Is This What Real Men Do? The Learning Careers of Male Mature Students in Higher Education

Anne Gannon

Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of EdD

The School of Education

The University of Sheffield

EdD

December 2014

Table of Contents

TABLE OF TABLES

Table of Figures

Acknowledgements

I would like acknowledge the following people and thank them for all of their help during the course of this study.

Firstly thanks are due to my supervisor, Professor Ann-Marie Bathmaker, for her unstinted encouragement, support and guidance during the research study.

Thank you to the fourteen male participants who gave so generously of their time and who kindly shared their stories.

Thanks to AONTAS and the HEA for answering all of my questions.

Thanks to all of my friends and colleagues who have given me so much help and support including Maeve and Judith, Catherine and Mary.

Thanks especially to Sinead, Jacqui, Patty, Annetta and Maria for keeping me going.

I wish to say a special thank you to Geof and Margaret for the numerous cups of coffee and the chats. Thank you for listening.

Special thanks are also due to:

- Brenda O'Neill, Breda Halligan, and Avril Sauvage

- Mary Barry, Dr Helen O'Brien-Gately and Dr. Carol O'Byrne

Thank you for talking me through many of the difficult times and for your advice and guidance. Your immeasurable help has been invaluable.

Lastly, <u>very special thanks</u> to my family - the Gannon and Roche branches. Thank you for your support and encouragement. You can all come and visit now!

My thesis is dedicated to the memory of my husband,

Anthony Francis Kieran Gannon.

For beloved Kieran.

For your love and support

without which

this would not have been possible.

January 1950 – April 2010

Remembered always. Loved forever.

Abstract

This thesis explores the learning careers and higher education (HE) experiences of a group of male mature students who chose to return to education in an Institute of Technology (IoT) in Ireland.

Men had traditionally dominated HE in Ireland but educational transformations, which resulted in a widening of participation in HE, saw this change. By the mid-1990s, as more women began to participate in HE, men had come to be under represented in Irish HE. This became a cause for concern amongst policymakers and researchers.

In the current recession men are looking to HE as a means of finding a job. The Irish government is keen to improve the HE experience for all students including mature students. As more men enter HE as mature students there is a need to understand their experiences in order to continue to widen male mature student participation in HE and provide support throughout their HE experience.

The way in which men see themselves and their constructions of masculinity have a bearing on their relationship to education and participation in HE. The social constructions of masculinity, which can take many forms, are shaped by experiences and expectations at home and in school. Their experiences affect the trajectory of their learning careers and often determine whether education and HE are options in their lives at eighteen or as mature students.

Masculinity, which has and is being refashioned, has brought about changes especially regarding the traditional role of the male breadwinner and female carer. The decline of the breadwinner role means that some men see the need to reposition themselves with regards to their masculine role in life, through new jobs and opportunities. Their attitudes and their social capital can, like their constructions of masculinity, change over time allowing them to cross the boundaries into HE so that they can become 'better' men.

The study sought to identify and understand the various factors that cause men to return to education in a higher education institution (HEI). Fourteen men took part

in the research study and various factors influenced their decisions to return to education. The participants explained their decisions and experiences through their narratives which were collected via semi-structured interviews.   The narrative approach allowed the participants to describe their individual learning careers thus framing their educational experiences.   It draws on the framework of learning careers to discuss the various reasons that influenced the participants' return to education in HE.

The study analysed and provided insights into the reasons why the participants entered HE and the impact that previous educational and life experiences had on their learning careers as well as highlighting the HE experience itself. These deeper insights provide an understanding of people's learning careers.   These do not always follow a traditional linear pathway but can stop and start and so develop over time.

The study reveals that the factors which impact the trajectories of a learning career include school and life experiences. For the participants a return to education was the way that they, as 'real men', could find jobs in order to look after themselves and their families. The study further indicates that there is a need for the HEIs to take on board the importance of catering for mature students' current expectations that have been framed by past experiences. This HEI support should allow them the chance to fulfil their traditional 'real men' roles by offering them the opportunity to become (better) working men and family providers. These findings should provide a lens for Irish policymakers' deeper understanding of the male mature student thus informing future HE planning and practice.

Chapter 1 – Introduction

The last fifty years have seen a dramatic change in education in Ireland and in particular in Higher Education (HE). Since the 1950s successive Irish governments have regarded education as an important pathway to success both on a national and individual level, and higher education is seen to play a key role in this success (HEA, 2012a; OECD, 2006; O'Dubhslainé, 2006). The abolition of secondary education fees in the 1960s opened up secondary education and ensured that Ireland moved from an educational provision that catered to the privileged few to one of mass school education. A direct result of this move was an increase in demand for a higher education. To cope with this subsequent increase, the 1970s saw the inauguration of two new universities and the establishment of the Regional Technical Colleges (RTCs) which provided more technological educational opportunities.

Up until the 1990s the main focus of HE in Ireland had been on providing places for school leavers across both the University and Institute of Technology (IoT)[1] sectors of HE (Collins, 2000, p. 75). The numbers of students transferring to HE straight from secondary school at the age of eighteen increased from five per cent to twenty per cent between the 1960s and the 1980s yet the numbers of students from other demographic groups did not increase at the same rate. At this time policymakers began to focus on who was participating in HE and by the 1990s several groups were causing concern vis-à-vis their low levels of participation. Two of these groups were mature students, aged twenty-three or over in the year in which they apply to HE (DES, 2000), who accounted for less than seven per cent of students entering the sector (HEA, 1995), and women who were under-represented in HE at that time.

As women were under-represented the question of 'gender equality in education [became] a key policy issue in Ireland during the eighties and nineties' (Gleeson et al., 2003, p. 25/31). Until 1994/95 men had outnumbered women in HE but as the numbers of women accessing HE began to rise at this time there was a reversal

---

[1] The IoT sector was formerly known as the Regional Technology Sector (RTC). See Chapter 2

from male domination to female domination in HE. 'Females always outperformed males in Leaving Certificate results[2] [and] it was around 1994/1995 that females started converting their results into the Central Applications Office (CAO[3]) points and attending third level [HE]' (Patterson, 2013). Parity between the numbers of men and women participating in HE was achieved by 1999 and by 2000 the numbers of women accessing HE had overtaken those of men (Skilbeck and Connell, 2000). By 2004/05 fifty-four per cent of the students attending full-time HE were women. The participation rate of women has risen 'at a much faster pace than the participation rate among men' (DES, 2007a, p. 17) and by the turn of the twenty-first century, concerns were raised by various agencies. These concerns were not just about the under-representation of mature students in HE but also about male participation in HE (McGivney, 1999; AONTAS, 2002; Jacob, 2002; Evers, et al., 2006; Burke, 2006; HEA, 2008a; Grebennikov and Skaines, 2009) as there was a 'noticeable absence of a large number of men from … mainstream … education provision' (Owens, 2000, p. 3). This 'under-representation of males in higher education is largely a consequence of their higher rates of early school leaving and their lower levels of performance in the Leaving Certificate examinations' (HEA, 2008b, p. 37).

This thesis explores why men return to education as mature students and why they choose to study in higher education. The overarching aim of this research is to gain a better understanding of male mature students in HE, specifically in the Irish context, by investigating their learning careers and the process of engaging in higher education as an adult.

In Ireland men and women adopted traditional roles where women were the homemakers and men were the providers, i.e. the breadwinners who went to work and brought in the weekly wage that provided for the family. With more women entering the workforce and either being a joint or sole financial provider for the family this traditional role has changed over the years (Janssens, 1997).   While

---

[2] The Leaving Certificate examinations are the final examinations that students sit in secondary school and are roughly equivalent to English 'A' levels.
[3] CAO is the Central Applications Office – the organisation responsible for processing students' HE applications.

women in Ireland have relatively recently embraced education in larger numbers, education has not always been seen as the way forward for men. Historically for men from lower socio-economic groups education has not been the 'manly [or] cool [or] hard' thing to do but something that was rather feminine (Archer et. al., 2001) and only something that those from higher socio-economic groups took part in.

Much has been written about the various aspects and influences that drive mature students and induce them into higher education either as returning students or as first time higher education students. Ireland's current economic climate has resulted in a contraction of the labour market with areas like the construction industry, which predominately employed men, being badly hit. The unemployment rate for men has dramatically increased over the last few years with the male unemployment figure reaching over seventeen per cent, having risen from five percent in less than four years (CSO, 2011). Policymakers believe that for Ireland to grow economically then it is necessary to have a skilled work force (Hunt, 2011; HEA, 2012b) and that education and HE in particular offers people an opportunity to reskill or upskill, therefore offering them a way out of unemployment (Lyons, 2010).

