younger and she was twenty one so she will be like...what...twenty two now but she was very much mature. She was with me and Vicky who was in our thirty. There was another girl Brenda and she was very mature for her age as well so us four we tended to get on very

well. The rest of the people in the class, we spoke to them and we talked to them in lectures and stuff but I don't know that we had much in common with them because they were busy going out drinking and we were not necessarily into drinking.

R: You are focusing on getting a job, what do you think about it? How easier or difficult it is to find a job?

LM04: I have had endless anxiety over it, endless anxiety over it because when I first started the degree... before everything happened with banks in 2008. I thought "Great!!, degree, three years, come out job." because I thought that the reason I am not getting a good job is because don't have a degree so I get a degree in threes and I get a good job, that's the end of it and of course since 2008 the economy has crashed and everything so that's what lead me to a round two of the degree thing. May be I need a Master's degree, stay on for the Master's degree. I thought "Ok, that will give me a better chance of having a Master's degree, but it hasn't stopped the anxiety of may be not getting a graduate career and that a horrible feeling because who wants to go to university for four years and borrow lots of money and then come out may be have to go and work in a supermarket. Who wants that to happen?. Yes, there is a lot of anxiety and I do worry about it.

R: Do you have anything in plan? You are finishing before September. What's the plan after this?

LM04: I have got a big over draft and when I say I have a big over draft I mean twelve hundred pounds over draft. What else have I got... options for money would be? I was looking on the job centre website and if you haven't got any money. You can get a loan, some kind of welfare loan. Now whether or not the lectures finish in March possible I could apply for Job seeker's allowance or something but I am not sure so I don't know. Hmmm but I am kind of worried. My mum always say "Oh, don't worry, I will lend you money." But I don't want to take money off my parents you see because I would like to rather pay and stand on my own two feet but it's a worry. You are always thinking about money but the most of the people I know worry about money.

R: How do you see all this recession and the fee rising bit?

LM04: Well from like a working class point of view I feel like it's going to hit the poor students much harder and everybody else thinks that as well. I just think that it kind of crazy that the fees are rising so much and I don't really understand why they are rising so much. Obviously I understand all the bank thing and recession but I don't know how they can justify the fees going up.... that amount and I just think that the middle class people will be Ok but it might prevent working class

people from applying because they are just going to think that how am I ever going to pay that back.

R: As you were planning to do a PhD. How are you going to do that? What about your fees, is it going to be high?

LM04: Yes, that's why I was only thinking about doing the PhD and looking into it and asking different people questions, who are either doing a PhD or ask lecturers, but I'll be very surprised if I could do because I haven't got the money to do on it. It would only be possible if there was some kind of funding. Yeah, I would be very surprised if I could do that.

R: If I may ask. How much do you think you have taken as a loan that you need to return back?

LM04: The Graduate Development Loan.

R: Yes, and other loans that you have taken whilst in University.

LM04: Do you know what I am a bit confused about that because the undergrad. I still am a bit confused to which one you pay back and which one you don't pay back. The fees every year was something like £3300.00, let's just say that. So it's like nearly ten thousand for the fees. I know you got to pay the fees but I never knew that whether you have to pay back the maintenance loan....

R: Ok

LM04: I don't know, so it's definitely £10.00 whether it's more than that I don't know. I would definitely say £10.000 for the Undergrad and for the Postgrad, its seven and a half thousand from Barclays, so definitely it's seventeen and a half. Now, whether it's more than that for the undergrad, I don't know. I am not really worried about the Undergrad one because you don't really have to pay it back until something like you are earning fifteen thousand and then you start to pay. The one that would worry me most is the one from the bank because that's from the bank say "Right, you've got to start paying three months after the course finishes." The course finishes in August by November, they direct debit every month so much out of my bank irrelevant of whether I've got a job because that's the nature of a bank loan. They are not interested in waiting until you are fifteen thousand.

R: Good. Thanks for your time. It was a pleasure.

APPENDIX I

Nawaz, Sajida

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: 19 April 2010 12:12
To: Nawaz, Sajida
Cc: [REDACTED]
Subject: Provisional Approval

Dear Sajida

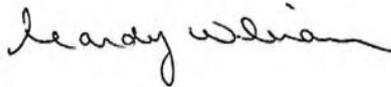
Provisional Approval

10/BLW/005 - Sajida Nawaz, P/G, *Coping alone: Investigating the experiences of social and institutional support for the lone mother student in Higher Education.* [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] University Research Ethics Committee (REC) has reviewed the above application at its last meeting. The Committee would be content to approve the research project subject to the following provisos:

- Submission of Signature Sheet required.
- Confirmation that data collection did not commence prior to the October 2009 start date stated in the application.
- REC feels that the use of "*Coping Alone*" in the title inappropriate.
- Please provide a definition of "*Lone Mother*" for the purposes of this research and please include in the Recruitment material.
- The Participants may address sensitive issues, so the Applicant should have contact details available to make referrals to the Counselling Service.
- Recruitment should be through emails, posters, snowballing or Academic Staff rather than Student Welfare or Counselling Service.
- Please separate the Consent Forms for the Questionnaires and Interview Stages to ensure that Participants agree to both exercises.
- Section 3 reads "*Lone Mothers face difficulties in being a student and a mum*" this should be replaced with wording similar to "*The purpose of this study is.....*"
- REC feels that observation of Participant's is inappropriate and will not result in accurate data. Perhaps use of a diary would prove more successful.

Yours sincerely
PP:



[REDACTED]
Chair of the [REDACTED]
Tel: 0151 231 3110
E-mail [REDACTED]
CC: Supervisor

Nawaz, Sajida

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: 11 April 2016 14:07
To: Nawaz, Sajida
Subject: RE: Ethics approval letter for my doctoral study
Attachments: 10BLW005.pdf; 10BLW005.pdf

Hi Sajida. Please find attached a PDF of your application, provisional approval and resubmitted documents. Because this is such an old project I cannot find the final approval letter. But we are satisfied that your project was approved on 5th May 2010 as our database records this.

Cheers M



[REDACTED]
(Research Ethics and Governance)
Research and Innovation Services
Kingsway House, Hatton Garden, Liverpool L3 2AJ
t: 01519046467 e: a.f.williams@ljmu.ac.uk

APPENDIX J

I hereby give my formal agreement and permission for my name (co-author, former supervisor, and advisor to the doctoral candidate Sajida Bibi-Nawaz) to be included in the thesis in an unanonymised form.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ian Stronach', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Prof Ian Stronach
M.A., M.Ed., Ph.D
Professorial Fellow
Liverpool Hope University

Doctoral Journey: The emotional roller coaster of a lone mother and a lone researcher

What is the research environment like for a Pakistani doctoral student who is learning to be a 'lone mother' and also learning to be a 'lone researcher' researching 'lone mothers'? It is complex.



By Sajida Bibi-Nawaz, Liverpool John Moores University

I AM UNDERTAKING RESEARCH ON LONE MOTHERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION.

I would like to bring forth my doctoral experience that highlights the emotional roller coaster ride of the journey so far. I was born in Pakistan, brought up in Dubai, had my Master's degree from the National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad, got married and after a few weeks was divorced. I have a son who is seven. In Pakistan I lived with my extended family of 11 members. I worked as a subject specialist in a higher secondary school. I was technically a 'lone mother' but was unaware of the category as

Looking after my child and undertaking day-to-day responsibilities ... became my routine as a 'lone mother', but this, together with no support from family and friends, started haunting me like a scary dream

there is no such expression in Urdu language. I moved to the UK and embarked on a doctoral research project. I opted to undertake the research because I was interested in lone mother students' lived experiences.

My journey began with our migration to Liverpool. Undertaking research was a lonely business as it did not involve much interaction, other than with my two supervisors, [redacted] and Ian Stronach. Looking after my child and undertaking day-to-day responsibilities, from bills to grocery, school pickups, drops and child care arrangements, became my routine as a 'lone mother', but this, together with no support from family and friends, started haunting me like a scary dream. It evokes Edvard Munch's "The Scream". I realised that I am a lone mother taking on the responsibility of organising and caring for my son and also a lone researcher who is working on lone mothers. Most of the emotions experienced by me as a lone mother and as a lone researcher are the same. Educational research is a solitary job where I sit alone and go through literature, collect data, transcribe, analyse and present the findings. Hence, it is a kind of double loneliness. At this early stage of my research I was also at the early stage

of realising what becoming and being a lone mother is.

"It was another day off to the kids park....Shah (my son) went to one of the boys and he swore at him F... off..... after 5 minutes or so we came back home. The thought of those boys going back and bringing bigger boys for the fight scared me.... I saw myself standing and defending Shah just like a dad." (Bibi-Nawaz's diary notes, April 13, 2010)

Even though the first year of my research was filled with emotional desolation, it was also full of determination to achieve my PhD. After my MPhil I was awarded a two-year studentship bursary to undertake my PhD. My research is ethnographic, taking a reflexive approach in understanding the experiences of lone mother students. My research sample includes women from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

In these two years of my doctoral journey I have experienced a wide range of changes. These changes are personal, physical, and workplace-related. For me, the journey is that of a 'juggler' and of a 'lone ranger'. It is a transformation stage for me because I have been learning to become a researcher and also learning to play the role of a lone mother. ●



A Reflexive Autoethnography of Doctoral Supervision Lone Mother, Lone Researcher

Sajida Bibi-Nawaz, Ian Stronach, [REDACTED], and Jo Frankham

Abstract This article traces elements of the learning of a doctoral student. It concerns attempts to bridge a number of gaps between supervisor and student in the process of studying for a PhD. In particular, it portrays differences in culture, gender, family, age, and experience and how those differences influenced the thinking of the student. A layered discourse of readings, misreadings, and rereadings is developed, drawing on the substantive literature on 'lone motherhood', on studies of doctoral supervision, and on anthropological insights into the nature of cultural differences. It is a case study in finding the 'missing' (or not yet known) person who is the lone mother and the lone researcher who 'reveals' herself to herself through interaction with her supervisors. The supervisors are also 'rewritten' in their situated self-understandings during this process.

Keywords: doctoral supervision, reflexivity, lone motherhood, autoethnography

This article has been written collaboratively by a doctoral student and her supervisors and elaborates the parties as 'colleagues engaged in a shared, unequal and changing practice' (Kamler & Thomson, 2008) rather than a master/protégé relationship. The student has personal knowledge and experience of the substantive subject (lone motherhood) that her supervisors lack as well as a reservoir of cultural knowledge as an insider. However, as this account makes clear, the student was in some ways not known to herself as a lone mother, this not being a cultural category she could readily encounter in her home country. The notion of insider/outsider not only distinguishes between supervisors and student but also marks further complications within the student's status of 'insider'. The notion of 'inside', then, is fragmented.

Overall, we aim to unearth some of the hidden uncertainties of supervised researching, thinking, and writing as well as making more explicit the relations that accompany such knowledge construction. Thus the aim is to develop a focused kind

of intercultural understanding that brings issues of ‘difference’ into play in an extensive way and where reflexivity from all parties is drawn upon to form successful supervisory relationships (Robinson-Pant, 2005). In that sense the ‘layers’ of the text aspire to an emergent and iterative interpretation (Stronach, Garratt, Pearce, & Piper, 2007), whereby successive readings, misreadings, and rereadings allow data to be reinterpreted and put in a broader, deeper, and more reciprocal context. In doing this we are shifting away from the ‘orthodox model of distance and separation’ on behalf of the researcher to the disclosure model of interactive interviews (Ellis & Berger, 2003, p. 469). Such ‘disclosure’ should not be seen in a confessional light, and we would prefer ‘disclosure’ as a different marker of ‘opening up’. The dangers of contaminating subjectivity, self-indulgence, and narcissism are never very far away from a reflexive approach (Etherington, 2004), and this is also true of autoethnography (Sparkes, 2000). And this kind of multiple reflexivity (one doctoral student and three supervisors) perhaps multiplies these risks. Where the student ‘speaks’ alone, the first person is employed. Other sections of the paper were written collaboratively and employ the collective pronoun ‘we’.

Extract From First Interview Session With Supervisors

Ian: OK, can I ask you a . . . Is there an expression in Urdu for single mum . . . lone mother? Does it translate at all?

Student: No, not . . . I have never even thought about it, to be honest with you, did not come to my mind that there is . . . that if there is any expression about it. There is something which is most common expression . . . is about divorce. In our culture there is that . . . but not about single mother. There is no concept about single mother in our culture, no, not that I heard of, no.

Ian: OK, Why would that be? If you had to . . .

Student: Because, probably . . . Probably in Pakistan there are . . . single mothers. By single mother we mean that she is actually taking the responsibility on herself. But in our culture, when I was like back home, two years ago, when I had . . . my son was born in my dad’s house and I stayed with my dad’s house for almost two and a half years and was working there. So I never thought of being a single mother because it’s a family – my mum, dad, sister, and everyone is around. So it’s not that I am going to be alone in a house with my son and me. No, it did not come to my mind, and I have never seen such circumstance. It is common in divorce that once you get

divorce you come back to your mum and dad and stay there for the rest of your life and if you have kids, your kids stay with your mum and dad for the rest of their life.

Ian: So the extended family means that there can't be single or lone?

Student: Yes, there is no such thing as single or lone, not that I know of.

Ian: That's interesting.

Student: Either, she is going get married again and move to husband's house and stay with him, otherwise . . . that how it works. Even if mum and dad . . . may God bless every mum and dad, even if they are not around – the brother – he is the one who is going to take the responsibility of the sister and the kids.

Preliminary Methodology

It is the supervisors' view that exploratory dialogue in doctoral supervisions is a necessary component of meetings. This dialogue begins an important process of exchange in the meetings and can begin to build a sense of relationship between the supervisors and student – a key component in students' evaluations of effective supervisory practice (L. C. J. Wong, P. T. P. Wong, & Ishiyama, 2013). Supervisors of international students need, most particularly, to learn about the context within which the student and their research topic have developed. This 'grounding' of the project is an early first step in avoiding any 'separated' notion of data and interpretation; the approach is consequently hermeneutic (Gadamer, 2004). At the same time, it would be antithetical to the singular and situated notion of 'relationship' to try to prescribe how such a thing might be built or what its characteristics might be. It requires, of course, 'improvisation' – responsiveness to the 'other' as described by Grant (2010):

Its dialogical expression may be reflected in forms of quotation (of self and others), commentary and imitation (Berliner, 1994), but good improvisation is also understood to be original. Improvising, then, requires certain capacities including an empathic ability to engage in intense listening (Bailey, 1992), an ability to be fully caught up in the moment, a tolerance for ambiguity, and courage in the face of risk (Berliner, 1994). It also requires a kind of flexible, in situ resourcefulness through which players take chances, provoke each other to play beyond their current vision (Barrett, 1998, p. 617), and rework errors and messes to make musical selves (Barrett, 1998, p. 610) on behalf of fellow players and the music itself. Sometimes what comes out of a save¹ may then become part of the knowledge base. (p. 273–274).