There is no agreement on what constitutes a mature student nor is there an overarching definition of the term.   Mature students can be classified according to age, to the types of learner they are or their status in life and as they have different characteristics they do not form a homogeneous group. Around the world mature students can be aged from nineteen upwards. Mature students may already have previous qualifications and return to HE in order to continue their education for personal or professional reasons (Thornhill, 1998). While some mature students want to pursue an interest at their leisure, they can also be second chance or 'catch up' students (Thornhill, 1998), students who want a second chance to achieve qualifications thus 'reclaiming [the] lost possibilities' (Fleming, 1998, p. 1) that they did not get the first time around at eighteen. Others choose HE for more pragmatic and instrumental reasons. These can include the desire for a better paid job and career advancements (Bunyan and Jordan, 2005) which it is hoped would accrue

benefits including 'higher earning power, lower unemployment, [improved] life style and social well-being' (Carpenter, 2004, p. 2). Arguments have been made that adults who pursue education throughout their lifetimes are benefitting not only by 'improving knowledge [and] skills [but through] personal fulfilment' (IFWEA, 2001, p. 2) which is important from an individual perspective as it is empowering and promotes self confidence (McMahon, 1997; Lanigan, 2005; O'Dubhslainé, 2006). The decision to return to education may be based on the realisation that their current situation is not personally fulfilling or they have a financial need for a better job. Other triggers that precipitate a return may be a life changing event such as bereavement or divorce.

Despite the perceived benefits in returning to HE, adults often do not return to education because they have a fear of being considered stupid, that it would be like returning to school or that their age is against them and that they are too old to learn (Hamilton and Davies, 1993). Preconceptions and past experiences exert a powerful influence on mature students. Seventy-five years ago, Dewey (1938) drew attention to the fact that one's past experiences influenced future ones and that negative and positive experiences had a bearing on one's future. Subsequent researchers have found that previous experiences of formal education have a bearing on whether adults decide to return to education later on in their adult lives (Kenny, 1983; OECD, 1997). Apart from a lack of confidence, mature students also face various other barriers in their pursuit of a higher education including economic considerations and the application and selection procedure associated with access to HE (Walters, 1997).

The most recent report on HE in Ireland, *Towards a Future Higher Education Landscape* (HEA, 2012b) notes that while the younger members of Ireland's workforce are among the most educated in the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development [OECD] 'the educational attainment levels of older workers are poor by international standards' (HEA, 2012b, p. 2). The Irish Government believes in the importance of an educated and skilled workforce and envisages that the educational level of older people will improve due to the greater participation of mature students in HE (Hunt, 2011).

For those who decide to return to education, and HE in particular, after having been away from education for a number of years, the process is often daunting and one that takes time to consider and complete. By the time a person becomes a student s/he has moved through a number of stages, starting at the 'non-participant' stage and moving through the 'aspirant, decision making [and] decider stages before becoming an applicant' (Osborne et al., 2004). With that come expectations and a certain amount of uncertainty about what it is like to be a mature student in HE. When entering HE mature students have:

> established predispositions which will influence their integration into the study world. In the case of a return to education the adults are 're-becoming', and previous school experience of school can create expectations which are not appropriate to the new learning environment. [Also] they are used to having their adult status respected, and do not always easily adjust to being disempowered by the new system they enter (Bean Ui Chasaide, 1997, p. 40).

These expectations and uncertainties which centre on their academic prowess, their relationships with lecturers and their peers and the differences between school and HE and previous academic experiences, colour their dispositions to learning and their experiences of HE. While literature has shown that the HE experience can be rewarding especially when the outcome of the process is a degree and an increase in self-esteem and self-identity, the whole experience can be stressful, problematic and risky. The risks that mature students may encounter range across both their familial and social lives and sometimes result in schisms within their family circles and friendship groups. There is the risk of failure, i.e. of failing examinations, of failing to do the work or of failing to integrate socially and academically into HE. This failure may affect the students' self-esteem and identity and the way in which they view higher education.

One of the main drivers for a future HE system as stated in the Landscape Report (HEA, 2012b) is to 'improve [the] student experience' (HEA, 2012b, p. 2) whilst in HE and this may be achieved through understanding the experiences from the students' perspective. Researchers have investigated male participation in education (Mac an Ghaill, 1996; McGivney, 1999; Archer et al., 2001) but in Ireland little research has been conducted into men's personal perceptions and

experiences of HE. Such research into men and education would 'greatly assist in the design and delivery of education programmes that are attractive to men, best serve their needs and thereby enhance their lives' (Owens, 2000, p. 52).

Aims and Research Questions

While much research has focused on women and the difficulties that they encountered when entering HE, there is only limited research on men and education (McGivney, 1996, 2004; Owens, 2000; AONTAS, 2009).

The aim of the study is to consider the question:

What does it mean to be a male mature student in Irish higher education?

The study therefore seeks to address the following research questions:

1. What factors affect men's decisions to return to education and why do men decide to rekindle their learning careers by returning to higher education as mature students?

2. Why do male mature students choose to study in an Institute of Technology (IoT)?

3. What are male mature students' perceptions of studying in an Irish Institute of Technology (IoT)?

4. What factors affect men's success as mature students in HE?

The implications of this study for increasing male participation in HE and improving the HE experiences centre on understanding the choices that mature students make with regards to the Higher Education Institution (HEI) they study in and the course they opt for. Understanding these choices and the expectations and experiences male mature students undergo in HE adds to the current debate into the future of HE in Ireland. The Landscape Report (HEA, 2012b), which focuses on the future of HE, states that one of its main aims is improving the student experience for all students who attend HE. My research provides insights into the choices that mature students make and the factors which influence these choices and whether their expectations of life in HE can be met.

Overview of the Thesis

Chapter 1 has explained the rationale for the study and set out the research questions upon which the study was built.

Chapter 2 charts the history of Irish education and the burgeoning interest in widening HE thus placing the research study in context vis-à-vis modern attitudes to mature students and HE.

Chapter 3 explores the concept of masculinity and the fact that there are different forms of masculinity. These masculinities are constructions built as a result of different experiences and shape and are shaped by boys' and men's relationship to education. The chapter looks at the ways in which education contributes to the construction of the identities of boys and men and how this connects to the formation of learner identities and careers.

Chapter 4 explores the concept of mature students as addressed by researchers and policymakers in the literature. Researchers and policymakers worldwide have defined mature students differently according to different criteria. The criteria which define students as mature students include age, educational qualifications and work experiences or status in life such as single-parent or second chance learners (McFadden, 1995).

Chapter 5 discusses the concept of Learning Careers using the work of Bloomer and Hodkinson (1997, 2000). A learning career is made up of events and activities and the meanings that people attribute to their dispositions to learning (Bloomer and Hodkinson (2000a). Why people learn and how they learn are affected by the previous and current events in their lives. Using learning careers as the conceptual framework for the study helps in understanding the decisions that the men made in returning to and engaging with education in a HEI.

Chapter 6 explains the choice of methodology and methods used in the study. It explains how the research sample was set up and how the data was obtained and transcribed.

Chapter 7 first presents the narratives of the fourteen participants and follows the development of their learning careers from childhood through to returning to education in a HEI. Part two of the chapter thematically charts the HE experiences of the participants and their involvement in HE as male mature students.

Chapter 8 draws upon the concept of learning careers to frame the discussion as to why the participants returned to education and the experiences they encountered as mature students in HE.

Chapter 9 sets out the main findings suggesting how they may inform future policy and practice regarding male mature students in HE. The chapter also sets out the study's limitations and areas for further work.

Chapter 2 – Widening Access and Participation in Higher Education in Ireland: The Policy Context

Introduction

The focus of this thesis is on why men decide to reengage with formal learning in a wider policy context. The chapter has three sections and begins with an outline of the education system in Ireland in order to place policy on HE into context. The second section looks at policy surrounding the drive to increase the numbers of mature students attending higher education, thus ensuring equity of access, while the third section looks at the question of the gender of mature students in higher education.

The Development of the Education System in Ireland

Attendance at primary and secondary school is compulsory for all children aged between four and sixteen years of age in Ireland. However free primary and secondary education were only established in the 19th and 20th centuries respectively. The free Primary school level or 'national school system' (Coolahan, 2007, p. 58), which was established in 1831, afforded all children the opportunity to go to primary school. Once they finished primary school at thirteen or fourteen, the majority of children went out to work, as secondary education was not free until the late 1960s. Only those lucky enough to obtain a scholarship, or who had parents who were able to pay the fees, were able to attend secondary school. In 1967, the situation changed and secondary education became free to all pupils.

By the middle of the twentieth century, parents were able to choose whether to send their children to a single denominational, multi-denominational or non-denominational school where their children could be taught through Gaelic or English in a co-educational or single sex environment. Currently, when children have completed their primary education they move up to second level and can attend secondary schools, vocational schools or comprehensive schools. Secondary schools have a mainly academic focus; vocational schools have a more technical focus whilst comprehensive schools have a mixed academic and technical focus. In the first three years at secondary level, school students take part in the junior cycle,

which leads to the Junior Certificate when a child is approximately fifteen years old. The senior cycle follows the junior cycle and lasts two or three years depending on the completion of the optional transition year.   The cycle is complete when students sit their Leaving Certificate examinations when they are approximately eighteen years old. Places in HE are based on the points that the students have earned in their Leaving Certificate examinations and 'students who have taken the Leaving Certificate examination are allocated points for the results they get in their 6 best subjects at a single sitting of the Leaving Certificate' (Citizens Information, 2011, p. 1). The more competitive courses such as Veterinary and Medicine require high entrance points while the sciences and humanities as well as many technical fields require lower entrance points (Patterson, 2012).

Higher Education in Ireland

Third level or higher education in Ireland is a binary system made up of the university sector and the institutes of technology (IoT) sector. The university sector comprises seven universities while the IoT sector has fourteen IoTs which were originally Regional Technical Colleges (RTCs).

Universities in Ireland

Religion was an important aspect of life in Ireland and HEIs were established along denominational lines. The first university, established in 1592, was the University of Dublin, which consisted of one institution, i.e. Trinity College. The student body comprised 'the Anglo-Irish *gentleman* and the Church of Ireland minister' (Coolahan, 2007, p. 111/112, emphasis added) thus having a protestant ethos. St. Patrick's College Maynooth, eventually a catholic seminary, was founded in 1795 and catered for catholic men who up until then had to go abroad to get their university education. In order to address this denominational question Queen's University was established in 1845 as a non-denominational HEI. It comprised Queen's College Belfast, Queen's College Cork and Queen's College Galway. Despite its non-denominational status Catholics were advised by Rome to avoid these colleges and so the initiative failed (Coolahan, 2007). The Universities Act of 1908 saw the establishment of Queen's University Belfast and the National University of Ireland (White, 2001). The National University of Ireland (NUI) had a

number of constituent colleges including University College Cork, University College Galway and University College Dublin. These colleges were originally Queen's College Cork, Queen's College Galway and St. Patrick's College Maynooth. The latter eventually admitted secular and religious students (White, 2001, Coolahan, 2007). The NUI continues to be a constituent university today but 'the Universities Act, 1997, redefined the nature and role of the National University of Ireland' (NUI, 2012, p. 1) and the four colleges became independent universities know respectively as NUI Cork, NUI Dublin, NUI Galway and NUI Maynooth. Dublin City University and Limerick University were created in 1980 and 1989 respectively having started life as National Institutes for Higher Education. Table 1 lists each of the universities and the dates of their original inauguration. With the exception of Trinity College, all of Ireland's modern universities started out under different terms and affiliations and in some cases with different focuses to those which characterise them today.

Table 1 -Ireland's Seven Univeristies and the Year of their Inauguration

Irish Universities		Established
Trinity College, Dublin	(TCD)	1592
NUI, Maynooth	(NUIM)	1795
NUI, Galway	(NUIG)	1845
University College Cork	(UCC)	1845
University College Dublin	(UCD)	1854
Dublin City University	(DCU)	1980
University of Limerick	(UL)	1989

Adapted from White (2001), Coolahan (2007)

Institutes of Technology (IoTs) in Ireland

The IoTs originated as Regional Technical Colleges in the 1970s. The Regional Technical Colleges (RTCs) were established as a result of an increased demand for a higher education and the government's desire to provide more technological educational opportunities which were lacking in Ireland in the 1960s (Coolahan, 2007). Of the fourteen RTCs, ten were inaugurated between 1970 and 1978 and the remaining four between 1992 and 2000. Table 2 lists Ireland's fourteen IoTs and the consecutive years in which they were inaugurated.

Table 2 - The Institutes of Technology in Ireland

Institutes of Technology	Established
Athlone, Carlow, Dundalk, Sligo, Waterford	1970
Letterkenny	1971
Galway-Mayo	1972
Cork	1974
Tralee	1977
Dublin	1978
Tallaght	1992
Limerick	1993
Dún Laoghaire	1997
Blanchardstown	2000

Adapted from IOTI (2013)

The remit of the RTCs was ... to provide vocational and technical education and training for the economic, technological, scientific, commercial, industrial, social and cultural development of the State with particular reference to the region served by the college' (Oireachtas, 1992, p. 5). Courses offered by the RTCs were mainly apprenticeships, adult education courses, hotel and catering courses as well as the technical and science courses. The awards made by these HEIs were mainly certificates and diplomas. These sub-degree courses enabled students who could not access university courses to apply for courses where the entry requirements were not so high.

The RTCs gradually began to move away from their original focus by increasing the number of bachelor degree courses being offered.   By the late 1970s, while certificates and diplomas were still being awarded more degrees were also being awarded. This change in focus also saw many students availing of these expanded opportunities (Coolahan, 2007). Each RTC came under the control of the Vocational Education Committee (VEC) of its region but this gradually came to be regarded as an 'outdated and restrictive' (OECD, 2006, p. 151) practice and resulted in the Regional Technical Colleges Act (Oireachtas, 1992) which gave the RTCs a greater level of autonomy and self-governance (OECD, 2006). The Steering Committee on the Future of Higher Education (HEA, 1995) recognised this change as well as the

RTCs' change in their role and focus, and recommended 'that [this] changed and still evolving role of the RTCs in technology and in research and development be reflected in their title' (HEA, 1995, p. 33). The Steering Committee proposed that specific individual RTCs be re-designated as Institutes of Technology (IoTs) in recognition of their key roles in their regions and possibly be given increased autonomy following detailed international panel reviews.

The first RTC to become an Institute of Technology was Waterford RTC. It pressed for a change to its designated status as it felt that this would increase economic development and open up the southeast region of Ireland to foreign investment (White, 2001). This change in status in 1997 caused 'uproar' (White, 2001, p. 231) amongst other RTCs and so a 'high-level group to advise ... on the technology sector' (Ibid.) was established.   Consequently, the committee recommended the upgrading of the RTCs to Institutes of Technology (White, 2001) and all of the RTCs became IoTs in 1998. The IoTs are spread across the country offering various courses at various levels. The locations of Ireland's IoTs are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 - Location of Ireland's Institutes of Technology
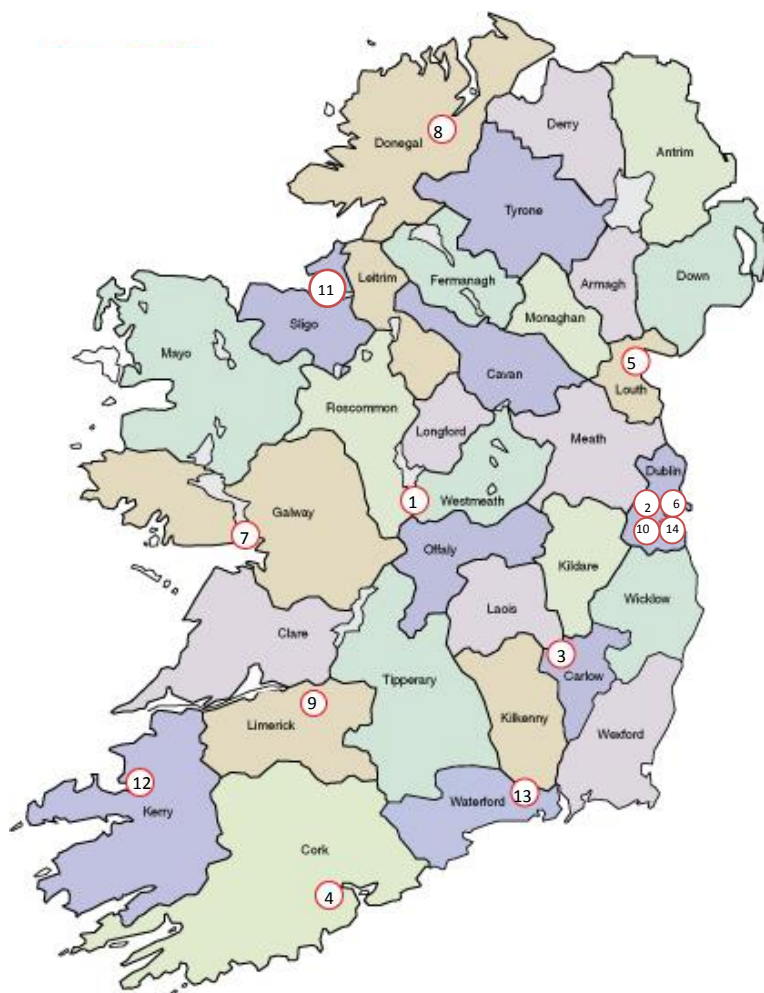
Adapted from IOTI (2013)

Code	Institute of Technology	Code	Institute of Technology
1	Athlone	8	Letterkenny
2	Blanchardstown	9	Limerick
3	Carlow	10	Tallaght
4	Cork	11	Sligo
5	Dundalk	12	Tralee
6	Dun Laoghaire	13	Waterford
7	Galway	14	Dublin Institute of Technology

Today the IoTs are moving away from their original ethos and more towards the university sector. IoTs are offering fewer sub-degree courses in favour of a wide variety of bachelor degrees, Masters and PhD courses, many of which they can award themselves.