As Grant (2010) goes on to claim, this is an apt analogy for doctoral supervision, and some of what we describe here are the fruits of our improvisations.

After early informal conversations about Sajida and her work, the supervisors suggested they tape record a further, more formal interview with the student. She was researching lone mothers in higher education. What might they all learn if they explored in more detail her experiences of being a lone mother in higher education? This interview was to include plenty of interaction as the supervisors responded to the student's stories and contributed their own. Once this data had been transcribed, it formed the basis for a series of further conversations and analysis. The data informed our thinking about reflexivity in the doctoral supervision process. We here develop a series of layered reflections on that data as an ongoing deepening of understanding. In particular we see the concept of 'lone motherhood' coming into and out of focus for all participants in the conversations. As we developed the account, further data was generated and some of that – including diary entries – are included here.

Reflexivity is usually held to be an obligation on the doctoral student (Robinson-Pant, 2005). Yet, especially in cases where the supervisors and the student come from disparate cultures, the ignorance and prejudice of supervisors can be glossed over (Robinson-Pant, 2005). This research is thus an attempt towards a deeper understanding of the researcher's cultural and social background, which places her differently in the UK culture (both in respect of lone motherhood and the research culture), and of what it means to carry out 'successful' doctoral supervision in such an instance. To develop a better understanding of the complexity of the lone motherhood category and its existence in UK culture, there was a need, on behalf of the supervisors, also to be reflexive. These reflections on everyone's part raised 'self-awareness' (Jupp, 2010), which, we believe, in turn allowed for further cycles of reflection and understanding. The ongoing interactions, then, called for Lather's 'reciprocal [emphasis added] reflexivity and critique' (Lather, 1991, p. 59). Yanagisako (1979, p. 187) argued that anthropological accounts are a social process which works 'from outside in' (meaning, such accounts are not descriptive and are conceptualized on the basis of authority or knowledge already in the public realm). Knowledge of what lies in-between different experiences and values is hard to come by and is easy to miss (Rosaldo, 1980). We hope to address something of that gap here. In the case we present here, we made a preliminary inventory of what seemed to be obvious differences that were likely to structure misunderstanding. We believe this initial, superficial identification of obvious possible differences later allowed us to delve more deeply into these themes – it was as if this list

somehow helped to make legitimate the discussion of what might have seemed insensitive or taboo.

Female/male: In this scenario, there may be gendered power relations or cultural differences regarding the roles of males and females in each of the cultural backgrounds of the researchers.

Young/old: Here, assumptions may hold true for the researcher that the 'older' supervisors offer a more knowledgeable background to researching.

Muslim/agnostic: The fear of exhibiting ignorance of other religions may prevail, and this may prevent open debate or the holding back of views in case they offend.

Pakistani culture/UK culture: Ignorance of cultures creates misunderstandings of norms within a given society. Language terms one culture uses may translate very differently in another. This binary is muddled by the diasporic elements of the student's identity, as we later discuss.

Novice/expert: There is a structured imbalance in any 'apprentice'/student relationship that distributes authority and deference in ways that contradict attempts at 'equality', 'empathy', or 'valid interpretation' and so on.

Inexperienced/experienced: Mismatches in experience may likewise distort or impede emergent understandings, especially where life experiences are so different.

Extended family/nuclear family: The workings of extended and nuclear families are another ripe field for misunderstandings, especially in relation to the location and status of the 'lone' or 'single' mother.

Insider/outsider: The student researcher is of course in one sense the 'insider' (it is her story) yet in terms of methodology and interpretation it is the supervisors who are the insiders (it is their 'academy' and they, to an extent, police the qualification the student aspires to).

The student researcher now outlines her background to facilitate understanding on the part of our readers.

Background of the Student Researcher

As an insider, I (the student researcher) am a 'lone mother', one who is solely responsible for a child under the age of 16 without a spouse or a cohabitant (Kiernan, Land, & Lewis, 1998). (The terminology of lone motherhood is considered at a later stage in this article.) Along with other lone mother students in the UK, I face similar problems in bringing up my child, such as caring issues, financial constraints, and poverty of time. At the same time, lone motherhood is not a cultural category I am

familiar with (Pakistani culture does not register such a category), and my present status as an international student also places me outside some of the norms of this (UK) society. There are, therefore, different shades and intensities to the notion of 'loneness'.

In terms of my background and that of my family, I am Pakistani and have six sisters and one brother. My Dad and Mum brought us up in Dubai. My son was 5 years old when we moved to Liverpool and started living with my sister Nori, who was undertaking her PhD in science. My sister Abi and brother, Taab, reside in London. The rest of my family, along with my Mum and Dad, are in Pakistan.

In 2004, I was the first one in my family to get married. It was arranged by my parents and uncle. To me the forthcoming wedding was more of a great chance to shop and buy lots of new glittering stuff, getting dressed up as a bride, and so on. Getting married to someone who is not my cousin also pleased me. It seemed an 'adventure'. I was focusing on the shopping and also planning to enjoy getting to know him, his family, and so on. Also, because he was approved by my parents and uncle, it never occurred to me to peep into my future and think, realistically, about what if he is not the right one? Or what if things don't work out between the families? I was 23 and must say was naïve enough to not ask myself 'what if?' The basis of the marriage was on trust between the heads of families, my Dad and uncle and his brothers and Mum. After the marriage, everything went well for the first couple of months, but then it did not work out, as my in-laws had started to back off from their previous agreement. I can recall the words 'All that we said was just BY THE WAY' (meaning, without true intentions) uttered by my brother-in-law in response to my Dad inquiring of him, 'What about your promise to let my daughter continue with her master's degree?' My innocence was apparent as I had not looked beneath the wedding's glitz and glamour, which subsequently came at a higher price than I could ever have imagined.

My father had always been very progressive about our education, and all my sisters and brother were born and brought up in Dubai. Although we belonged to a village (Mohaal), we had never lived there. At this time, my (ex) husband was living in Spain while his family remained in rural Pakistan. The women in his family used to work in the fields and were mothers rather than waged workers. In contrast, our upbringing was very different. We were kept 'like a hair in butter', as the Urdu expression goes (wrapped in cotton wool).

The paper now considers a series of themes that were raised during the subsequent meetings between the student and her two supervisors.

Lone Motherhood as a Floating Concept

I had assumed that the interview conducted by my supervisors would be based on my experience as a lone mother student, given that my PhD topic was on that subject. However, it was not just about my recent experience, it was more than that. I seemed also to be learning about me and about me being a lone mother in the broadest sense. My interview opened me to my supervisors as I narrated my past, present, and anticipated future. It was emotional; there were tears. As I now realise, it may be difficult for a researcher to understand part of one's own experience (in my case as a lone mother student) without revealing a lot more about many other interconnected issues. Indeed, it is part of the hermeneutic approach that there should be an ongoing 'dialectical tacking' (Heywood & Stronach, 2005, p. 117) between the details of local circumstances and more global understandings which give the local its meaning. Riessman (2000, 2005) realises this during her research on infertility and its consequences for women in South India; her participants resisted fragmenting their stories into 'thematic (codable) categories' and so would 'digress'. For example, she notes that one of her participants, Gita, would not give a clear answer and had gone 'on and on' and always used to drag the talk back to politics, which she enjoyed talking about because she had been an active politician. Later during her talk the participant referred to her niece and nephews as her 'big family', challenging Riessman's 'bipolar notions of parenthood' (Riessman, 2002, 2005). A new dimension of relational understanding was thereby opened up. Hence it can be useful to allow a 'long story' in response to an interview question for which the researcher expects a 'long list', as in the case of Gita.

Thus the need may be to 'give up communicative power and follow participants down the trails' (Riessman, 2002, p. 696) that they open up in interviews, to 'improvise' in ways analogous to the process we were going through. This also points to the danger of constructing two separate worlds: a world of research interviewing and the natural world of social interaction/conversation (Riessman, 2000, 2005). Research may not bring a holistic understanding but rather isolated bits of information. Feminist researchers (amongst others) have certainly worked to move away from more 'dominating' forms of interviewing in pursuit of more relational forms of interviewing which recognise and acknowledge respondents' ways of organizing meaning in their lives (Reinharz & Chase, 2003).

Once conversations had begun in the supervisory meetings, my supervisors expressed continuing surprise at the stories that emerged. Ian writes that 'just when I'm thinking that I've begun to understand what kind of story she presents, I get

a further surprise' (personal communication, March 29, 2010). At that point Ian is surprised to find out some details about the student's sister. This sister seems at first sight to be more of a Western-oriented individualist; she places great importance on her job/career/qualifications and seems to put a stress on 'me' rather than 'us', in the sense of the wider family group. She is also reluctant to help with the upbringing of the student's son. However, one day, she made a kind of rescue attempt to protect him by telling him that a 'princess' will be waiting for him in Pakistan 'if you are really good'. This surprises the supervisor but also reveals a facet of himself to himself; he is happy to talk about fragmented identities in one context but was prone, in this instance, to expect greater coherence in the student's sister's identity.

The term lone mother is mostly used in British academic writing and is intended as an 'inclusive' marker referring to all mothers whether they are divorced, separated, widowed, or single (never-married) (Kiernan et al., 1998; Standing, 1998). In the United States, the term widely in use is single mother, which has replaced the term unwed mother, which was in turn considered a better term than illegitimate mother (Winkler, 2002). However, a limited number of feminist scholars also use the term solo mother. One of these is Winkler (2002), who, as she describes, uses it on the advice of her students. Standing (1998) abandoned the use of the term single mother in favour of lone mother in order to gain a wider definition. To me, the term lone mother strikes a pejorative note and implies loneliness, or the isolation of the 'lone ranger', while single is a much more neutral term. This is especially the case in coming from a culture where 'lone motherhood' does not exist as a cultural category, making it difficult for me to overcome the connotations of overwhelming loneliness in the term. Standing's (1998) term may be technically more inclusive, but I find it rather excluding, shutting me into a more affective and negative register. May (2010) also finds the category 'lone mother' helpful in relation to the diverse experiences of women, based on a variety of social positions, such as class, culture, and ethnicity. She makes the point that it is difficult to 'homogenise' or 'totalize' the diverse group into one category, which often does not share common elements (May, 2010).

It would not be an exaggeration to call it an irony of fate that I had to travel thousands of miles to meet and fully experience the loneliness of my motherhood. Ian's first question in our interview (as quoted above) was: 'Is there an expression in Urdu for single mum . . . lone mother? Does it translate at all?' I respond 'No, not . . . I have never even thought about it. To be honest with you it did not come to my mind that there is . . . that if there is any expression . . . ' Although I was technically a single or lone mother when I was in Pakistan, I lived within an extended family. I was a mother to my son, daughter to my parents, and sister to my brother and sisters,

and so the thought of being alone never occurred to me. I was never a 'lone' or even in many senses a 'single' mother. The extended nature of Pakistani family life made sure of that. Later, when I moved to London in 2007 and started living with my brother and sister, I came across the term single Mum. At this stage I was still insulated from many of the realities of what that meant. But then I embarked on undertaking research on 'lone mothers' when I moved to the north of England and gradually began to feel the 'loneliness' of the term. It is interesting that I had to cross all those cultural and geographic distances to become a 'lone mother' in terms both of the concept and its emotional loading.

Such background helps to contextualise my supervisors' struggle to locate my 'lone motherhood', culturally. This struggle carries on as we try to unearth other assumptions. One of my supervisors senses an element of 'fate' in my account – 'something unrepairable has happened', he says, and, Sajida 'does not feel that new relations are possible', and that a 'sense of fate is carried over into pessimism about other relationships'.

Ian adds more in a later interview session:

What are my thoughts about this? First, the husband story: I assumed he had deserted her at the time of the interview. Spain/bright lights/girlfriends. It fits UK cultural norms well enough. The second story does not deny that interpretation so much as deepen it in relation to values and gender issues. They are both caught between discrepant things. . . . And we get a glimpse of where her heart is when she says that she thinks of herself and her child's predicament and cries. But she has no tears for the break-up of her marriage and loss of her husband. So the absent father is a cultural rather than a personal loss. It's not "personal" in the Western way (if there is such a thing); it's just something that should never have happened, to paraphrase the data from the first interview.

█ feels, on the one hand, that this is quite different to many accounts of lone motherhood in the UK. On the other hand, she cites similarities in UK household experiences, drawing on her own family. The 'absence of father' has a parallel in the death of a missing relative (grandfather): 'In my childhood death or a disappearance was dealt with by not talking about the person . . . when my children experienced this we tried to answer these questions in a way which would give them some truth, but satisfy their curiosity on why they were now gone'. At this stage in the process, these stories were emerging, but clearly not in chronological order. The stories were formed as social narration, either as responses to questions, additional stories to

make connections, filling in the gaps of previously told stories, and so on. It felt more like building than telling. Hence supervisors who were not familiar with my culture were trying to understand that culture and my particular predicament, examining the location of lone motherhood, providing an insight into UK culture, and also exchanging reflections on their parallel experiences, insofar as they had any.

Floating Metaphors: Purity/Impurity/Contamination

On another occasion we gather to discuss progress on the draft of this article and, as usual, we end up bringing more data into our discussions. In the first interview, I told a story about my ex-husband living in Spain and returning to Pakistan no longer 'pure', as I put it at the time. We began to play with notions of 'purity' and 'impurity' and their connotations – one anthropological, associated with contamination, and one moral. 'Purity' triggered one of my supervisors to recall Douglas's *Purity and Danger* (1966). I then added to the story in ways that say much more about a different but not entirely unrelated clash between 'traditional' and 'modern' cultural mores and the sort of 'contamination' that might result. This was my inability to accept village life and to follow a traditional married woman's role – probably as a result of my education in Dubai and experience of different family values. In this sense I was going to find it difficult to play the role of the 'pure' Pakistani woman. At the same time, my (ex) husband was living in Spain, in a Western culture, and I could also therefore cast him as impure in my eyes.