Historically, universities offered ab initio or honours degree courses, which require the 'minimum [degree] entry requirements [of] at least grade D in five subjects' (Clancy, 1995, p. 22) while the IoTs offered 'two-year certificate and three-year diploma programmes, with a smaller number of degree programmes' (DES, 1995, p. 197).

Initial Recognition of the Importance of HE in Ireland

Ireland achieved political independence from Britain in December 1921 yet the importance of Higher Education and its value to the welfare of the State and its people was not immediately a major public or political priority (OECD, 2006).   The 1950s saw Ireland commit 'to a comprehensive and rational plan for the economy as a whole' (White, 2001, p. 26) resulting in a rise in Ireland's living standards and a growth in its population. The government then turned its attention to education and became committed to a comprehensive educational system covering male and female students of all ages across all levels of education. The resulting educational reviews saw the realisation that secondary education, which was not free to all students and the 'many pressing problems in higher education' (White, 2001, p. 41) needed to change. The 1960s therefore saw the start of a period of change across the Irish education system.

One major change that occurred in the 1960s was the abolition of secondary school fees. This opened education up to the whole population resulting in a considerable increase in the demand 'not only in first-level and second-level schools but also in third-level' (Carone, 2000, p. 5). With this increase, policymakers recognised that a review and reorganisation of higher education was needed in order to accommodate this demand and a number of commissions were established in order to achieve this.

The Commission on Higher Education, set up in 1960, established 'the need for a new appraisal of existing third level provision and of the need for new guidelines for development' (Coolahan, 2007, p. 126). A consequence of its report was the establishment of the Higher Education Authority (HEA) in 1968 whose remit was to 'supervise all aspects of higher education' (White, 2001, p. 100). The Steering Committee on Technical Education, established in 1966, presented its findings 'on technical education' (White, 2001, p. 52) in 1969 and its recommendations 'formed the basis for the establishment, between 1970 and 1977, of the … network of regional technical colleges' (Seanad Éireann, 1992, p. 1) effectively establishing Ireland's HE binary system.

Achieving the Targets of Increased Numbers of Mature Students in HE

Successive governments have recommended various initiatives and '"adult friendly" polices' (Dept. of the Taoiseach, 2000, p. 111) to help achieve the set targets. These initiatives and policies include:

- The allocation of €25.5 million between 2000-2006 for the development of an equity policy applicable to all HEIs so that mature students can access and participate in HE 'other than through the Leaving Certificate route' (NDP, 1999, p. 117).

- Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) for students who do not have traditional qualifications to gain access to HE based on their previous work-life experiences.

- The provision of Access courses, considered stepping stones to HE, to allow prospective mature students 'to prepare, personally and academically, for an undergraduate course of full-time study' (NUI, 2011, p. 1) thus giving them qualifications other than the traditional Leaving Certificate points.

At the institutional level, adult friendly policies include the following:

- Open Days and Evenings which provide other forms of support as they supply prospective students with information on accessing HE as well as providing information on life in HE.

- ... dedicated Orientation/Induction programmes for mature students, which take place before adult learners begin their chosen course and are designed to help in the transition to third level study' (Brady, 2009, p. 5).

- HEI Mature Student Support Officers to ensure support through the provision of study skills workshops, general advice and financial assistance once mature students have entered HE.

- Mature Student Societies, which provide mature students with opportunities to meet other mature students and take part in social events.

While these policies have helped increase the numbers of mature students in HE there is still a disparity between the proposed numbers and the actual numbers of mature students in HE. Also, the proposed initiatives have not always been implemented to the same extent across the HE sectors (McMahon, 2000). With regards to supporting mature students, Brady (2009) believes that support officers are vital in HE as they are usually mature students' first 'port of call' (p. 3) yet the extent of the supports that are in place vary.

A review of the various HEI websites shows that not all HEIs offer the same level or types of support either before entry or after entry to HE. The HEA (2013a), offering advice to mature students, also notes that the types of supports on offer to mature students are not wide-ranging across all HEIs. One initiative concerning childcare, and mentioned in the 2000 White Paper *Learning for Life* (DES, 2000), is currently only offered by one IoT. Different HEIs have different entry requirements and acceptance is often different in each case. Some HEIs require a portfolio, while others interview students. Yet other HEIs grant access based on a CAO application along with a letter of application that mature students have to provide and certain HEIs require a combination of the three. Some courses are restricted, meaning that mature students have to have certain qualifications before they can be accepted on

courses such as veterinary for example. Although the Commission on Adult Education (Kenny, 1983), the Steering Committee (HEA, 1995) and the *Learning For Life* White Paper on Adult Education (HEA, 2000) put forward suggestions concerning the accreditation of prior experiences and learning known as Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) 'not all education providers deal with RPL in the same way or apply RPL extensively' (Qualifax, 2013, p. 1). In a recent report by the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC)[4] (2011) it was noted that one IoT admitted that RPL was too time-consuming a process to implement and so preferred not to advertise such possibilities on its website. Qualifax (2013), the National Learners' Database, suggests that mature students contact individual HEIs directly in order to confirm their policies concerning mature students and their RPL policies. This indicates that there is no definitive national policy in place re the acceptance of mature students into HE. Recommendations are put forward and policy documents and reports are produced but these are not always acted upon. The Hunt Report (Hunt, 2011), a detailed report into the future of HE, has now been superseded by the Landscape Report (HEA, 2012b) in which the future landscape of HE has been redrawn. Both of these reports mention mature students but only briefly. The Hunt Report (Hunt, 2011) acknowledges that while the sector will recruit most of its students from the mature student sector mature students 'will have very diverse learning needs' (p. 44) when they enter HE. To cope with these needs HE will have to make a number of provisions which include flexible opportunities but what these opportunities entail is not explained. The Landscape Report (HEA, 2012b) only refers to mature students briefly. When outlining the student profile, the report lists mature students under the heading of lifelong learners. Neither the Landscape nor Hunt reports talk specifically about mature students and their particular needs.

Mature Student Participation in Irish HE

The concern of Ireland's modern educational policymakers is that education should be open to all potential students, and as a result equity of access has been one of the 'national policy priorities in Ireland since the mid-1990s' (HEA, 2004, p. 9).

---

[4] HETAC: Higher Education and Training Awards Council: the national awarding body for HE.

While the intention has been to widen access to students from all backgrounds, thus increasing numbers across the board, policy has also focused on the ages and gender of potential students. The desire for an equitable education system has produced a range of reports highlighting various aspects that affect participation in HE, including the number of mature students and the gender of students in HE. The 1990s saw a number of these reports as well as recommendations which focused not only on increasing the numbers of mature students in HE, thus eliminating their underrepresentation there, but also on ensuring gender equity across the entire student population in HE.

Mature Participation in HE – Policy Recommendations

Traditionally students transfer to HE straight from school at eighteen and the student body is aged between eighteen and twenty-two. Irish governments, in their concern to widen access, have endeavoured to open HE to all students irrespective of age. This means including mature students, those who are twenty-three and over in the January in which they start their course in HE. Policymakers wanted to 'ensure that all members of the population can access opportunities to enhance their quality of life' (DES, 1998, p. 17). This second chance option allows students to avail of educational opportunities that they did not make use of when they were first in education (AONTAS, 2013a). It should also 'provide opportunities for older age groups for whom educational opportunities in their youth were significantly more limited than is currently the case' (DES, 1998, p. 73).

By the late 1990s, various figures were being suggested for the number of places that should be allocated to mature students in higher education. The Steering Committee on the Future Development of HE (HEA, 1995), for example, suggested that the number of mature students in HE should reach 6.2 per cent of the intake into full-time courses in 2000 rising to sixteen per cent by 2010 (HEA, 1995). Without specifying a percentage, The Green Paper, *Adult Education in an Era of Lifelong Learning* (DES, 1998), wanted a guaranteed set number of places to be allocated to mature students in HE and suggested the use of 'a quota system across HE' (DES, 1998, p. 8) as a way to achieve that.

A quota system was proposed to ensure that HEIs set aside places specifically for mature students and the Commission for the Points System (DES, 1999) echoed this recommendation.   The Commission went further by suggesting that 'by the year 2005, each institution should set aside a quota of at least 15% of places for students entering at age 23 or above ... increasing to twenty-five per cent by 2015' (DES, 1999, p. 109-110). The Commission believed that this figure would ensure Ireland would be more in line with 'the average participation rate for mature students in OECD countries as a whole' (DES, 1999, p. 95). All of the HEIs adopt a quota system and while some have abided by the recommendations and have gradually increased the numbers of matures students and in some cases have already reached the twenty-five per cent target set for the HEIs, some are sticking to the fifteen per cent threshold, the figure set for mature student access in 2005 (HETAC, 2011).

Table 3 details the mature student projections for the years between 2000 and 2030.   The numbers recommended by the Steering Committee in 1995 for 2010 were due to the fact that compared to other European countries Ireland's provision for mature students was poor (Clancy, 2001). The actual figures for 2000 were greater than those suggested by the Steering Committee (HEA, 1995) but the figures for the following years, as detailed in Table 4, did not match these predictions.

Table 3 - Proposed Targets for Mature Students Entering Irish HE as New Entrants

Year	Percentage Targets for Mature Students[5]	Comment
2000	6.2%	Suggested target set in 1995 by Steering Committee (HEA, 1995)
2004/2005	15%	Suggested target set in 1999 by Commission on Points System (DES, 1999)
2010	16%	Suggested target set in 1995 by Steering Committee (HEA, 1995)
2013	20%	Suggested target set in 2009 by HEA's CEO (HEA, 2000a)
2015	25%	Suggested target set in 1999 by Commission on Points System (DES, 1999)
2025	25%	Suggested target set in 2011 by the National Strategy for HE to 2030 (Hunt, 2011)
2030	25%	Suggested target set in 2011 by the National Strategy for HE to 2030 (Hunt, 2011)

Sources: DES (1999), HEA (1995, 2009a), Hunt (2011)

Mature Participation in HE – The Reality

Table 4 details the percentages of mature students who actually attended higher education between 1986 and 2011. During the 1980s and 1990s mature students were not a priority and there was 'only a limited provision' (White, 2001, p. 195) for them in HE as, during this period of higher education expansion, young people were prioritised due to the high birth rate and high levels of emigration (White, 2001). Importantly, as there was 'an almost constant labour force surplus ... there was no priority for retraining or upgrading the skills of the existing labour force' (White, 2001, p. 195).

---

[5] The proposed percentages reflect the number of places that are to be allocated to mature students out of the total student population in HE.

Table 4- Actual Percentages of Mature Students Attending HE Across Both Sectors

Year	Actual Percentage of Full-time New Entrants who are Mature Students Across Both Sectors of HE
1986	2%
1993/94	3.4%
1998	5%
2000	6.6%
2001/2002	8.3%
2002/2003	9.2%
2003/2004	9%
2005	9%
2006/2007	11%
2007/2008	11%
2008/2009	11%
2009/2010	14%
2010/2011	15%

Sources: O'Connell, Clancy and McCoy (2006), HEA (1995, 2006, 2009b, 2010),Carroll and Patterson (2011)

Currently the projected target for 2015 onwards, set by the HEA in conjunction with the DES, is that twenty-five per cent of the total intake should be made up by mature students (HEA, 2012b).   Policymakers believe that this figure is achievable as 'the demand from students entering higher education directly from second-level ... will increase only marginally, while the bulk of the increased demand ... the largest proportionate increase ... will come from ... mature students' (HUNT, 2011, p. 44).   Revision of these numbers may be necessary in the wake of the current financial climate. The downturn in the economy has resulted in an increase in the numbers of the unemployed especially in the construction industry. More mature students are applying for courses in HE as a result as they need to reskill and upskill in order to find and maintain employment.

Ireland's once buoyant construction industry has collapsed and the causal effect of the downturn in the economy with the collapse of the construction industry and the high male unemployment rate has resulted in more men returning to HE at this time (AONTAS, 2009; Carroll and Patterson, 2011).   These men either want to reskill or upskill thus endorsing the Expert Group's (2010) recommendations that

education will help in the 'upskilling and reskilling of the labour force' (EGFSN, 2010, p. 20). The policy document, the *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 or Hunt Report* (Hunt, 2011) emphasises that the 'demand to invest in education to support job creation and innovation, and to help people back into employment is increasing' (p. 5). Policymakers believe that 'the higher education system has a responsibility to respond effectively and urgently' (HEA 2012c, p. 8) to this need as HE can help the country to climb out of recession through ensuring Ireland has an educated and fully skilled workforce thus allowing Ireland to compete in a global market.

Current figures indicate that the numbers of mature students are rising. While more men are applying to HE thus lessening the new gender gap, policymakers and various agencies such as AONTAS[6] (Perufo, 2012) are *still* expressing concern re men's involvement in education. This concern is for specific groups of men and this concern is being 'more targeted at men with less than upper secondary qualifications' (Peruffo, 2012, p. 1). This concern is echoed in the policy document *Towards a Future Higher Education Landscape* (HEA, 2012b) which notes that 'the educational attainment levels of older workers are poor by international standards' (p. 2). The Hunt Report (2011) states that over the next twenty years HE will grow with most of this growth coming from the mature student sector. Current policy wants HE to play its part in ensuring continued participation in HE and believes a key outcome of HE is to provide people with a 'rich and personally fulfilling [HE] experience' (HEA, 2012b) which may help to encourage more mature students back into education.

Carroll and Patterson (2011) noted that Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction have been the areas of study that have failed to grow at the same rate as other areas. The collapse of the construction industry and its related sectors may account for this as there are few jobs to go to upon graduation. Other agencies such as the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) and Foras Áiseanna

---

[6] AONTAS – The Irish National Adult Learning Organisation

Saothair (FÁS)[7], believe that occupations requiring HE qualifications and high levels of skills will be the ones to grow in the future and that:

Other lower skilled jobs are projected to decline or experience only moderate growth. This finding accentuates the need for Ireland to implement a meaningful lifelong learning strategy so that those already in the labour market can up-skill and continue to be gainfully employed in a changing labour market. Unless this happens there is a real risk that these individuals could become unemployable in an economy dominated by high skills occupations (HEA, 2013b, p. 1).

The years of the Celtic Tiger meant that although the idea of an educated workforce (DES, 1995; Thornhill, 2002) had consistently been suggested as important to the economic success of the country, its importance was not to the fore as Ireland was experiencing an economic boom. The years of the Celtic Tiger came to an end in 2008 and Ireland went into recession. The unemployment rate reached fourteen percent by 2010 meaning that Ireland had the fourth highest unemployment rate in the European Union. The government sees education as a means of extricating Ireland from its economic downturn. Anecdotal evidence seems to suggest that while many young people are opting for emigration as a way to improve their lives older adults are looking to education as their familial commitments do not always make emigration easy. Figures produced by the HEA (2012a) show that not only is the greatest increase in the numbers of undergraduates coming from the mature student category but that, of those students classed as mature students (aged over twenty-three) the highest percentage are over thirty years old. Table 5 provides a breakdown of the ages of full-time new undergraduates in HE and shows the rise in the number of mature students entering HE.

---

[7] FÁS – the Government Training and Employment Authority

Table 5 - Age Distribution of Undergraduate Full-Time New Entrants for all Irish HEIs
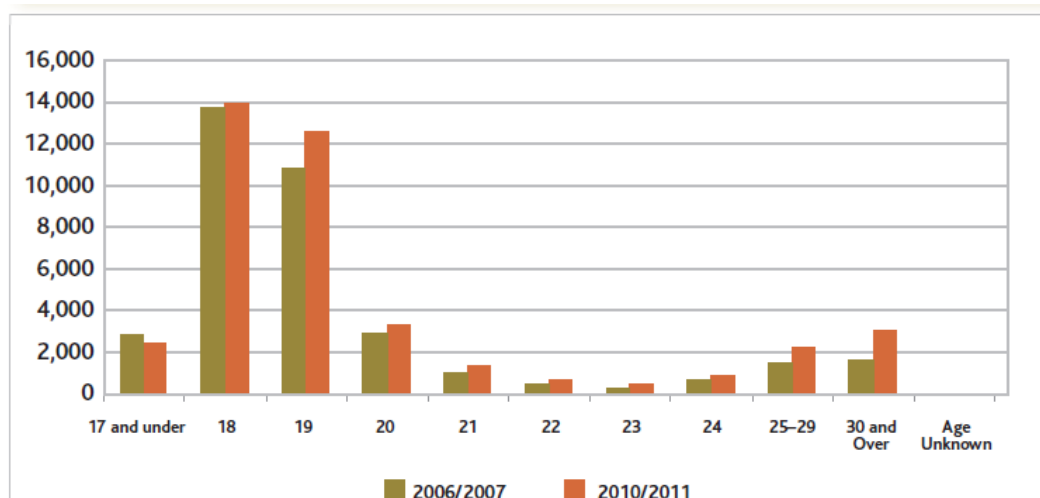
Reproduced from HEA (2012a, p. 38)

The Steering Committee (HEA, 1995) designated mature students as being disadvantaged due to their under representation in HE. This recognition in various reports of the underrepresentation of mature students resulted in the recommendation of the implementation of various initiatives (see below) aimed at increasing the numbers of mature students in HE.