Why then should I live a village life as a 'proper' Pakistani woman? I feel sure this made me seem impure to his family's eyes. I had in mind at first 'purity' as only a notion of moral 'purity', but I subsequently found myself close to Mary Douglas's sense of purity as contamination because I do not fit into a 'pure' version of a Pakistani woman's life. Douglas (1966) notes that impurity means different things to different groups of people, cultures, or societies. Purity essentially refers to moral symbols, based on people's concept of what should be the case and what should not be the case. Defining what is polluted, people classify their social life into opposing categories of what is acceptable and what is unacceptable. And so our notions of 'purity' and 'impurity' are not isolated notions but are products of our social life, as Murray (1999) suggests: 'Narratives do not, as it were, spring from the minds of individuals but are social creations. We are born into culture which has a ready stock of narratives which we appropriate and apply in our everyday social interaction' (p. 53).

The interpretation, then, by my supervisors of the initial version of my story was that it was a clash between 'traditional' and 'modern' cultural norms, some of it

expressible in terms of purity and danger. But there were other nuances. I was the most highly qualified woman in my ex-husband's village and, in addition, I was also better qualified than him. Initially, this meant I was given much prestige by his family members across the village. They offered me the best chair, which during my interview I call the 'sweet chair', which can be interpreted as an expression of 'great reverence and kindness'. I went on, however, to somehow 'betray' that respect when I suggested dissatisfaction with my engagement with village life. I felt a fear of being trapped in the village, bearing children year after year, alone and putting my qualifications in a box. A more critical evaluation of my wedding would be that it was in itself a clash of at least two cultures. On the one hand, we have a village culture embedded in the groom's family, as opposed to the more modern Spanish cultural context of the groom's working environment. On the other hand, I presented the values and mores of a modern city, and of a socialisation based on Dubai. The diaspora offers clashes in values, shifts in meaning, and crucially, in this instance, a marriage conceived by a woman in 'modern' terms but reconceived by the equally 'modern' husband as a proper incorporation into 'traditional' customs. This latter split divides the husband as well as the couple and the families.

Telling the Story of Lone Motherhood

My experience is a story of ending up as a 'lone mother in voluntary exile' after separation from my husband but never being able to contemplate filing for divorce for fear of custody problems. These constitute a kind of 'chaos narrative'. Such a concept refers to those stories which are never meant to have an audience because they are culturally and personally 'not tellable' (Smith & Sparkes, 2008, p. 218). Smith and Sparkes (2008) write of the 'two-sided notion' of tellability. One is the 'lower bounding side' which comes with the guarantee of being heard/listened to by the listener while the other is 'upper bounding', which is not perceived as possible as a narrative, perhaps because they are not 'success' stories and are 'failure narratives' (Stronach, 2009, p. 149); they are 'too personal, too embarrassing, or too frightening' (Smith & Sparkes, 2008, p. 218) to express. My story of 'exile' also relates to being part of a diaspora, 'displaced communities of people who have been dislocated from their native homeland through the movements of migration, immigration or exile' (Brazier & Mannur, 2003, p. 4). The emotions involved are not referred to, in this definition.

As a 'chaos narrative', a story of divorce is not welcome in either Eastern or Western culture and so does not have a receptive cultural audience, does not bring

forth ‘solace’ or ‘restitution’ for future settlement. Such a ‘failure narrative’ remains ‘tellable’ for the insiders (within the extended family) and is not taken as ‘failure’ perhaps because of the ‘restitution’ of undertaking doctoral studies, which suggests an independent future life. It is not, however, ‘tellable’ for the outsiders, who note the unacceptable nature of the event in Pakistani culture. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees suggests that the return of a divorced daughter to the family home creates the potential of stigma for both parents and family and is ‘tantamount to being a social pariah, while the husband’s ill conduct is not questioned generally’ (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2007). In this scenario women face social criticism within society, thus ensuring that single women often have to forego any support.

Thus the upper bounding of ‘tellability’ needs to be increased. So if we were to make a preliminary analysis of my story of lone motherhood, both anthropology and autoethnography could explain some of its ‘untellable’ features. But perhaps such theory cannot do justice to the harsh realities of the experience.

As we saw, Sparkes (2000) introduced the notion of ‘restitution’ and of course this kind of doctoral study in itself has elements of what we might call ‘self-rescue’. But my son also had his version – using the cultural resources of the fairy tale to fashion a kind of resolution for his problems. This attempt on his part showed me another limit on ‘tellability’, this time within my own (reconstituted nuclear?) family.

Diary Entry: Last week when I was putting my son to bed and was pulling out the story books to read to him, he asked me: ‘Mama, Abu jee (Urdu for father; he is referring to my father) is not my dad’ and Taab (my brother in London) ‘is not my dad’. ‘Where is my dad?’ I did not know what to say and went quiet. After a little while, when my son did not hear a voice, he said ‘Mama, it’s your time to talk’, which he often does when I take a pause before answering him. I do that to make sure that what I tell him is hopefully correct in its complete sense. So there I was silent, and tears started rolling out of my eyes. My son suddenly comes up with a response ‘Mama I know, my dad is up in the sky and I need a magic carpet to fly up in the sky and bring my dad, but you do not have to come with me. You can stay here and I’ll bring him all by myself’.

For the last few weeks we have been watching Aladdin episodes; the idea was introduced by my sister Abi when we visited her in London during half term. I thought it would be nice if he was to watch the same cartoons we watched when we were growing up: Aladdin, Ghostbusters, Popeye the sailor man, Donald Duck, DuckTales, etc. So just a day or two before he inquired of me (about his dad), we were watching Aladdin and the King of the Thieves. In this episode, Aladdin’s wedding with Jasmine

(the princess) is being planned and Aladdin is missing his dad. Later on he flies on the magic carpet to rescue his dad. My son is 5 years and 4 months old, and I always had that thing in my mind that the questions about his dad will come to me around his 7th birthday or so, and that by 7 he will be old enough to understand it all by himself and so would never ask me in such straight, plain words. Maybe I never want to reveal the truth to him because I am afraid that he may end up saying that it's my fault, maybe because I never want him to ask me about his dad and to believe that I can take on both roles – Mum and Dad – which I did say to him but he refused to take that as a possible fact.

█ sympathises with me on hearing this account and wants to advise me but does not comment at the time. Later she writes: 'The issue for me is that what if I say something or advise on something that may be constructed as culturally insensitive? In this situation my response would be to give some motherly advice but because we are in this supervision mode, I hesitated and instead reflected that similar situations can be found in most households'. This supervisor also later sympathises with my decision to not move to the village and with the situation I was facing with my son, who had been questioning me about his father, and says she can see it has created an 'inner turmoil of conflict' within me.

On the other hand, Ian tries to unfold the connections between the 'troubling absence of father' and the complicating business of a 'double divorce': 'The "father" becomes a troubling absence for both parties – not as "real" father but as an absence that lacks explanation or resolution'. For me, the absence of his father is not a loss to cry about, but my son asking me about his dad and finding no answer did bring tears. I feel it as a loss for him, and I feel the need to try to fill that gap by suggesting that I could somehow be two people.

Ian also suggests that I might be in some sort of exile in the UK. In my understanding, the term exile is connected to the concepts of 'shame, taboo and stigma' written into my data such as 'my Mum and Dad were trying not to reveal it to other people (in Pakistan)' and feared questions being asked such as 'are the other sisters to be trusted as successful wives?'. This provoked me to explore the notion of stigma and whether I should see myself or my family as being stigmatised. Goffman (1986) states that when a person comes into our presence we tend to 'anticipate' his/her category and 'attribute' his/her 'social identity', which is a 'virtual social identity', and if the person does not 'fit', we consider him/her less desirable (in its mildest form) and in the more extreme form a 'handicap', 'dangerous', 'weak', and 'thoroughly bad', and such an attribute is called stigma. For me, moving to the United Kingdom was

my choice for a better life for my son and also to be tucked ‘out of sight, out of mind’ (as [REDACTED] put it) in order that the whole affair does not pose any further challenge to my family’s reputation. In that sense I was ‘sensing’ a possible stigma for my parents, without naming it as such.

The Wider Social Context of My Lone Motherhood

A family may provide support for a lone parent, and that was certainly the case for me. According to Macmurray (1961), ‘there are few things that I desire to do which do not depend upon the active co-operation of others. I need you in order to be myself’ (p. 69). In my case my son has enjoyed staying with my family – Mum, Dad, brother, and sisters – and I must say that we were pampered by them, which I did not realise as much as I do now. I used to study and even started teaching while my son used to stay with them. I remember returning from work and asking if my son had had his dinner. Sometimes I’d be sitting on the couch, having dinner, watching TV shows while he was either sleeping or playing with my family members. Those were the days when I did not perceive myself to be a lone mother. Being in an extended family, my functional isolation was very minimal because they were there to help me with everyday chores and a strong sense of solidarity.

In my first interview with my supervisors, the key construct marked by one of them was ‘family’ and a strong dependence on it. They noted my deference. It is unusual for a UK-born white woman aged 29 to say ‘even today if my Mum and Dad say something, I would just blindly follow . . .’ or ‘they are going to think right for me’. I am reminded of Matthew McConaughey in the movie *Failure to Launch*. Matthew’s parents hire a woman to take their 35-year-old son out of their house in order to socialise. This suggests that staying and relying on your parents beyond a certain age needs a push-out. And it was a lot harder for me as I could not envisage it; it was not a cultural possibility. As we saw, ‘lone’, ‘alone’, ‘single’ are not culturally ‘tellable’ positions in female Pakistani culture. Beginning my PhD was my unwitting ‘push-out’. Day-to-day life with my son continues to provide other challenges, including ones which ‘pull me out’ into British culture.

Diary Entry: It was another day off to the kids’ park, and since the weather has been good for the last few days, me and my son visited the park quite often. I was walking a few yards away from him and was watching him come down the slide. A few boys of around 10–12 were also playing there. My son went up to one of the boys, and the boy swore at him F . . . Off. After realising that I must say something, I went to the boy

and said 'Did you just swear at my boy'? He was like 'Yes because he was going to throw a stone at me', and I responded 'No, he was not, he just came and stood next to you to have a go at the slide after you are done'. Another boy who was also standing there came to me and said 'Listen, you cannot tell him not to swear because he will, it's his life and you cannot stop him'. I very quickly responded 'Yes, you are right he can swear any time, anywhere, but he cannot swear at my son'. Perhaps the boy did not like that, and so he went on swearing at me and saying 'We do not care what you say so you can just shut up'. I said my boy is small and we do not swear. If you swear at me, I wouldn't mind that because I know you are kids and I can ignore it, but a small child like him will absorb it and I don't want that. We all are living in this country, together just like a big family, so we all need to take care of one another. At this he aggressively responded 'Which country are you from?' I said Pakistan. He quickly responded 'You are not our family (putting his arms around a black boy – his friend). We English and black are family, not you'. Another English boy (from their group) responded 'Hey, you cheeky racist! You can't say that'. By this time this little incident had gathered an audience of eight other children, all between the ages of 8–12 and of a variety of ethnicities. I repeated my sentence that we should all try to take care of one another and since you are big so you should take care of small children at least not to swear. They said sorry, and I called my son to shake hands with all of them and be friends. The boys left after a minute or so.

After five minutes or so we came back home. The thought of those boys going back and bringing bigger boys for a fight scared me, and so I could not stay there any longer. This was the first fight I had ever experienced, and I just saw myself standing and defending my son just like a dad. A flash of my son's future passed through my eyes and I realised how strong I'll have to be.

This episode concerning my son has echoes in another paper (Stronach, Frankham, et al., 2013) about the process of developing doctoral work. I see myself and my son (and the missing father) as connected in ways which may be unfamiliar to Western eyes. As Stronach, Frankham, et al. (2013) say, 'this kind of reciprocal reflexivity may be part of an internal or external relation, as when a daughter talks of her relation to her father and then to her child' (p. 292). When thinking about my dad, I said 'my Dad . . . in us he sees himself . . . so he looks for himself in us – we are his pieces, in us he exists. So from him, I have this, that whatever the kids are they are me . . . he (my son) is what I am'. Here I find myself exposed to myself again – via my son – via the missing 'parts' of my son – his dad – by my attempts to be both Mum and Dad to him, and by the challenge I know that will be.

From the outset, we collected data in the form of interviews and doctoral meetings and we also began to develop a relational identity. The transcribed data was interpreted and circulated, and we put down further reflections to share. But while interpreting the data we all quoted one another and instead of just bringing out our personal reflections on the data, we moved from 'I' to 'we'. 'We' had, in a sense, become a collective. As Ian noted:

Because it was intimate and emotional for Sajida, I kind of think that it made me (and maybe [REDACTED] as well) get involved more personally ourselves, as a kind of reciprocal gesture . . . it just feels wrong that intimate disclosure should be so one-sided.

We all belong to the academic world but are at different stages of our academic career and also at different levels in the academic hierarchy. We tried to break down the hierarchical structure and power relations between us to work collaboratively. For the last two years we have been working on collecting data through our interactive interviews, interpreting that data, and then reflecting back on it. But as a supervisor reads my redraft, he pauses before suggesting that although we are trying to work on a more reciprocal reflexivity, 'perhaps there is something missing . . . an element of challenge from the student . . . the layers that we are trying to build are not being fully reflected . . . perhaps as academics we sound over-confident in interpreting your reality'. He was right to an extent that layers of reflection were not as obvious as they were envisaged to be. Perhaps the student has to 'write herself into that space and it would be premature to expect that process to happen so quickly'.

As far as I (doctoral student) have been able to ascertain, this is the first piece of academic writing based on 'autoethnography' in doctoral supervision. Research has been conducted on doctoral supervision: supervisors' dilemmas, doctoral supervision experience, cultural dilemmas in doctoral research, etc., but our attempt to work on reflexivity in doctoral supervision is an aspect which has not been explored by researchers such as Delamont, Atkinson, and Parry (2000), Delamont, Parry, and Atkinson (1998), Robinson-Pant (2005), and Hutchings (2015). I must say that it became difficult for me to write and create a suitable narrative when the data was changing as each account rewrote the previous one. We were in a continuous process of creating data through interviews, reflecting on the data, and rewriting these reflections as more data was being generated. Each layer brought with it a deeper understanding, and so it was changing and fluid, altering the previous account by adding further dimensions. This process produced a wealth of data which was complex, and I felt at the limits of my abilities as I attempted to write up such complex

narratives, trying to portray elements of the story by ‘knitting’ and ‘weaving’ together all the layers and also bringing in relevant literature.