While these initiatives have helped to secure an increase in mature student numbers it has been achieved at a relatively slow pace. Numbers hit a plateau and 'remained static between 2006/07 ... and 2008/09 ... [but] started to increase from 2009/10' (Carroll and Patterson, 2011, p. 7). While the researchers do not offer any reason for the fact that the numbers remained static between 2006 and 2009 they feel that the rise in numbers from 2009 are attributable to the country's worsening economic situation and the need for reskilling or the upgrading of qualifications.

Although mature student numbers have been rising, the numbers of actual students in HE have not reached the optimistic targets set by the various bodies in the early 1990s. Patterson (2012) theorizes that this may be due to financial considerations. Many potential mature students cannot afford, financially, to go to HE as they have family and work commitments. More mature students opt for part time courses due in part to these commitments and this also has an effect on the

numbers attending HE. The reduction in the grants payable to full time students may also act as a disincentive vis-à-vis applying to HE. HE fees were abolished in 1996 but students still have to pay registration fees and throughout the economic downturn these have consistently risen year by year and currently stand at €2250 per year.

Gender in HE

Over the past two decades, the situation has changed and the IoTs are now offering a wider portfolio of HE courses. Table 6 shows the undergraduate enrolments, by gender, on courses that are offered by both HE sectors.

Table 6 - Undergraduate Enrolments inUniversities and IoTs by Gender

Subject	University Degree				IOTs Degree				IOTs Ordinary Degrees				IOTs Certificates & Diplomas			
Traditional Subject Choices	2008/2009		2009/2010		2008/2009		2009/2010		2008/2009		2009/2010		2008/2009		2009/2010	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Education	941	4093	1105	3971	4	126	3	113	19	33	11	26	0	0	0	0
Humanities	6365	10241	7052	11042	1208	1886	1662	2287	811	891	899	758	101	70	66	34
Social Science, Business & Law	7855	9407	8235	9140	3406	4190	3946	4648	2102	2839	2207	2801	977	1251	1035	1244
Science	5867	5149	6564	5299	1475	684	2390	1092	2230	996	2351	1003	515	294	527	324
Engineering, Manufacturing, Construction	4515	1184	4586	1280	3165	416	4156	751	6563	836	6325	602	958	61	1042	52
Agriculture & Veterinary	516	612	644	705	54	18	44	25	443	207	478	221	142	11	233	10
Health & Welfare	3253	10086	3794	10517	582	4165	826	4647	362	1875	283	1538	68	405	83	399
Services	68	57	136	57	663	890	808	1051	1535	1350	1831	1431	160	117	143	105
	2008/2009		2009/2010		2008/2009		2009/2010		2008/2009		2009/2010		2008/2009		2009/2010	
Totals	29380	40829	32116	42011	10557	12375	13835	14614	14065	9027	14385	8380	2921	2209	3129	2168

Adapted from HEA (2012a)

The figures shown in Table 6 indicate not only that different levels of education are offered across the two sectors but that the subjects students choose to study are still demarcated along gender lines with more women opting for education, humanities, business and health while in the main men still choose sciences and engineering. This follows the traditional pattern where there is a gendered choice vis-à-vis subject option. The figures also indicate that women tend to choose the

honours degree courses both in universities and IoTs while men often take the ordinary degree courses as offered in the IoTs. While the honours degree courses such as business, which require higher points, are offered by both sectors, students with lesser points can study for such courses at an ordinary degree level in the IoTs. While more women are accessing the IoTs, there is a 39:61 split in favour of male students in the IoT sector (Carroll and Patterson, 2011) with more men than women taking the ordinary degrees. Table 7 provides a gender breakdown of the numbers of undergraduate men and women and the level of awards that they have enrolled on.   While there is only a marginal difference in the higher number of women taking honours degrees there is an approximate 58:42 percent split in favour of men with regards to the take up of ordinary degrees. These figures for 2010/2011 continue the traditional trend, as indicated in Table 6 above and Table 7 below, of more men than women taking ordinary degrees in the IoT sector (HEA, 2012a).

Table 7 - Full-Time Enrolments by Gender for the IoT Sector

Type of Award	Men	Women	Total
Honours Degree	14979	15500	30479
Ordinary Degree	14745	8499	23244
Diploma and Certificate	3655	2457	6112

Adapted from HEA (2012a)

Table 8 provides a breakdown of the subject enrolments across both the university and IoT sectors and clearly shows the take up of subjects along traditional gender lines. The fact that more men enrol in IoTs can be attributed in part to the disciplinary mix of the two sectors (Carroll and Patterson, 2011; HEA, 2012a).

Table 8 - 2011/2011 Full-Time Undergraduate New Entrants for the University and IoT Sectors
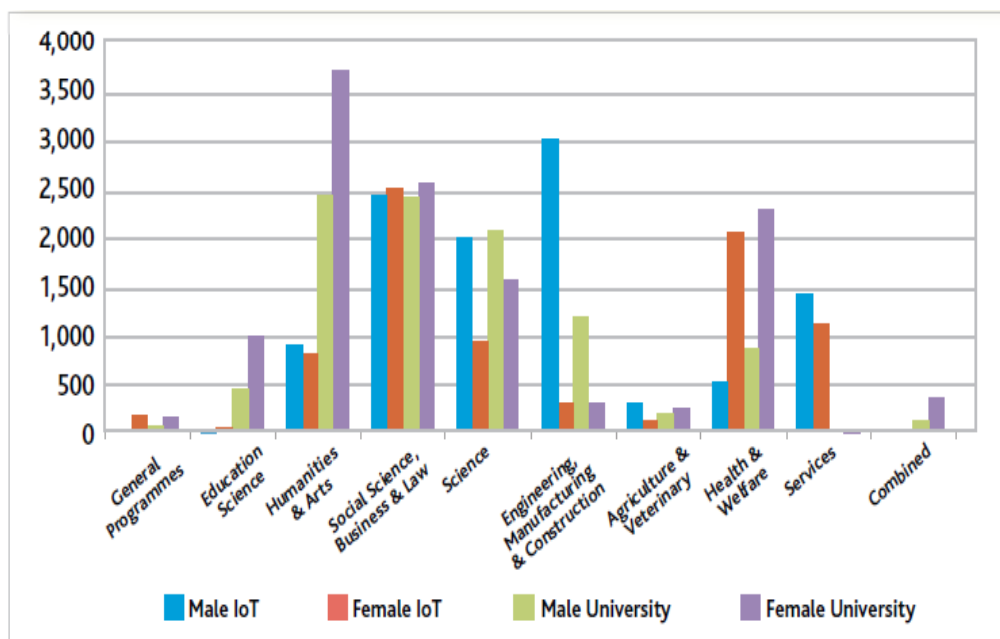
Reproduced from HEA (2012a, p. 37)

Table 8 shows that there are considerable differences between male and female enrolments in most sectors except for Social Sciences, Business and Law where the enrolments are relatively close to parity. More women choose to study Humanities and Arts in university while the majority of men who decide to study engineering, manufacturing and construction do so in the IoT sector, again following traditional practices (Clancy, 1988, 1997).

Gender and Mature Students in HE

The policies listed earlier focused on mature students as a group but ignored the group's gender differences. The issue of differences in male and female participation in HE focused initially on women rather than on men, as women were originally under-represented in HE. The issue of female under-representation became 'a key policy issue in Ireland during the eighties and nineties' (Gleeson et al., 2003, p. 25/31) and effort was focused on encouraging more *women* to take part in higher education (HEA, 1995). While HEIs were encouraged to promote gender equality policies, the initiatives were aimed primarily at women. This was notable in the provision of childcare arrangements, female role models and 'policies

for the promotion of equal opportunities and associated action programmes, including procedures for preventing the sexual harassment of students and employees' (DES, 1995, p. 109). These suggestions became law in 1997 and 2006 when the Universities Act (1997) and the IoT Act (2006) stipulated that there should be a gender balance in HE and that there should be 'equality, including gender equality, in all activities of the college' (Oireachtas, 2006, p. 16). The policy to increase the numbers of women in HE has been successful and by 2000, the numbers of women availing of higher education on a first time basis in Ireland outstripped those of men (Skilbeck and Connell, 2000). By 2000/2001 approximately sixty per cent of the new entrants across the whole HE sector were female (HEA, 2006). The rise in the numbers of women in the HE sector has effectively created a new gender gap across the sector (DES, 2007b), but this time to the detriment of men.

Policymakers and organisations (Owen, 2000; Hughes et al., 2006; HEA, 2008) have more recently become concerned with the decreasing numbers of men in HE. This concern has been evident since 2000. The NDP (1999) stated that the Women's Educational initiative (established in 1998 when women were under-represented) should continue to be broadened to include men and should focus 'on the needs of educationally *disadvantaged men'* (p. 116, emphasis added). Hughes et al. (2006) were as direct, stating that '[M]asculinity is now being recognized as gender ... as gender [can now be] uncoupled from its association with women [alone]' (Hughes et al., 2006, p. 644). This indicates that the gender question and concern over participation in HE still exists but that the concern once reserved for women's participation in HE should now be focused on men's participation and under-representation.

The European Access Network (EAN) (2009) also expressed concern about this issue, concern which was manifested in the fact that it devoted conference time to discussing the issue of the under-representation of men in higher education. During its 18th annual conference in the UK, one session entitled *'Boys and higher education-what is the problem?'* looked at the gender imbalance and the way higher education is viewed by boys and men. It highlighted that girls in education

'have made most of the progress in the last two decades, while boys have consistently lagged behind' (EAN, 2009, p. 1). The session explored 'gender differences in learning situations and [argued] for a broader educational strategy and a radical rethink in the way institutions deliver higher education' (EAN, 2009, p. 1). This echoes the recommendations in a report published in Ireland in 2003. The main aim of the AONTAS report, *Gender and Learning* (AONTAS, 2002) was to look at the learning styles and needs of adult men and women with a view to the kinds of provisions that they would need. Whilst the study found no significant differences in the way that adult men and adult women learn, the group did express a concern about the educational provision for men and the way they learn. One suggestion was that there should be an exploration of 'the provision of education and training opportunities in locations more likely to be used by men [and that] single-gender groups should be available to learners' (AONTAS, 2002, p. 123). While the NDP (2007) noted that 'the widening gap in participation between males and females requires focused attention' (p. 11) many men suffered as a result of the collapse of the 'Celtic Tiger'.

Table 9 details the current acceptances of both male and female students to HE. While the figures show that there has been a steady increase in the numbers of men and women applying to and accepting places in HE, the trend shows that more women than men have accepted places until 2010/2011.

Table 9 - The Gender of Mature Students' Accepatances to HE

Year	Male	Female	Totals	Percentage of Total Student Acceptances
2000	723	778	1501	4%
2001	837	907	1744	4.7%
2002	1059	1141	2200	6%
2003	1296	1520	2816	7.3%
2004	1393	1596	2989	8%
2005	1459	1858	3317	8.7%
2006/2207	1879	2246	4125	11%
2007/2008	1889	2299	4188	11%
2008/2009	2385	2393	4779	11%
2009/2010	Not Available	Not Available	6029	14%
2010/2011	3751	2896	6647	15%

Sources: HEA (2006, 2007, 2008, 2009b, 2010, 2012a); Carroll and Paterson (2011)

Summary

Participation in HE increased as a result of the abolition of secondary school fees (Carone, 2000; Patterson, 2012). The student demographic primarily consisted of younger students, those who come straight to HE from school at eighteen. Mature students, who were outside this demographic, were under-represented in HE. Various reports have recognised this under-representation including the Steering Committee report (HEA, 1995) which recommended that the numbers of mature students be increased thus ensuring equity across the education system. Consequently equity of access has been one of the 'national policy priorities in Ireland since the mid 1990s' (HEA, 2004, p. 9) yet the under-representation of mature students in HE continues to cause concern. Various reports including the White Paper on Adult Education (HEA, 2000), the Report of the Action Group on Third Level Access (2001), Report of the Taskforce on Lifelong Learning (Taskforce on Lifelong Learning, 2002) and the OECD's Higher Education in Ireland report (2006) have recommended that the numbers of mature students in HE need to be increased. Policies and initiatives have been recommended to help increase the numbers of mature students in HE and while there has been some success not all of the targets have been achieved and not all HEIs provide the same level of support.

Until recently the increase in the numbers of men applying to HE have not kept pace with the numbers of women applying to HE therefore creating a new gender imbalance with an under-representation of men in HE. Concern was and continues to be expressed about male participation in HE. The 'changing economic situation … [means] … the industry most affected by [the economic downturn] was the Construction industry a traditionally male dominated industry' (Carroll and Patterson, 2011, p. 18) which in turn appears to have had an effect on male applications to HE. The downturn in the economy appears to have been the trigger for more men applying to HE as a way of improving their job prospects through reskilling and upskilling. For the first time in over a decade, the number of male mature students as new entrants in HE in 2010/2011 reached fifty seven per cent of all mature new entrants (HEA, 2012a). Despite this rise, policymakers are concerned about the experiences mature students go through whilst in HE. One of

the main focuses of the most recent report on HE, *Towards a Future Higher Education Landscape* (HEA, 2012b) is on the HE experience and on ways to improve the whole experience thus widening participation and success in HE.

The HEA (2012b) study looks at all students in HE rather than focusing on mature students or male mature students. As most of the students in HE are younger students, their experiences will be different from male mature students and as such will not provide a deep insight into what life is like for male mature students in HE. This study aims to fill this gap by providing an insight into this under-researched group.

Chapter 3 - Boys and Men's Relationship to Schooling and Education: A Review of the Literature

Introduction

This chapter explores a range of literature that examines boys' and men's relationship to education. It considers the ways in which education contributes to the construction of boys' and men's identities, and how this connects to the formation of learner identities and careers. For men who are not automatically successful in schooling and HE, this literature highlights the challenges they face in engaging with education as adults.

The rise in gender studies focusing on feminism and the female role and position in society (See for example Friedan, 1963; Joyce, 1986; Hooks, 1989, 2000) has been paralleled by an increase in research into men and masculinity. There has been a growing interest in masculinity and masculinities since the 1980s (Kimmel, 2008). Male research centres on various aspects of masculinity, for example Kimmel's (1987) *Changing Men* and Levant & Kopecky's (1996) work on the male image, Flood et al. (2007) and Laker & Davis' (2011) work on understanding men and masculinities and Burke's (2006, 2009, 2012) work on men and their relationship to education.

The male landscape has changed over the years. Kimmel and Davis (2011) argue that young men today are 'coming of age in an era with no road maps, no blueprints, and no primers to tell them what a man is or how to become one (p. 13). This notion of crisis is endorsed by O'Neill and Crapser (2011) who query whether there is 'a backlash against men' (p. 46).

When defining the male and female it is important to note that there is a difference between biological sex and gender, two terms that are used to describe and discuss men and women.   As Giddens (2001) observes:

> The term sex … refer[s] to the anatomical and physiological differences that define male and female bodies. Gender by contrast, concerns the psychological, social and cultural

differences between males and females. Gender is linked to socially constructed notions of masculinity and femininity; it is not necessarily a direct product of an individual's biological sex. The distinction between sex and gender is a fundamental one, since many differences between males and females are not biological in origin (p. 107).

Connell (2005) too talks of difference when he notes that 'The terms 'masculine' and 'feminine' point beyond categorical sex differences to the ways men differ among themselves, and women differ among themselves, in matters of gender' (p. 69).

These gender differences are socially constructed differences and ones which often 'rule' the way in which a person behaves in society. The social construction of masculinity is built on various factors such as the home and education as well as class and race and men identify their positions in society in relation to these factors. Men construct their masculinities as a result of these environments but their understanding of themselves and their position in society are changing. In order to gain some understanding of men, their position in society and relationship to education it is important to understand how men and masculinity are defined.

Masculinities as a Factor in Understanding the Construction of Identities

One of the ways in which we understand ourselves and our positions in the world relates to our gender. In many instances men and women conform to *'gender roles ... a set of behavioural prescriptions or proscriptions for [an] individual['s] ... assigned gender'* (Paechter, 2001, p. 47). Gender is an important determinant of people's behaviour and experiences (Maynard and Pearsall, 1994, p. 229) and these prescriptions and proscriptions are a socially constructed set of rules and regulations that boys and girls, women and men adhere to. Gender role identification starts early in life and children as young as two years of age are able to identify themselves as male and female. By the age of four they are able to differentiate between stereotypical male and female activities (Eysenck, 2009). This 'complex social construction ... intersects with class race, age, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation and sexual identity' (UTD, 2011, p. 1). While

agreeing that gender is 'the social construction of masculinity and femininity', MacInnes (1998) says that it is a contested concept, one that 'is something we imagine to exist and which is represented to us in a material form through the existence of the two sexes male and female' (p. 1). What then is meant by masculinity and masculinities?