Some Interim Conclusions

So what does autoethnography mean? For Maréchal (2010), it is a ‘form or method of research that involves self-observation and reflexive investigation in the context of ethnographic field work and writing’ (p. 43). Ellis (2004) defines it ‘as research, writing, story and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political’ (p. xix). In this account we hope we have shown how this process may also involve others – in this case research supervisors – in the process of both developing and interpreting autoethnographic accounts. We have discerned elements of reciprocal reflexivity (Lather, 1991) as the supervisors were exposed to themselves as well as the student researcher.

However, we do not wish to fall into some kind of utopian or Habermasian ‘free speech’ resolution (Habermas, 1979). The easy language of ‘collaboration’, ‘participation’, and ‘partnership’ is to be avoided (Frankham & Tracy, 2012). No doubt there are still enduring problems of cultural confusion and misunderstanding between us and issues of expertise and authority as well: ‘Cultural translation, which is what ethnography is, never fully assimilates difference’ (Marcus, 1998, p. 186). Just as difference can never fully assimilate itself, come to that. Nor does it dismiss the ‘authority’ of unequal power. In fact ‘authority’ is an interesting concept in this context, power invested in the ‘author’, or in this case ‘authors’, whether they like it, want it, or not. Perhaps Rancière’s (1991) insistence on an ongoing ‘equality’ is more helpful, as something that we need to start with, rather than hope eventually to achieve. He writes: ‘Emancipation is the consciousness of that equality, of that reciprocity that alone permits intelligence to be realized by verification’ (p. 40). His commentary elsewhere is also helpful: ‘Emancipation begins when we challenge the opposition between viewing and acting; when we understand that the self-evident facts that structure the relations between saying, seeing, and doing themselves belong to the structure of domination and subjection’ (Rancière, 2011, p. 13).

But in trying to bring things to the surface; share understandings; travel dialectically and recursively between data, theory, and interpretation; we feel that we made some progress in our attempt to ‘breach the space between experience and analysis’ (Panourgía, 1995, p. xxii). We have realised that these interactions are complex engagements across divisions of gender, ethnicity, age, experience, religion, and culture. Thus far, we have managed to unearth cultural in-betweenness resulting from

the researcher's diasporic location (perhaps we should say 'illocation'?), including the role of the missing father and dilemmas of divorce as well as narratives of redemption, from the son's magic carpet story to the lone mother's attempt at a doctoral rescue. We also came to realise that lone motherhood (in the student researcher's case) was never fixed in emotional terms and had serious emotional swings. Nor is the journey simply an emotional, intellectual, and hermeneutic one. As the 'relation' of supervisor/student changes towards a more socially defined 'relationship', we enable further reflection and deeper dialogue. It is not just a question of confession or disclosure. Forms of friendship begin to accrue. These dialogic acts free up both thinking and feeling as well as the possibility of disagreeing.

A danger is worth noting here. Some regard reflexive approaches as 'dead-end self-indulgence' (Marcus, 1998, p. 193) or outright 'narcissism' (Davies, 1999, p. 179), but we would want to leave such final judgements to the reader; it is not for us to say. Recently, Westbrook (2008) has called for a more conversational approach to ethnography. Academic ethnographers should, he says, 'let go and be amateurs' in an ethnographic approach that takes 'the possibility of conversation as its premise' (p. 149–150). This we have tried to do, and we hope that the article supports that case. Of course, the parameters of any real conversation cannot be prescribed in advance – it will always be a matter of improvisation. Davies (1999) also notes that ethnography in its reflexive forms is always a business of 'self and other' (p. 183). Perhaps our interim conclusion should be that in the journeys between experience and analysis, the supervisors travelled mainly in one direction, from analysis to experience, while the doctoral student travelled in the opposite direction, from experience to analysis. Did we meet in the middle? No, but we at least managed to wave to each other!

Our aim, it will be recalled, was to 'unearth some of the hidden uncertainties of supervising, thinking and writing' in a cross-cultural context. A first move in developing a 'broader' and 'deeper' reflexive approach was to identify the sorts of difference that separated two supervisors and a doctoral student – ethnicity, gender, age, experience, culture, etc. This done, the learning 'triangle' could draw on a growing knowledge of these shifting dimensions at an empirical level – the status of 'lone mother' in Pakistan as opposed to the UK, the role of Abu gee (father) in an extended family, the extended role of the mother (e.g., as also 'father' and 'family' rolled into one) in relation to the child, the difficulties of relations with other parents, and so on. Both of these are a conscious kind of learning but are accompanied by a more unconscious performative dimension. We are not filling the gaps in our knowledge of the Other so much as we are shifting the grounds from which we think (reflexively, we hope) and from which we are thought (reciprocally, or so we intend) in new and

unforeseen improvisations. These shift 'content, frame, and context' in themselves and in relation to the others (Stronach, Frankham, et al., 2013, p. 289). Such differences, then, are not just facts to be learned, they also initiate ways of understanding and misunderstanding that are ongoing. Such moves develop inductively, as we have illustrated, and also draw deductively on a literature whose relevance is relative rather than given. Concepts such as shame, purity, danger, and stigma are visited and revisited more like building blocks rather than one-off 'tellings' and are in turn considered as part of broader narratives, such as the 'chaos narrative', which itself is expressed rather differently from Sparkes' (2000) notion – expressed not as personal tragedy but as a social disaster. In these processes of telling, retelling, revising, and extending, the work of reflexivity is never done, always underway, and never complete. It is in all those senses always a question of failure, whose 'success' is a question of its recognition rather than correction (Smith & Sparkes, 2008). And it reflects a philosophy of difference and 'becoming' much more than any representational claims the research process may from time to time feel able to make.

Postscript: Two years after we began to write this article, I want to add a postscript to the piece. As I 'became' a lone mother (a title I now wish to 'own'), both by moving to the UK away from my extended family, and in perception as this paper developed, I experienced a double loss. Not only was my son going to have to grow up without a father, but I was not going to be able to 'replace' that father through surrogacy or my attempts at 'being two people'. My continuing reading of work in the field of lone motherhood introduced me to another loss or deficit, that of the lone mother who is 'responsible' for lower academic achievement and for my son being at 'greater risk' of 'behavioural and emotional problems' (Amato, 2005). My thinking, however, has also since been reframed by the writing, by the redrafting, and by my continuing explorations of Western literature on lone motherhood, the place of fathers, and the (Western) discourse of the nuclear family.

Recently, I downloaded an article called 'Ambiguous Loss Theory: Challenges for Scholars and Practitioners' (Boss, 2007). I happened upon the piece when continuing to search for literature on absent fathers. I realised as I approached the printout of the piece (almost as if peeping round the edge of a curtain) that it held a horrible fascination for me. I both wanted to look at it (to discover how the 'ambiguous loss' of his father might be psychologically damaging my son, so that I might try to protect him) and not to look at it for fear of what I might learn. As I began to read the piece, however, I sensed a 'new self' had developed (at least in part) as a consequence of my PhD. I looked at the litany of descriptors in the piece about loss: 'traumatising',

‘freezes the grief process’, ‘prevents cognition, blocks coping and decision-making processes’ (p. 105) and found myself, instead of grieving, feeling angry. I hope I am not deluding myself when I discern in my anger a new-found ‘freedom’ in my lone parenting of my son. I find myself much better able (and more comfortable) to ascribe to a new identity, one I found described recently by Sarah Ebner (2001) when describing the portrayal of lone mothers in film:

Hollywood has portrayed single mothers as prominent characters since the era of silent film but for almost as long as they have been portrayed, they have been characterised as socially deviant or at least responsible for their kids’ troubles. In these recent films, the women who portray the characters are strong, courageous and willing to take risks.

Note

1. A ‘save’ in improvisational jazz is exactly as it sounds – when an improvisation goes well, it is ‘saved’ for another occasion and a musician may draw on this ‘save’ again.

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The X-Factor: Performing Reflexivity as Indeterminate Praxis

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Abstract

This article addresses practices of reflexivity, drawing on a number of stimuli, including Zizek's formulation of Lacan's "prisoners game," whereby different circumstances generate a typology of reflexive responses from the prisoners in their competitive efforts to win freedom. The article also draws on reflexive performances based on literature and in history, and more extensively on the art of Rene Magritte. These various reflexive performances are then related to the reflexive "praxes" of the authors' doctoral study. We conclude that reflexivity is always part of a necessary uncertainty, whose "remainder" between the visible and the invisible, the present and the absent, generates an inescapably qualitative *symbolon*.

Keywords

reflexivity, doctoral study, methodology, self-portraiture, Rene Magritte

Thus anyone who sets reflection in motion must already be both knower and the known. The subject of reflection on its own thereby satisfies the whole equation "I=I." Yet reflection alone was supposed to bring about this equation. Gasché, R. 1986, *The tain of the mirror. Derrida and the philosophy of reflection*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, p. 99.

What good will it do me to re-write? The person in the writing is someone else. Pessoa, F. 1998, *The book of disquiet*. London, UK: Penguin, p. 64.

We begin in Leningrad, a city under Nazi siege in the winter of 1941-1942. In the Hermitage museum, a strange event takes place, yet relevant to our reflexive inquiry:

Army cadets who helped move antique furniture into the dry were thanked with a tour of the galleries by a museum guide, who talked them through the absent masterpieces empty frame by empty frame. (Reid, 2011, p. 332).

This event is provocative because it shows content, frame, and context in a bizarre, paradoxical, and yet understandable relation. Content has the paradox of absence, the actual paintings having been spirited away to somewhere safe in rural Russia. The frame therefore frames nothing—"this is not a painting"—we might conclude. Yet the tour has meaning for the cadets: They do not think they are looking at nothing. Why? The originals have left their "aura"

behind, to draw on Walter Benjamin's famous account of art in the age of copies, of effortless and exact mechanical reproduction (Benjamin, 2004, p. 5). He claimed originals had the aura of "authenticity," absent from commodified reproduction. But it is the context rather than the absent content that constructs this aura in the beleaguered Hermitage Museum. The context is the "original" that frames the frame with a content outside of the missing pictures: its meta-narrative is Mother Russia's treasures made safe from German looting. They are, in two senses, *in retreat* rather than simply missing. The nothing is a something; the something a kind of everything in cultural and political terms. Imagine that the army cadets had instead been shown *copies* of the original masterpieces. Would they have been more or less impressed? Less. Not just because those reproductions had lost the aura of the original but because the missing content, that violent extraction of content—circumcision and scar—engendered a "ritual" value as well as a political force. The tour, then, is an act of worship, a communion, perhaps like a kind of reverse transubstantiation whereby the immaterial becomes material. What is missing is also what is authentically left over, as

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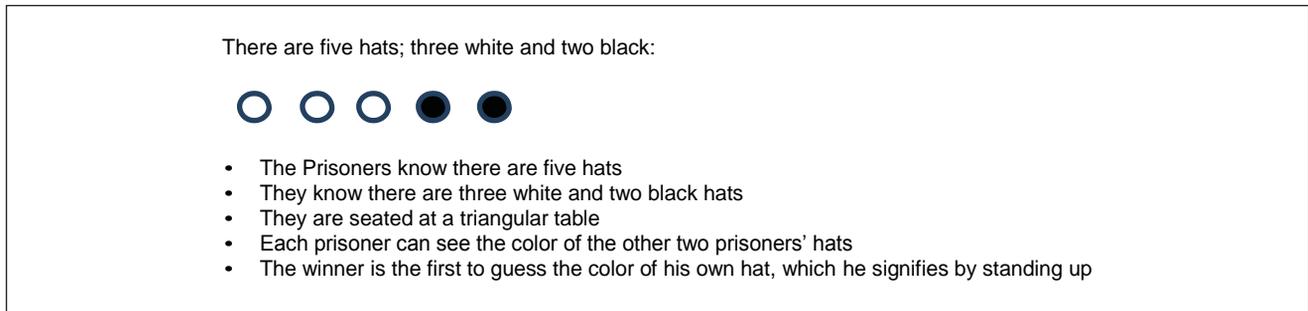


Figure 1. A test is set for three prisoners and the winner will be freed

Note: Developed by Greg Cahill from Žižek, 2007, pp. 133-136.

holy space. It generates “authority” and “authenticity,” to return to Benjamin’s (2004, p. 7, 5) terms. We conclude that context and frame left “content” (however absent) as a potent and prescient remainder, an archaeology of itself.

Content, frame, context. We will deploy and extend these notions analytically in this account of reflexivity as praxis. And we will relate them to a sense of the reflexive self and the reflexive act as another “empty space”; as Merleau Ponty (cited in Zizek, 2007, p. 51) has it: “What ultimately eludes reflection is *its own act*.” As Zizek (2007) argues it, following Lacan and Schelling, the self is a “barred” self (p. 135): We cannot directly know ourselves, nor can we know with certainty the Other. There is a pervasive uncertainty that we need to place in the center of our thinking, rather than as some unfortunate codicil (yes, an absent center like those Hermitage pictures). Before relating Zizek’s notions of reflexivity, which in this instance are narrowly expressed within the rubrics of game theory, it is worth radicalizing that uncertainty.

It is no accident that we turn to literature rather than “social science” to envisage such radical uncertainty. We started with Pessoa and his notion of an inherently iterative self, whose ambition is to define unravel with every self-transformative stroke of the pen. Borges also mulls over the question of himself and “Borges,” the writer, ending on an ironic note. He concludes that “my life is a flight and I lose everything and everything belongs to oblivion, or to him,” adding “I do not know which of us has written this page” (Borges, 2000, p. 282). In a less introspective reflexivity, Robert Musil (1995) argues thus in *The Man Without Qualities*:

For the inhabitant of a country has at least nine characters: a professional, a national, a civic, a class, a geographic, a sexual, a conscious, an unconscious and possibly even private character to boot. He unites them in himself, but they dissolve him, so that he is really nothing more than a small basin hollowed out by these many streamlets that trickle into it and drain out of it again, to join other such rills in filling in some other basin. Which is why every inhabitant of

the earth has a tenth character that is nothing else than the passive fantasy of spaces yet unfilled . . . an empty, invisible space, with reality standing inside it like a child’s toy town deserted by the imagination. (p. 30)

The “passive fantasy of spaces yet unfilled”; with “reality standing inside it like a child’s toy town deserted by the imagination”—apart from the thrill of genius, what can we make of that? Well, for a start they are all “empty frame” stories, selves ‘missing in action’. If we look at the ‘self-work’ of Pessoa (2001), Borges (2000) and Musil (1995), we see that these selves are iterative, displacing, and displaced. They construct themselves from what is missing, from absent centers, and generative “remainders.” What notions such as “missing,” “uncertain,” “unknown,” “barred,” “displaced,” and “deserted” do is address the empty frame, but not with mere synonyms of remainder but rather a heterodox archaeology of absence that engenders different performances of logic and different sorts of subjectivity. And it is context rather than content that is decisive, as is in the Hermitage incident.¹

Zizek (2007), following Lacan, offers a fascinating way into working out the dilemmas of that missing person. We will first illustrate his “game” of self-discovery, then relate it back to the empty frame story of the missing Hermitage masterpieces, and forward on to some of our reflexive efforts as qualitative researchers trying to write ourselves into accounts that eventually will say more than we know or intend.

Zizek (2007) sets up a game in the form of a logical puzzle. There are three prisoners, one of whom will be released if they solve the problem, which is that there are five hats, two of them black and three of them white. The prisoners sit in a triangle so that they can see the others’ hats but not their own (see Figure 1).

Zizek (2007) identifies three different scenarios.

If one prisoner has a white hat and the other two black hats, the one with the white hat can immediately “see” that his is white by a simple process of deduction:

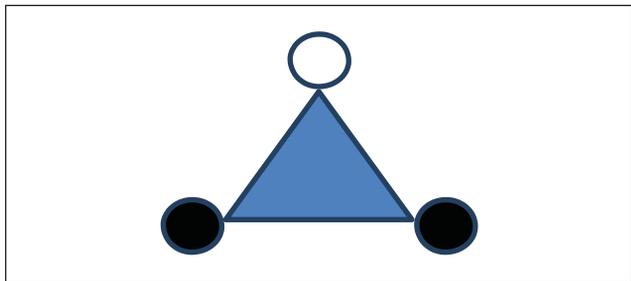


Figure 2.

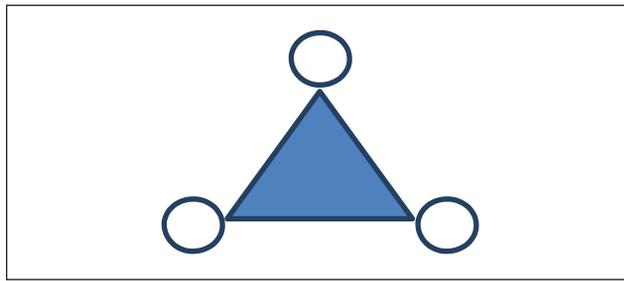


Figure 4.

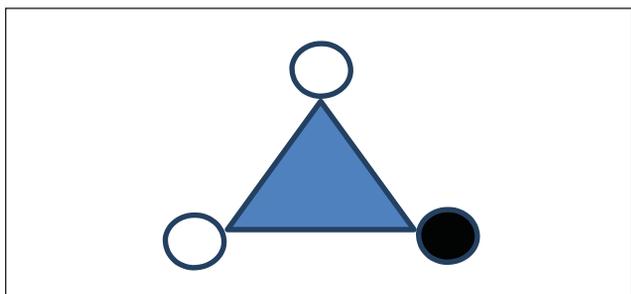


Figure 3.

“There are only two black hats; I can see them on the others’ heads, so mine is white” (p. 134; see Figure 2).

In an “instant of the gaze” (Zizek, 2007) an impersonal logic determines the result. The prisoner stands up, and leaves the room a free man. Were we to extend that kind of logic to the Hermitage anecdote we would take a simple realist position—the paintings are no longer in their frame—and dismiss any addition as speculation. It offers an objectivist shortcut rather than a hermeneutic circling of context, frame, and content.

The second possibility is that there are two white hats and one black hat. I will reason like this: “I can see one black hat and one white, so mine is either white or black. However, if mine is black, then the prisoner with the white hat would see two black hats and immediately conclude that his is white—since he has not done so, mine is white too” (Zizek, 2007; see Figure 3)

Here some time has to elapse; understanding in the form of an empathic reading of the mind of the other has to take place. It is a different mode of subjectivity from the first. An impersonal logic of time is replaced by an intersubjective endeavor that involves thinking the Other, and reading their reaction (or rather its absence in this particular case). In the Hermitage example, the subjectivities of the guide and the cadets are *imagined*² to make sense of apparently senseless behavior: Why look at a painting that is not there? *Ceci n’est*

pas une peinture, an echo of Magritte we will later amplify in relation to the contrast between resemblance and similitude (Foucault, 1968, p. 44). The connection between the former notion and reflexivity is made clear by both Magritte and some of his commentators: “Resemblance, however, unlike representation, must be self-reflexive” (Gablik, 1985, p. 139). Foucault, in his discussion of Magritte, goes further, arguing that “resemblance” is also prefaced on a kind of model, and it is “similitude” that is the more fertile category:

Resemblance predicates itself upon a model it must return to and reveal; similitude circulates the simulacrum as an indefinite and reversible relation of the similar to the similar (Foucault 1968, p. 44).³

The third possibility—three white hats—is the most complex. Here the reasoning goes like this: “I can see two white hats, so mine is either white or black. If mine is black, then either of the two remaining prisoners would reason in the following way: ‘I can see a black hat and a white hat. So if mine is black, the prisoner with the white hat would see two black hats, and would stand up and leave immediately. However, he has not done so. So mine is white—I shall stand up and leave.’” (Zizek, 2007, p. 134).

In the second instance, the subjectivity was limited to working out what one of the others must be concluding, assuming a certain rational capacity. Zizek (2007) calls this a “simple reciprocal capability to take the other’s reasoning into account” (p. 135). But there is an important extension of that subjectivity in the third instance. As he puts it, there is a “moment of conclusion” that provides the true “genesis of the I.” The subject begins not knowing himself (an identity encapsulated in the color of the hat), and reaches the conclusion of “the assumption of symbolic identity” (p. 135)—“to the conclusion that I am white . . . —That’s me!” (ibid.)⁴ Such a genesis of the I refers as much to “Researchers” as to “Respondents.” In that sense, identity comes inwards rather than radiates outwards from some imagined “core,” again as Magritte envisaged: “The person is his reflection” (Roegiers, 2005, p. 41). It is the Other who

decides the Self, as Anderson (2012) notes in relation to academic contexts: “Criticism is the oxygen of self-reflection” (p.49).

In each case there is a mobilization of *evidence* (hats/empty frames), *logic* (meaning/ cause/ consequence), *time* (instant/deliberative), and *subjectivity* (impersonal/ empathic/ holistic). That mobilization creates a hermeneutic narrative that draws as persuasively as it can on the integration or, more like, concatenation of these various registers. We can see that the original conceptual trinity of “content, frame, and context” articulate with all of these notions and act out as a singular performance a kind of reflexive signature that cannot be reduced to any one of those—least of all to mere subjectivity, the usual charge against reflexive appropriations of meaning (Stronach, 2010). “Navel-gazing” is not a coherent charge. And “subjectivity” is a necessary and positive feature of the interpretation. We return later to the puzzle as to what mobilizes the mobilization.

We do, however, need to note the degree of oversimplification in the hat–prisoner analogy. It is rule-bound; the rules are known to all the players; they are applied with integrity; and the results are accepted as consequential. The context is “frozen.” In short, it is a *methodology*, replete with the same reduction, abstraction, and reification. The real world is not that easy, and proscribes the heuristic of a metaphor that prescribes a model. As Schelling (1970) points out, (and Zizek somewhat downplays), we would need to revise the “game” into a much more “precarious partnership” (p. 16), within which “we are dealing with imagination as much as with logic; and the logic is of a fairly casuistic kind” (Schelling, 1970, p.58). Such a “non-zero sum game” is based on much more chancy “reciprocal expectations” (p. 87).⁵ If we think this intersubjective game against the Hermitage empty frame scenario, we do not end up with a typology of reflexivities against which to map our practices so much as an (inevitably simplified) heuristic in which the reflexive “I” can think itself into a complex, interlaced, and contradictory “becoming.”

We now turn to *practices* of reflexivity. With the help of Zizek (2007), Foucault (1968), and Magritte we have taken an empirically derived trinity (context, frame, content) and related it epistemologically to a similitude in relation to three “game-theory” scenarios that Zizek (2007) draws from Lacan. Our practices of reflexivity do not map on to these scenarios in any sense of resemblance. On the contrary, we suggest that each praxis draws on a range of such scenarios, although to be comprehensively reflexive it is necessary in each case to mobilize a hermeneutics that is at least similarly triadic in its signature.

Praxis I: The Reflected Self

This article began with a quotation from Gaschē (1986), pointing out a reflexive dilemma: How can you reflect on

yourself when you are already the self that is part of that reflection? It posits reflexivity as either self-indulgence or self-delusion. There may be empty frames within us, but we have no access to them: We are our own worst strangers.⁶ As the Lacanian/Zizekian games, above, suggested, the self’s self-understanding is not a matter of simple introspection. It is an intersubjective achievement, drawing on rational and emotional connection. Identity claims are often appeals to the foreignness⁷ of the Other: “I am not one of those people who dominates,” “I am not one of them people that gives up on things,” “they said well . . . look at you, what, you are 61 . . . I mean, I am not that decrepit” [Greg’s data],⁸ what in earlier group discussion we called assertion of identity via a “perimeter of negatives.” Some of that distance exists also between the researcher and the respondent: It took a serial confession over a number of interviews before an incident initially portrayed as “say something” to a student talking during the lecture progresses through “just be quiet please” to a “shut the fuck up” as the verbatim finale:

It was quite funny, he said do you want to shut the fuck up, and I thought it was quite funny.

To become that total misnomer “data,” the original reporting from the respondent passes via developing intimacy of relationship and a growing mutual reflexivity between researcher and researched into the intersubjectively “sayable.” The data is “diacritical” (Pocock, 2006, p. xii) between both researcher and researched, in their readings of themselves in relation to the Other and to Others. This is not “emergent” theory: it is “emergent data.”

We travel often cautiously through others to arrive at ourselves, as Corngold (1981), drawing on Nietzsche, noted:

The self is an interpreting being . . . that needs to interpret in order for that interpretation to interpret the self. (Nietzsche, as cited in Corngold, 1981, p. 74)

In the absence of a significant Other, to give us *ourselves*, as a “lone mother” indicated, there is only isolation: “Why am I cooking and why am I doing everything that I am doing because at the end of the day I am just alone, all by myself . . . need someone to be with me to tell me it’s all right” [Sajida’s data].

Ricoeur (1981) unpacks this theme rather well:

On the one hand, self-understanding passes through the detour of understanding the cultural signs in which the self documents and forms itself. On the other hand, understanding the text is not an end in itself; it mediates the relation to himself [*sic*] who, in the short circuit of immediate reflection, does not find the meaning of his own life (in Thompson, 1981, p. 158).

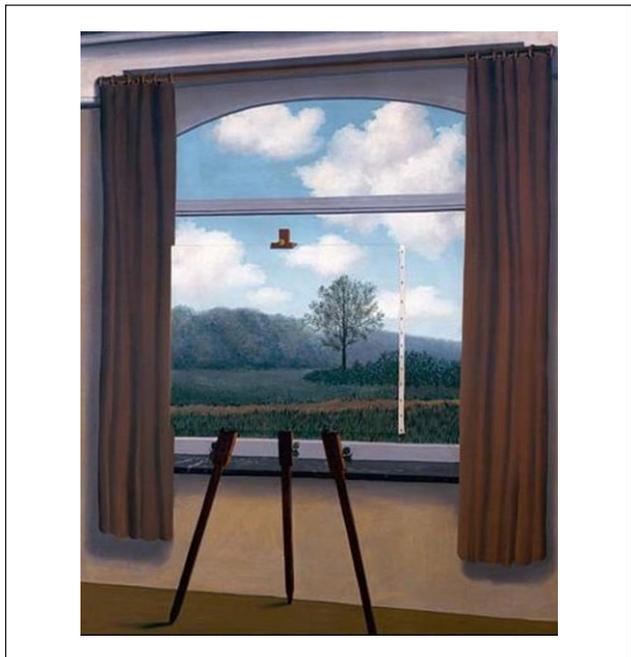


Figure 5. Magritte: The Human Condition
 Note: © ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London 2012.

And such a process, as the introductory quotation from Pessoa (2001) tells us, is iterative and unending—a becoming rather than a being. In both senses, a reflection rather than a given core self. As the reflexive work of Gregg, Masrur, Vanessa, Katy, and Sajida well illustrate, the distancing of the self from it-self is a complicated and even contradictory process, as Butler (1997) argues:

On the one hand, the subject can refer to its own genesis only by taking a third-person perspective on itself, that is, by dispossessing its own perspective in the act of narrating its genesis. On the other hand, the narration of how the subject is constituted presupposes that the constitution has already taken place, and thus arrives after the fact (p. 11).

In her account, we become the selves that we already are not.

Vanessa expresses the dilemma of the “reflected self” in terms of Goffman’s (1959) account of stages and identities: “My participants and I were both performing within the research, but sometimes my front stage was their back stage (or even off-stage).” She expressed such intersubjectivity in terms of different lenses, wondering in addition whether such occlusions and perspectives were not rather “like those double-sided mirrors where one side works as a mirror and the other side as a window.” Such a formulation of mirror/window reminded us of the play on seeing surfaces in Magritte’s *The Human Condition* (see Figure 5), where

“reality” is painted on to the window and mirrored in its apparent depiction in a painting.

This kind of reciprocal reflexivity may be part of an internal or external relation, as when a daughter talks of her relation to her father, and then to her child: “My dad . . . in us he sees himself . . . so he looks for himself in us—we are his pieces, in us he exists . . . So from him, I have this, that whatever the kids are they are me . . . he [her son] is what I am” [Sajida].

In this respect, we found looking at the self-portraiture of Magritte a fruitful endeavor in the exploration of reflexivity. Later in this account, we look at one of those self-portraits through which Magritte documents and forms “himself” and use this as a vehicle for opening up questions about the representation of ourselves in research. Such a picture depends on absences, even when, in this case, it is actually present within the frame. These absences include a refusal to be direct,” a refusal to exist without an audience, and in those refusals a further refusal to “stand still” (or, as it were, hold any single meaning or meanings). “The art of this text is the air it causes to circulate between its screens” (Derrida, 1997, p. 75).

Praxis 2: The Intercultural Self

As a group, we are highly “intercultural,” comprising of Malaysian, Pakistani, Chinese, Irish, Scottish, and English backgrounds. These disconnections are productive, in unpredictable ways. For example, Masrur’s doctoral study develops case studies focused on “risk assessment” in event management in Malaysia. His reflexive piece begins with what appears to be total irrelevance:

For more than a decade since I obtained my driving licence back in 1991, safety and risk have never come into my consideration whenever and wherever I am behind the steering wheel. It is quite a norm for Malaysian drivers (including me) to pay little attention and not be too cautious with our driving style. I have been fined more than three times for not wearing my seatbelt . . . Here in the UK I have changed completely. It has transformed me into being a good driver with lots of safety and risk concerns, something that I had never achieved in being a motorist in Malaysia for nearly 20 years. Now I would automatically put on my seatbelt even for just reversing my car in our own driveway.’

Living in a more “risk-averse society,” Masrur notes the disparity with Malaysian norms. He also sees the analogy between his thesis and his driving. As a result he feels he can “jump in and out of the informants’ shoes time and time again.” The change in place and time reframes past and present experience: Identity becomes reflection; cultural

difference creates a new subjectivity. Content and context are in a continuous relay: “The context is not exterior to the question; it conditions the form that the question will take” (Butler, 1995, p. 6).

However, Sajida’s reflexive dilemma is ontological. Her study of “lone mothers” has a founding problem. It includes her own status, and yet there is no such thing as a “lone mother” in her language and culture, and that status is radically different from its United Kingdom equivalents. There is an existential loss:

I have no meaning because the things around me are not there to give me meaning . . . So maybe I need someone to give me meaning to whatever I am doing . . . there is this missing person.

A life reduced to objects and routines with too little sense of agency or purpose—a “no hat” scenario? She is, in her own account, estranged. But oddly, it is not from her husband but from herself. Yet, in this account, that estrangement is both inevitable and also productive.

Praxis 3: The Immanent Self

Recall Musil’s (1995) intriguing reference to a “child’s toy town deserted by the imagination.” What are we to make of that? Physically, such a toy town is unreal, a copy of a generic kind, even a copy of copies since it resembles other toy towns much more than it resembles towns themselves. It is nothing but wood, cardboard, paper, and plastic. Such is its “impersonal logic.” So to be a concept called “child’s toy town,” it has to be inhabited by the child’s imagination: a metaphysical construct. From the child’s point of view it is over there at the same time as it is in here. The metaphysical is real. The physical is merely true. Without the “endeavor” of that subjectivity, it is nothing. To understand the child’s toy town we need to include the imagination of the child, which in turn means that we have to imagine the imagining of the child—what hat is she wearing, and ourselves too? The analogy with research is striking: Without imagination, without subjective and intersubjective investments, it is an “empty space” that really is empty, trapped by the logic of scenario 1.⁹ As Schelling (1970) argued, a logic indifferent to imagination in matters concerning intersubjectivity is incompetent. To address Benjamin (2004) as well as Schelling, if there is an aura that marks a certain authenticity, it resides within that metaphysics as a kind of potent invisibility such as Magritte conjures in his painting-as-philosophy. Of which, more later.

Sajida expresses the dilemma of the immanent self when she writes of her “loneliness” and contrasts it with the strength of other lone mothers she has been interviewing:

“When I was listening to them, they were very strong and collected and I was in pieces . . . I couldn’t figure out that. How come me? They are surviving but I can’t. Probably I need someone to become *collected* at that time” [emphasis added]. That notion of a self *collected together* is important, and stands in direct contrast to the missing partner, whose absence is a cultural rather than a personal disaster, and so a matter of shame rather than regret: the son asks what his father’s other [first] name was: “. . . he questions me directly what is his dad’s other name which goes with Shareefa and I announce in a very low voice his first name. To my luck he doesn’t hear it and his attention is caught by a Power Ranger toy commercial on television. I take a sigh of relief.”

In this reflexive dilemma, the researcher is placed neither back in her Pakistani culture, where in one sense she cannot exist, and in a UK culture where her “lone motherhood” is different from the norm. Nor is it that she is constituted “in-between” these selves (a bit of this or that experience or value as old content and new content). Indeed these two selves are experienced as non-selves—there is nothing to be in-between. The in-between is absent, and she is constituted in the impossible place of that space—missing, but still in action.¹⁰

Praxis 4: The Professionalized Self

As a dance movement therapist, Katy’s reflexivity is very different. It is inherent to the professional role, “with touch as the basis for the therapeutic process”:

I talk softly to her, “Breathe easy . . . if you want to move as I touch you, yes you can move” . . . She breathes deeply, “That helps?” We look at each other, I nod my head with her rhythmic breath . . . “Feel your chest coming up when you breathe.” I start gentle jiggling. She looks at me. (Extract from field notes. The patient is an adult with severe learning difficulties.)

The aim is to establish an “empathetic resonance” (Trevarthen, 1979, p. 430) wherein “countertransference” articulates the reflexive ambition of the therapist expressed in presensory, visceral, and discursive forms. In this instance a comprehensive reflexivity is a foundation of the professional role. This may seem wildly different from the situation of the other researchers, but any attempt to rationalize and operationalize “reflexivity” will carry its own “professional” burdens.

There is an irony. Katy resists the medical science of the chemical intervention to offer an alternative therapy in

terms of intersubjectivities and interactions. Yet in her early research experience, she dons that same scientist's coat of neuroscience to (unreflexively) address her reflexive professional practices.

Conclusion

There is a common notion in these interweaving “takes” on reflexivity (they are by no means separate, exclusive, or segmentary “selves”),¹¹ and it returns us to the empty frame and the notion of an “absent centre” (Pajaczowska & Young, 1992) or remainder that are variously conceptualized by Derrida (2000), Butler (1995), Pessoa (2001), and Žižek (2007). These omissions constitute reflexivity as a set of invisible movements that circulate and articulate the *visible* aspects of reflexivity that we have already discussed—evidence, logic, time, movement, subjectivity, and so on. But the latter constitute, as it were, only the face of the clock. Were we to leave our analysis of subjectivity there, we would be inviting the sort of contradiction to which Peshkin (1988) succumbed in his work on reflexivity, constructing behind our own backs an unacknowledged transcendent self who animates the reflexive inventory. Such theorists who claim to reflexively construct a self-inventory of segmentary selves (e.g., the political, religious, etc. components of their research selves), face an impossible contradiction: the very act of inventory omits the “academic- I that constructed the whole account” (Jones, 1997, p. 100; Stronach, Garratt, Pearce, & Piper, 2007, p. 183). The researcher's story leaves the researcher unstoried.

If it is the case that the *invisible* constitutes reflexivity in its absolute singularity in each instance (as we said, *never* a methodology) then we have to avoid the traps of representation and definition, which would destroy the nature of the “foreignity” that we are trying to articulate. The link between the “visible” and the “invisible” is always more than evidential: it is inferential. It is the product of an inescapable intersubjective heterogeneity. Nevertheless, we want to say more by way of analogy, and to do so with recourse to Magritte's painting. We have already indicated a debt to his paintings *Ceci n'est pas une pipe*, and *The Human Condition*, relating them first to the Hermitage empty frames and then to Žižek's (2007) linking of reflexive logic and the nature of subjectivity. Magritte also offers a self-portrait which, we will argue, enacts by its absences and paradoxes the sort of meaning-making that we have been trying to picture (see Figure 6).¹²

In *Clairvoyance*, Magritte offers an ironic profile of himself painting a bird in flight, while apparently looking askance at an egg on a side-table. There is a patina of reflexive realism that echoes the presence of logic, time, movement, and place. It seems to mirror reality, to make a scene *visible* and comprehensible in and by its visibility.



Figure 6. Magritte: *Clairvoyance*
Note: © ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London 2012.

But Magritte is painting the invisible. The visible is oddly static, a pose, a tableaux. Nothing connects, really. The painting performs its impossibility. He paints himself painting a picture of a bird, which he is not looking at. The artist is painting another impossibility—what the egg will become. The egg is the thought of the bird. He is painting *Becoming as Being*. The egg is a metaphor masquerading as a model. And the egg seems too big for the bird. Magritte usually painted pigeons and doves, but this seems (the size of the egg may also be a clue) to be a cuckoo. Does the palette express the destruction of other eggs in the nest (the “nest” is another favorite theme of Magritte)? The eyes of the bird are “barred” by the immobile brush. The left hand is hidden yet it supports the invisible transition of egg to bird. The painting offers a jolt of incongruity via all these (and other) invisibilities and disjunctions. Magritte wants us to look at ourselves looking at him, and *think* his painting of the visible and the invisible. His ambition is not representation but intersubjectivity. He intends to unpaint painting and paint for us that unpainting, just as reflexivity seeks to un-think, un-see, and understand the empirical surfaces of the real. His subject is really the intersubjective couplet of painter and viewer: He makes us *look into* painting rather than *look at* a painting. That is his game, as we see it.

Finally, what broader cultural sense can we invoke for this search for a reflexive practice that refuses to give up its invisibility and mystery as remainder and all those other conceptual markers that the image of the empty frame conjures? Graeber (2011) discusses the nature of the Greek *symbolon*. The *symbolon* was an object—ring, pottery, knucklebone, tally—that when broken in two and shared between partners constituted an agreement, whether in

friendship or contract. The halves had to “tally,” the origin of that word. The *symbolon* was nothing in itself except a “social convention,” “a concrete token, perceptible to the senses, that could only be understood in reference to some hidden reality” (Graeber, 2011, p. 299). Whether ring or tally, it is a form of nonmonetary agreement in a noncommodified world. Its physical breaking was a guarantee of a metaphysical joining, acting as “reminders of friendship” or partnership.¹³ It therefore tells the relation of the visible to the invisible, as this article has tried to do. And in so doing, it takes qualitative inquiry, as reflexively determined at least, beyond any possibility of quantification, measurement, definition, or commodification. Hence, the significance of the empty frames in the wartime Hermitage, the absent centers of our theorizing, the “givenness” of our selves as socially inferred rather than essentially given, and the “X-factor” of our title. All of which sympathize with a founding loss and desire, as Musil (1995) once noted:

Then there are always some people who think beyond all this of a God who has their missing piece in His pocket (p. 197).

Authors' Note

The group comprises two faculty members of CERES (Stronach and Frankham) and five doctoral students. As indicated above, Greg's work addresses the different cultures of “mature students” as opposed to their younger contemporaries. Katy is a dance movement psychotherapist researching her own practice with patients with severe learning difficulties. Vanessa is studying various initiatives in LJMU to bolster “employability,” attending especially to students' perceptions of HE-work links. Sajida is studying the phenomenon of “lone mothers,” while Masrur is evaluating risk assessment strategies in the context of Malaysian event management.

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Notes

1. We discuss the hermeneutics of context later in the article, with reference to the sorts of “dialectical tacking” between subject, object, and context that the likes of Geertz and Ricoeur recommend (Geertz, 1975; Ricoeur, 1981).
2. To “imagine” does not mean to wildly and randomly invent, as an act transgressive of good “research.” As Schelling (1970) notes, imagination is integral to any linking of evidence and logic. And the “image” and the “word” can be made to

act together in paradoxically fruitful ways, as Magritte has shown.

3. We posit three forms of picturing. The first is “representation”; it aspires to a logical and closed outcome (scenario 1 is our analogy). Resemblance is a more reflexive activity, although we agree with Foucault (1968) rather than Gablik (1985) that it draws on an implicit model. Foucault prefers a looser and more subjective notion of similitude as does Schelling. What is the difference? The couplets similar/different as opposed to typical/atypical point us toward the epistemological divergence.
4. Of course, such an identity is an effect of a simple game. Real-life reflexive dilemmas are somewhat more complicated, but the key point is the ways in which the radical uncertainty of the “I” is addressed.
5. To illustrate: imagine an obvious cheating. The rules having been explained, one of players dyes a white hat black without the knowledge of the other two. In the first scenario the two duped players see two black hats and reasonably but wrongly assume that their hat *must* be white. And so on. Note that in such a circumstance, the cheat has more work to do rather than less. His hat may still be white or black. He needs to read the actions of the others appropriately to decide whether that is the case or not. In terms of intersubjectivity, cheating makes the “impersonal” scenario disappear. Cheating thus makes things more difficult for the cheat! And a rational cheat can only assume that the others may be up to similar tricks. Of course, as researchers, we are not fighting a Cold War with ruthless opponents, but, as we have seen, telling what you know and not letting on what you don't know, are still part of the interaction that a reflexive inquiry must acknowledge and address. Empathy is always also a matter of suspicion. Always juggle with the Johari Window! (Luft & Ingham, 1955)
6. Perhaps this is worth unpacking. “We are our own worst strangers” echoes the familiar saying “we are our own worst enemy.” Thus behind the visibility of the words is the same kind of invisibility that we are writing about in the paper. It acts as a palimpsest, just as Magritte's paintings sometimes do: we really do have to look for what is not there!
7. Why the neologism of “foreignity”? Surely there is a perfectly adequate if clumsy sounding “foreign-ness” that will suffice? But the latter refers to an aspect of something failing to be “homely”—a dimension of the alien. It sets up a series of hidden polarities (foreign/home; missing/present; deserted/occupied etc). Foreignity is rather different. It expresses an abstract founding principle rather than a subsidiary empirical aspect. To think foreignity, consider the abstraction “sovereignty,” which means much more than mere “royalty.” We thought “neologism” was our new coin-ing. But, as we are beginning to get used to, we subsequently discovered that we were beaten to it by 26,700 entries on the web—though as far as we know, none of them deploy the word as we have done.

8. Greg's doctoral research contrasts the attitudes mature university students have to younger students. This incident dramatizes the different levels of "seriousness" that attend their academic engagements.
9. An example of "scenario 1" in education might argue, "If A, then B." To illustrate, if whole-class teaching, then better learning outcomes. Or to give an example suggested to us by Andrew Sparkes: if "Blackboard" (an on-line learning environment widely used in higher education in the United Kingdom) and "powerpoint" usage, then greater student satisfaction and subsequent recruitment. That such an alliance of rote teaching with rote learning might have educationally counterproductive consequences escapes managers in HE in the United Kingdom.
10. She says of herself: "I was in pieces." Who says "I was in pieces?" It cannot be one of the pieces, for sure.
11. Ascherson (2012) offers us an embodied "gap" or "aporia" in the state or rather nonstate of 19th century Amikejo, otherwise referred to as the "Akvizgran Discrepancy," a "tiny sliver of land between Belgium and Germany which had been overlooked by the surveyors as they drew new European frontiers after the fall of Napoleon" (p. 17). If we count imperializing states as paradigms, we can see that reflexivity demands its own differentiating and singular exceptionalism—a necessary "Discrepancy."
12. On September 14, 2011, the doctoral group visited a Magritte exhibition at Tate Liverpool. The exhibition featured the paintings discussed in this article.
13. Are there contemporary examples of such a phenomenon? Stronach recalls his primary schooling in Scotland in the 1950s. If a boy "fancied" one of the girls, he would wait until he acquired a bus ticket whose numbers added up to 21, then tear it in two and send the half of the ticket with the number on it to the girl. If she kept the half, the relationship was agreed upon. If she returned it, no deal. It seems a very good illustration of the *symbolon* still in action. Though the ancient Greek connection might be tricky to establish. According to Graeber's (2011) rather gung ho generalizing, this would not be a problem since such arrangements were something of a universal in ancient civilizations, including the Chinese.

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Deconstructing the Intercultural Learning of a Doctoral Group Undertaking Qualitative Research—Or How Not to Do a ‘White PhD’

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Abstract This article looks at the intellectual and linguistic dilemmas of an international doctoral group and juxtaposes these with some of the existential challenges the group faces. The intention is to offer a kind of ‘dialectical tacking’ between doctoral thinking and doctoral experiences more broadly. The overall aim of the piece is to think in front of each other while developing a sense of ‘equality’ in relation to group contributions. Each of the excursions into research in this article enacts different approaches to research thinking – comparative, inductive, deductive, dialectical and deconstructive. In this piece, the voice of a tutor (Stronach) is mostly dominant, but further publication will shift that balance significantly towards the voice of the doctoral student. We begin with an empirical detail that highlights the nature of some of the problems of cultural and linguistic translation.

Keywords: doctoral study, international students, intercultural learning, UK higher education

Miss-translations, and the Life of ‘Thi’

Dung explained how ‘Thi’ in a Vietnamese name indicated ‘woman’. It appeared in the middle of the name. Thus, in contemporary usage: ‘family name, “Thi”, middle name, first name’. So how would we go about translating ‘Thi’ into English, just to kick off our consideration of intercultural difficulties? English language markers of ‘woman’ in a name depend mainly on prefixes such as ‘Miss’, ‘Mrs’, or more recently ‘Ms’. But there’s a politics behind these female markers. ‘Miss’ can mean ‘young’, but

sometimes 'old' as in an unmarried spinster. Either way, there's usually something belittling, literally or metaphorically, about the use. I say 'usually' because male senior consultants in a UK hospital are not called 'doctor' but 'Mr', a mark of higher status. I learned recently that their female equivalent can be 'Miss'. So 'Miss' is a bit of a semantic wanderer. High status, low status, no status. OK, so how about something more definite like 'Mrs'? O dear, worse and worse. 'Mrs' marks the married status of a woman. Until the 1950s, or thereabouts, one of its uses was incredibly gendered – my mum would get letters addressed to 'Mrs Peter Stronach'. As a little kid, I remember puzzling over how she could possibly be called 'Peter' – we're in 'A boy called Sue' territory here (Cash, 1969). So what 'Mrs' meant was a married woman belonging to the man called whatever. Not a person, not part of a name like 'Thi', but a possession. This reflected a historical subordination of women to men in UK culture. Hence the coining of a new naming device in the 1960s and '70s: 'Ms', meaning a person in their own right, not to be labelled married/unmarried. 'Ms' is a feminist invention, an 'insurrectionary force' (Fraser, 2013, p. 1) against the patriarchy of female-naming in the UK and elsewhere.

So what's in a name? A whole hidden politics of gender, in the case of the English words for naming 'woman'. Now, Dung wasn't there to unpack 'Thi' for us – she'd just written something for us and headed off to do fieldwork in Vietnam – but we can see that the idea of a straightforward translation into an English word is impossible. Precise definition is not the solution, it is part of the problem.

When Dung returned she added to the mystery of 'translation' at our next meeting: 'Thi' meant female and could apply to any age or marital state. There was no equivalent male marker, so 'Thi' in a name meant woman as a presence, just as its absence from a name implied a male. We wondered if that was also connected to notions of patriarchy. Woman was the exception that had to be named, perhaps a little like the kind of patriarchy that used to obtain in English where 'man' meant male but also all of humankind, including women.¹ What became apparent was that Vietnamese had a great number of age- and status-type prefixes. They meant things like 'Sister', 'Aunt', 'Grandfather' and so on. Nasra also added to this, saying the Mr/Mrs/Ms boxes on UK government forms were culturally strange. They had no such gender labels to prefix names in Oman.

At any rate, it seemed that 'Thi' was untranslatable, and the six different ethnicities in the meeting agreed that was the case for them all. Each word-marker in each language was a mini-ideology of cultural difference. Thinking in another language was like walking through a minefield: Small things had big consequences. A further point of relevance. This section could not have been written by any single member of

the group. We had to pool our information about Mr/Mrs/Ms/Thi to compare and analyse the different cultural and language translations. Knowledge of these differences was the only possible basis for a common understanding. There was a certain dependence on each other and a necessary equality in that process of exchange – a theme we will return to. That was difficult, but it had the bonus that we could get further together than we could apart. It was an inversion of the notion of ‘together apart’ (Derrida, 1991). All group members were ‘apart together’. Jointly, as Rancière (1991) puts it, ‘the problem is to reveal an intelligence to itself’ (p. 28). And that ‘singular’ intelligence turns out to be necessarily collective.

We now shift from that illustration of the semantic dilemmas of translation to a more experiential aspect of intercultural dilemmas.

Being Friendly, or Very Rude: Mark My Words!

At another of the doctoral group meetings, a student responds to an early draft of this paper: ‘One more thing, in Vietnam, saying out the name of an older people or name of teachers, professors . . . is rude. I am not allowed to say “Mark”, instead, saying “Professor”’. That’s very important. We saw a whole politics hiding within apparently everyday labels for women, in English and in Vietnamese, and now we can see (or begin to suspect) more overtly a politics of learning. Behind the ‘Mr’ or the ‘Professor’ is a whole range of understandings and feelings. On the one hand, we saw from an Asian perspective notions such as respect, love, maybe a kind of Confucian ‘filial piety’, as someone else wrote. Or the ‘priority’ for ‘modesty and politeness’. And also the imperative to be ‘respectful’. On the other – more Western – reading, these virtues may translate into deference, hierarchy, an acknowledgement of inferiority, dependence. There are two very different ‘learners’ in the room! I (Ian Stronach)² can only I can only pick up the Western thread of this (if ‘Western’ is a sensible generalisation – but it’ll do as shorthand for the moment). Notions of ‘emancipation’ in education are part of the European Enlightenment, at least in the more progressive versions of that inheritance. So the initial pedagogy is already very differently politicised. On the one hand, the expectation of an autonomous and independent learner, facilitated by a kind of learning that is based on dialogue, discussion and difference. ‘Education’ rather than instruction. On the other hand, a search for definition, certainty, procedures, authority. Of course, ‘on the one hand’/‘on the other hand’ sets up too definite a distinction: Things never divide that neatly, but we’ll shortly take one extreme and explore a theory of educational relationship that Rancière argues (Davis, 2010, p. 25–35). It relates to our data.

Only the Lonely

These were some common feelings amongst the international students in the group:

‘I enjoy the modern life but sometimes I feel so lonely’

‘I still need more local friends to help me to get to know the country better’

‘being lonely without my family and friends’

‘being a lone mother’

‘finding friends to discuss things’

Loneliness was a nested experience. First there was the core loneliness of doing a PhD – a long, hard, difficult, solo performance. Adding to that sense of isolation is the perceived uncertainty of success. Surrounding that core loneliness is the isolation of the ‘doctoral silo’: you get to know very few other staff in the faculty. Then there was the feeling of not understanding how everyday things worked in the UK, such as the need for a TV licence. Opinion was divided on whether Liverpool was a friendly place. Another form of loneliness. Some found their compatriots (Malaysian, Chinese) for company and also for what was called a ‘cycle assistance’ (cycle of assistance) whereby those who had been here a while could explain housing, car purchase, driving in England, visa requirements, the weather, etc., to the newcomers. A final form of loneliness was created by a British government and university bureaucracy which seemed continuously suspicious and required reassurance that you really were a proper student by asking for confirmation with paranoid regularity.³

Not all of the group agreed with the lonely theme – for themselves, that is. Irish and Scottish agreed that Liverpool was ‘the easiest of all the cities I have ever lived to fit in’, and loneliness for the international students (most of whom were female) also meant an important new experience of independence. Like all expatriates, they learned to look at their identity in different ways, partly by recognising ‘imagined communities’ (Anderson, 1983) and partly by redefining themselves across their new identities and experiences. They had to cope, catch buses, order taxis, shop, work – all without the familiar supports of an extended family. One student felt that she would come out of the experience glad to get home but also stronger for the experience. An article on being an American father in Norway, with a Norwegian wife and kids, pointed out at least the hope that, following Nietzsche (1882), the children would of course become Norwegian in terms of their identity but still able to look at being Norwegian from an outside perspective as well. Nietzsche called this a ‘suspecting glance’ (Miller, 2013).

Towards a Theory of ‘Rude’

Generally, the group felt a heightened sense of personal responsibility across both living and learning. ‘I have responsibility to do everything’, ‘I have to accept whatever obstacles’, ‘I have to survive’. When we discussed this theme, someone said that one of the very difficult things was reading and reading again – maybe 10 times, and still not understanding. As Dung wrote:

Though I got IETLS 7.0 [test score for English as Additional Language] I didn’t understand anything after days of reading a book. I kept reading. The more I read, the more I felt upset and just wanted to quit. I didn’t think I was clever enough to keep moving toward.

This reminded me of something I had recently been reading. Rancière discusses the work of Joseph Jacotot, who spoke only French, yet taught students who spoke only Flemish. This was at the University of Leuven in 1818. Jacotot made them recite the opening lines of a book written in French and ‘when they had reached the middle of the first book, he made them repeat what they had read over and over again and then read the rest of the volume’ (Davis, 2010, p. 25). Jacotot was ‘astonished’ to find that when required later to write about what they had read, they did so better than native French speakers. He concluded that ‘explanation’ stood in the way of learning, a theme Rancière develops. Ordinary pedagogy installs a permanent dependence on the learner, an ‘intellectual inequality of teacher and student’ (p. 12). As Davis notes, ‘Far better results could be obtained by presupposing from the outset that the students were the intellectual equals of each other and their teacher’ (p. 26). Rancière calls this ‘radical equality’ and takes it to be a ‘presupposition’ of real learning. The student becomes autonomous from the beginning, rather than working towards it. The institution in its very structures is condemned to be hierarchical and oppressive: It generates the dependence that guarantees its professed aims of ‘equality’ or even ‘autonomy’ will be endlessly deferred. Now, it’s only a theory, and the question is how convincingly can we connect the theory to our empirical references? Let’s try to do that just to see how we can develop such links and also begin to see what a theory looks like and can and can’t do – addressing this concern: ‘In Vietnam, in my research area, there is no “theory” like that. I was very confused about that’.

What are the connections for us, in this group, in these (for most) early stages of our doctoral work? First there is the empirical parallel: reading and reading and reading, not understanding, and then – finally and hopefully – understanding. It’s not so far away from Jacotot’s ‘reciting’. Second there is the parallel in language.

Knowing English but not well enough to feel competent at doctoral-level intellectual tasks; there is a flavour of the French/Flemish incomprehension there. Third, there is the remedy of a sort of ‘radical equality’: The doctoral group is, I think, the only one in the country (in education at least) where the group publishes before its members complete their doctorates (Frankham et al., 2014; Stronach et al., 2013) and which acts together as a thinking group, rather than stays in its ‘doctoral silo’. Fourth, there is an attempt at breaking the hierarchies of institutionalised knowledge that Jacotot and Rancière criticised, which takes us back to the business of calling the ‘Professor’, ‘Mark’. And so learning to be ‘rude’!

The analytic memo for this part of our work ended like this: ‘Conclusion: You can only start at the end’.

Deconstructing Research Pedagogy in Qualitative Research

We proposed at the start of this article that we would attempt a ‘dialectical tacking’ between the intellectual problems of intercultural understanding in a doctoral context and some experiential dilemmas. We further address in this section the intellectual problems of understanding the unfamiliar. As Bull (2011) notes, ‘reading like a loser means assimilating a text in such a way that it is incompatible with one’s self’ (p. 36). I want to pick up on Jacotot’s weird pedagogical suggestion – that we can somehow understand through endless repetition, even when we don’t understand the language of instruction. Rancière called it, you may recall, a ‘radical pedagogy’ (as cited in Blanchot, 1982, p. 25), and I tried to use that kind of theorising as a way of making sense of our problems in understanding across language, gender, culture, religion and age. To add to what was earlier written on Rancière’s thinking, he argues that what conventional pedagogy does is to offer a kind of stultification (¼ a making stupid) of the learner’s intelligence. Learners are constantly reminded of the expert’s superior knowledge, so what is ‘learned’ is a perpetual dependency and inferiority. Yet, he claims, we share the same intelligence, noting ‘intellectual emancipation is the verification of the equality of intelligence’ (Rancière, 2009, p. 10). That intelligence can be foregrounded and mobilised by the learner as a ‘poetic labour of translation’ (p. 10). He addresses the traditional ‘myth of pedagogy’ (Davis, 2010, p. 26) with an ‘anarchist scepticism’ (p. 25). What must be eroded is the learner as passive, inactive, distant from the learning, waiting to be instructed out of his or her ignorance:

These oppositions – viewing/knowing, appearance/reality, activity/passivity – are quite different from logical oppositions between clearly defined terms. They

specifically define a distribution of the sensible, an a priori distribution of the positions, and capacities and incapacities attached to these positions. They are embodied allegories of inequality. (Rancière, 2009, p. 12)

But what about writing itself? What kind of a difference does the act of writing, of narrating, make to our (mis)understandings? Again, we used the following extract in order to deconstruct some of its possibilities, thinking in front of the group.

Blanchot (1982) writes about this most peculiar of difficulties. You will feel like one of Jacotot's students when you first read this paragraph, but let's hope that a 'radical pedagogy' can come to our rescue! Here's what Blanchot had to say about this sort of problem, which he calls one of 'narrative voice':

I write – or say – the sentence: 'Life energy is not inexhaustible'. In doing so I am thinking of something quite simple, of the feeling of exhaustion which constantly reminds us of the fact that life is limited: we walk a few steps down the road, eight, nine, and we collapse. The limits set by exhaustion limit our lives. The significance of life is in turn limited by this limit – the limited significance of a limited life. But a reversal occurs which can be perceived in various ways. Language alters the situation. The words I speak tend to draw into life the limits that ought to contain it. To say that life is limited does not make the limit disappear; but language gives it the possibly limitless meaning it is supposed to limit; the meaning of limit by stating it contradicts the limitation of the meaning or at least displaces it. But in this way the knowledge of limit understood as limitation of meaning may be lost. How then can we talk of limit (convey its meaning) without the meaning un-limiting it? Here it would be opportune to employ a different kind of language and, first of all, admit that the sentence: 'Life energy, etc' is not, as such, entirely legitimate. (p. 213)

Here is some of the thinking (out loud) that we did with each other about this passage:

1. I have a feeling (of growing exhaustion). I name it with words that I hope represent that feeling, honestly, accurately and completely. So I say: 'Life energy is not inexhaustible'. But 'life energy' is a concept, not at all like the reporting of a 'few steps'. I might have said 'vitality' or 'fitness' or perhaps I could have avoided using the negative route of 'not in'. I might have said it positively, 'Life energy is exhaustible'. So every attempt at representation is an interpretation: it is never certain. Even a 'step' has conceptual limits – when is it not a shuffle, a totter or a jump? As I have written before,

‘each . . . halting . . . print . . . of . . . individual . . . word . . . on . . . paper . . . inserts and withdraws meaning, giving a “one” (more or less) and taking away an “infinity” of not-said in the lop-sided arithmetic of writing’ (Stronach, 2010, p. 162).

2. But when I say ‘life energy is not inexhaustible’ I point to a double limit, the ‘feeling’ of limit, and also its ‘significance’ – which is not the same thing because significance indicates ‘meaning’ rather than ‘feeling’. It is a different ‘sense’, in these two ways.
3. So the statement of ‘feeling’, given ‘significance’ to accompany it, becomes a kind of generalisation, a piece of cautionary wisdom, which may help explain why it is expressed through a double negative, that is, ‘not inexhaustible’. For example, I may make sense of the ‘exhaustion’ thesis by expressing it to myself in terms I can relate to: make the act jogging, call it miles not steps, and I can see precisely and empirically how such a ‘feeling’ may come about. That would be a reflexive kind of ‘making sense’. A particularisation rather than a generalisation would go like this: ‘My life energy is not inexhaustible’. I can combine these two versions of the statement by arguing that if I am human, and all humans have energy which runs out in a similar way, then I can take my own case, with its merely singular claim to truth, and offer it as a naturalistic generalisation, a more or less universal truth.
4. Then Blanchot (1982) takes a linguistic turn: ‘The words I speak tend to draw into life the limits that ought to contain it’ (p. 214). What can he mean? Well, here’s one possibility. Life is made up of events. Events are recorded in words. It seems thereby that the active is made passive, the temporary made permanent. We may take ‘a few steps’, but words can’t. They sit still on the page. But Blanchot says otherwise: ‘Language gives it [life] the possibly limitless meaning it is supposed to limit’ (p. 379).
5. So Blanchot (1982) claims to have found a paradox about language in its very being, which he calls a kind of ‘neutrality’ later in the argument. Words are never limited to attempts at representation. They are also a performance. This performativity is active, part of the world, an unavoidable violation of the ‘limits’ of what words ought to be doing. A rather too simple illustration: Think of the difference between saying ‘This ship is called Queen Mary’ and ‘I name this ship Queen Mary’ (Austin, 1962). The first statement offers an empirical and contingent truth (which will be wrong if the ship is actually called Floppsie). The second makes something happen: It is the word as event.

6. Blanchot (1982) concludes by arguing that the statement ‘life energy is not inexhaustible’ is ‘not, as such, entirely legitimate’ (p. 184). ‘Legitimate’ means lawful, permitted, correct. In its original meaning, it means ‘(of a child) born of parents lawfully married to each other’ (Concise Oxford). What narratives try to do is to marry off events to appropriate words and to give birth to legitimate ‘children’ of meaning and representation. But in Blanchot’s view, the marriage never quite comes off, though the babies come thick and fast. And that’s why writing is always a bit of a bastard.

We’ve looked at some of our intellectual challenges within the group and also at the experiences which accompany them, both in the group and as a ‘foreign’ student in Liverpool. We’ll say more about experience in a later article, but meantime we want to turn back on our account and consider how it might be criticised.

Decolonising Metaphor and Value: An Asian Excursion Concerning ‘White PhDs’

Thus far, we have looked at an aspect of linguistic translation, concluding that it is only by unearthing and thinking about differences that we can create a common understanding. In this instance, there is no ‘master’ relationship. We equally bring our knowledge of difference. These differences create a common understanding beyond the reach of any individual in the group. Our second move was to make the same attempt with a politics of pedagogy, constructing a reflexive understanding of what we variously take doctoral learning and teaching to be about. Thus we add helpful uncertainty within the disjunctions of difference. Then we located problems of language and pedagogy in a broader existential field, which we conceptualised as the nested ‘loneliness’ of the international student in a strange country. Alienation joined uncertainty and disjunction. We sought to redress those various forms of estrangement with Rancière’s notion of ‘radical equality’ and ‘intellectual emancipation’ (Rancière, 1991), though we would want to temper that ‘equality’ in the manner suggested by Badiou (2012): ‘The axiom of the equality of intelligences is far from constituting an axiom of the equality of opinions’ (p. 16).

Now that may still seem a far too utopian ambition, one which disguises a fairly obvious ventriloquising equality as well as an unacknowledged Eurocentrism contained in the very rhetorics of equality and emancipation. Our defence would be that, as the ‘Thi’ example showed, we are trying in this exercise to think in front of each other so that the thinking, and the writing, become visible, shared and open to

challenge. In other words, experiential. Each of these differences, therefore, opens up the possibility of a common understanding.

If we were to criticise some of our earlier thinking about intercultural doctoral learning, what could we say? First of all, there are, as we noted, invocations of 'equality' that obscure obvious inequalities of experience, status and authorship. Are these gestures towards 'equality' anything better than a form of 'indirect rule'? Is the collaboration real or illusory? Then again, if we look at the apparent emphasis on 'equality', we can recognise a European Enlightenment theme, carried from the French Revolution by Jacotot, and then Rancière, and then the 'Western' lead authors of this piece (see also Badiou, 2012). Is it a European enlightenment dressed up as a universal value? If so, does it say to international students: 'Come and do a White PhD'? The ironic notion of a 'white PhD' was suggested by Vanessa and referred to how some of her peers in China responded to her doctoral ambitions in the UK. The concept carries with it, in unspoken conspiracy, notions of 'civilisation', 'order', 'progress'. It adds to that a kind of sovereign knowledge related to transcendental Truths (God or King), essentially, according to Rancière (1991), religious in its hierarchical appeal, 'the framework of a theocratic and sociocratic vision of intelligence' (p. 53).

We turn now to a more adventurous attempt to reground our politics and practices of meaning elsewhere in an experimental recourse to the history and culture of Asia, where many of the group come from.

Junger (2010) reflects on the unruly nature of Afghanistan, both historically and in the present. As he puts it, 'it's no place for empires' (p. 99). It is a thesis that J. C. Scott (2009) develops at considerable length and extends to most of the uplands of Southeast Asia. J. C. Scott's thesis is original. He argues that we need a much more jaundiced view of 'Empire' – whether Han-Chinese, Burma, Thai, various European ones or Arab, Roman or Greek ones. They were mostly founded on slavery, or at least authoritarian subjection. In Asia they centred on 'wet-rice' cultivation and were lowland 'padi states' (p. 79). The people were enclosed, made sedentary, taxable and controllable. The state sought to homogenize them, 'to integrate and monetize the peoples, lands and resources of the periphery so that they become, to use the French term, rentable – auditable contributors to the gross national product and to foreign exchange' (p. 4). They were made 'legible', measurable and hence taxable. Such 'extractive' empires (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012, p. 124) envisaged themselves as models of 'civilisation', with 'progress' as their major conceit. The 'civilizational discourse' involved separating the 'cooked' from the 'raw' (as the Han-Chinese had it) and representing hill people as 'wild' (p. 116), primitive barbarians who belonged

to 'tribes' that reflected their inferior development. Such was the 'tunnel vision of the court-state view' (p. 36). J. C. Scott argues that this 'civilizational discourse' (p. 98) invented the nonstate peoples as 'archaic remnants' in order to justify attempts at 'enclosure' and incorporation in the state. The Han-Chinese had three categories of assimilation – 'min, cooked barbarian, raw barbarian' (p. 123). If we deploy this narrative as an analogous resource, we can ask different questions: As international students, is the implication that we're learning to be 'cooked barbarians'? Or, as a Chinese participant in this group put it, becoming 'bananas' (yellow on the outside, white underneath)?

According to J. C. Scott (2009), the historical and anthropological record can be read very differently. A 'wild' status often reflected a 'flight from the state'. Some became oral cultures when previously they had had writing. These were deliberate ploys to remain ungovernable, either through the altitude at which they lived or via their shifting patterns of cultivation or settlement. Their social processes involved 'shape-shifting, fissioning, disaggregation' (p. 219) while their identities were formed in something much more like a 'bricolage' (p. 233). They tended to have social goals that involved 'equality, autonomy, mobility' and this was reflected even in the cultivation of crops, as for example, cassava rather than rice. J. C. Scott refers to all such peoples/groups in Southeast Asia as belonging to a new term, 'Zomia', a nonstate space determined not by geographical boundaries so much as by altitude, remoteness, desert and disaffiliation. He notes that such contrasting dynamics could historically be found elsewhere – Arabs/Berbers, Scots/English,⁴ Albanian/Greek, Cossacks/Russian and so on.

Such a 'Zomic' analogy helps us to decolonise the imperial pretensions of this account, which draws too much on Enlightenment values (the rhetoric of empires) and to consider instead the insurgent and oppositional nature of these values as a set of practices outside imperial rule and rhetoric. Thus we can challenge one of the fantasies of the 'West' – that of a 'monopoly of the universal' (Debray, 2013, p. 32) part of its 'delusions of grandeur' (p. 37). A bit too much of a 'just-so' story, as J. C. Scott puts it (2009, p. 335). And there is a theoretical literature that develops such themes, such as the nomadology of Deleuze and Guattari (1986) and the 'Empire' of global capitalism identified by Hardt and Negri (2000). It is, incidentally, striking how close in his conceptualisations J.C. Scott comes to the language and concepts of such theorists – yet there is nothing in his references to indicate a direct link as opposed to a parallel kind of thinking about 'difference'.

Empire was also a matter of classification, definition, quantification and audit. It had its own distinctive and enclosing ways of thinking, measuring and recording. In

contrast, J. C. Scott (2009) posited a ‘Zomia’ that was open, fluid, indefinable, portable and oral.⁵ It takes only a little epistemological imagination to see in such an empire and its contradiction a paradigm conflict between a quantified social science and its more fugitive alternatives in qualitative inquiry. Current audit mania seeks to make the social entirely ‘legible’ in J. C. Scott’s sense. That would take us to a happy ending in terms of a resistance to commodification, though it would be wrong not to note that J. C. Scott sees ‘Zomia’ as currently coming to an end. We are witnessing, he concludes, ‘the world’s last great enclosure’ (p. 282). That is a political claim that is perhaps a little premature. There seems to be plenty ‘wild’ places left, if we take a more malign view of that condition – say Somalia, Congo, Afghanistan, Syria. But can we be sure – analogously – that it is also a premature epistemological claim? There is much in contemporary educational and social research in the ‘West’ to suggest just such a ‘last great enclosure’ (Stronach, Clarke, & Frankham, 2014). In which case we need to be clear: We need more anarchy, not the chaos of more order.

Postscript (But Not Really)

It would be deceptive to say that we have been rehearsing forms of research thinking and writing, since performance precedes rehearsal, after our musings on Jacotot and Rancière. Finally, we want to enact an end to this writing, again in front of itself, as an object for future thinking. This piece of course came out of the port of Liverpool, and we want it to end there while acknowledging that it can’t ‘end’ anywhere. The problem is this: Narratives end in false closure (it is rude to stop in the middle of a sentence). Yet telling the ‘story’ of method (a form of enclosure) is always unravelled by the ‘method’ of story (a form of dis-closure). Calvino (2009) – in the surreal science of ‘Solar Storm’ – offers a narrative of galactic chaos in relation to Earthly conceits about cause and effect: The Sun mocks Earth’s certainties, and yet we are compelled to end our self-storying with attempts to make ourselves ‘safe from the maelstrom of chaotic elements whirling around us’ (p. 350). In ‘Solar Storm’, the narrator travels home within science, on the good ship Halley, as a captain, a navigator, a predictor of positions in the surety of Earth’s regularities. But he gets lost in magnetic storms generated by the Sun; they disrupt his communications, make his compass fail and his crew panic. As a doctoral group also sailing to and from Liverpool, the place of our estrangement, we can empathise with these metaphorical failures of direction and place. We have enacted getting lost – ethnically, experientially and even potentially, for the last future is the educational bit. Yet, with Calvino, our narrative defies the chaos and insists on a certain illusory closure:

Our route is certain, the sea is calm, tomorrow we will be in sight of the familiar Welsh coast, and in two days we will enter the tarry Mersey estuary, and cast anchor in the port of Liverpool, the end of our voyage. (p. 350)

Notes

1. Bellos (2012) notes that ‘this problem does not arise in German where “man” is either “Mensch” (meaning humankind) or “Mann” (male)’ (p. 206). J. C. Scott (2009) notes that ‘interestingly, but not significantly, “man” apparently also turns up in Vietnamese, where it means “savage”!’ (p. 100).
2. Throughout this article, all first-person references refer to the first author, Ian Stronach.
3. At Liverpool John Moores University, international student attendance/progress was monitored at six-week intervals. Such reporting involved the student and director of studies filling in and signing a form which went first to the university’s central bureaucracy and thence to the UK Border Agency.
4. A more apposite contrast would be between Highland and Lowland Scots. Sir Walter Scott did much to romanticise what he called the ‘wild people’ (W. Scott, 1814/1985, p. 124).
5. J. C. Scott’s thesis is controversial, as Hammond (2011) and others illustrate. Sadan (2013) would add charges of overgeneralisation and romanticisation of the ‘wild’ peoples. Indeed such romanticising of the upland peoples is a persistent literary effect, as Sir Walter Scott’s construction/invention of the Scottish Highlander amply demonstrates (W. Scott, 1814/1985).

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