For Mosse (1996) being masculine means the display of the 'manly virtues [of] power, honor (sic), and courage' (p. 4) a view that Gough and Peace (2000) espouse as they also equate masculinity with being 'strong, tough, independent' (p. 386). While Segal (1993) too says that masculinity is associated with power Mac an Ghaill (1994) takes this further when he says that masculinity means not just the display of 'power' but also of 'violence, competition [and] a sense of identity and social support' (p. 51).

Masculinity is often defined or understood according to such a set of characteristics or 'descriptive norms [that men] are perceived as actually having [along with] sociocultural norms - the attributes and behaviour men should have ideally' (Thompson and Pleck, 1987, p. 25). The 'descriptive norms' or characteristics include Mac an Ghaill's list (1994) but also power, strength and confidence. Levant and Kopecky (1995) highlight sociocultural norms when they say that masculinity is the 'avoidance of femininity; restricted emotions; sex disconnected from intimacy; pursuit of achievement and status; self-reliance; strength; and aggression; and homophobia' (p. 75).

The definitions of masculinity and masculinities emphasise the various aspects that are considered to be male such as power, strength and aggression and different researchers have categorised masculinity according to these aspects.

Researchers such as Segal (1993), Mac an Ghaill (1994), Mosse (1996) and Gough and Peace (2000) emphasize the view that masculinity espouses power. The term was 'originally used to legitimate patriarchy [thus] demonstrating how men were more capable of exercising public power than women (MacInnes, 1998, p. 2).

Other researchers connect the notion of masculinity with leadership (Gilmore, 1990; Archer et al, 2001). Gilmore (1990) believes that the masculine qualities of strength and confidence are required in order to be able to deal with the rigours of life. The belief that 'real men' lead implies that anything else will result in failure:

> So long as there are battles to be fought, wars to be won,
> heights to be scaled, hard work to be done, some of us will have
> to 'act like men' (p. 231).

The connection between leadership and masculinity is also made by Archer et al., (2001) who say that masculinity is not just 'playing football, chasing girls and having fun' but more importantly in producing 'social 'leaders'' (Archer et al., 2001, p. 436).

Some researchers see masculinity as an opposition to femininity. Levant and Kopecky (1995) and O'Neill and Crapser (2011) talk about masculinity as the avoidance of femininity and femininity is an anathema to masculinity. Mac an Ghaill and Haywood (2007) talk of the emergence of a new 'hypermasculinity' which 'involves the rejection of all that which is deemed feminine' (p. 200). Martino (1999) and Connell (1989) both talk of how abhorrent it is to be considered to be feminine in any way for those who want to be belong, to be part of the gang and therefore want to be masculine.

While stereotypically definitions that portray men as strong, powerful and in command of their emotions can be found in the literature there is no overarching definition of the concept of masculinity. This, MacInnes (1998) believes, is because the concepts of masculinity and femininity 'are the most confused that occur in science' (p. 15). This point is also made by Mac an Ghaill (1994) who reasons that a straightforward definition of masculinity is not possible as the whole concept is 'complex and contradictory' (p. 51).   Rather than trying to find one definition of masculinity Connell (1995) argues that it would be better, to 'focus on the processes and relationships through which men and women conduct gendered lives' (p. 71).

While there is no one overarching definition of masculinity there is the belief that there is more than one masculinity. Masculinities are:

> produced from differential locations within and across social divisions, entailing different relations of dominance/subordination in relation to other racialised, gendered, classes groups (Archer et al., 2001, p. 432).

The various masculinities then are intrinsically linked to men's lives and are reflective of men's backgrounds, beliefs and/or upbringing. Connell (1995), in his seminal work on masculinity where he posits the notion of various masculinities, reasons that as a construct the idea of masculinity can and does change. Like Archer (2001), he believes it is based on the 'interplay between gender, race and class' (p. 76). This view is also proposed by Tolson (1977) who says that masculinity and femininity have a wider meaning due to their cultural and identity focus. Masculinity and femininity, he suggests, are not simply opposites as 'there are many different types of gender identity … and different expressions of masculinity within and between different cultures' (Tolson, 1977, p. 12). Mac an Ghaill and Haywood (2007) also talk of masculinity with a cultural reference. Multiple masculinities are social constructions that shape and are shaped by the experiences boys and men go through and as such, according to Mac an Ghaill and Haywood (2007) and 'are constituted and constitute cultural forms' (p. 200) of masculinity.

This idea of multiplicity is reflected elsewhere in the literature where references are made to various types of masculinities including not only hypermasculinity but also hegemonic, gay, heterosexual, class, disabled, black and race masculinity (Staples, 1982; Connell, 1995, 2005; Mosse, 1996; Levant and Kopecky, 1995; Mac an Ghaill and Haywood, 2007; O'Neill and Crapser, 2011). These masculinities can be classified as dominant and subordinate masculinities.   Mac an Ghaill (1994) argues that the dominant masculinity is the:

> configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees the dominant position of men and the subordination of women (Connell, 2005, p. 77).

This dominant masculinity, which is characterized by 'heterosexuality, power, authority, aggression and technical competence' (Mac an Ghaill, 1994, p. 12), is a socially constructed pattern which emanates from patriarchy – the 'single overarching structure of domination between men and women' (Mac an Ghaill, 1994, p. 10).

Subordinate masculinities (Mac an Ghaill & Haywood, 2007; O'Neill & Crapser, 2011) are complicit and marginalized masculinities which include classed and raced masculinities (Connell, 1995). These masculinities fit into the:

> hegemony, domination/subordination and complicity [relationship while the] marginalization/authorization [relationship] – provide[s] a framework in which we can analyse [these] specific masculinities' (Connell, 1995, p. 81).

These different forms of masculinity are, therefore, constructed in accordance with various influencing factors such as social class as well as ethnicity and race. These constructs and learned behaviours are also shaped through external factors such as advertising and media as well as one's peers, friendships and education all of which have far reaching effects. The forms of masculinity that boys adopt is a result of these factors. As Connell (2000) says 'Society, school and peer milieu [make] boys an offer of a place in the gender order' (p. 162/163). While the decision of where they are placed is one that is strongly influenced by learned behaviours and environment it is one that the boys themselves decide upon, according to Connell (2000) who says ultimately the boys themselves 'determine how they take [masculinity] up' (Ibid., p. 162/163).

The traditional or stereotypical way that gender has been taken up has seen men and women adopting socially constructed gender specific roles. Men were the breadwinners and women the carers. The role of protector (Levant and Kopecky, 1996) and breadwinner rather than that of husband or father was one, Jump and Haas (1987) argue, that confirmed men's 'manliness' (p. 111).   Increasingly this view is changing especially in light of the 'decline in the ability of the single breadwinner to support an entire family [and consequently] the rise of the women worker' (Gerson, 1987, p. 127).   As the ''masculine' manufacturing base is

disappearing and being 'displaced by an increase in the traditional 'feminine' service sector' (Mac an Ghaill, 1994, p. 72) masculinities have to some extent been refashioned. This refashioning has seen the move away from the traditional or 'gendered dualisim [perspective] of male breadwinners and female housemakers (Mac an Ghaill and Haywood, 2007, p. 3) which has for decades been the 'defining cultural image' (Ibid., p. 3) of the male and female roles in western society. Now men are facing a work place that does not offer 'full-time pensionable employment [but] an insecure world of contract work, part-time jobs and casualised labour' (Ibid., p. 72).   The result of this, Mac an Ghaill (1994) argues, is that the male breadwinner no longer feels secure within his role of breadwinner thus endorsing the notion that masculinity is in crisis. The notion of crisis is also endorsed by Kimmel (2008) who believes that boys' transition to manhood which was once relatively straightforward is now more complicated (Kimmel, 2008).   This complication has implications for the way boys' and men see their positions and roles in life and helps to explain the crisis that many men experience today.

Traditionally men were responsible for providing for the family but some men now run households where they are the only parent or are the parent who is the carer while the woman earns the wage (West, 2008). For some men this brings a sense of loss of power and threatens their traditional position of power in a society where the breadwinner was in charge of the family (Kimmel, 2008). Although the 'world gender order is *[still]* patriarchal, in the sense that it privileges men over women' (Connell, 2000, p. 48) masculinity is believed to be in crisis.

This repositioning of men is happening on a global scale where men have not only found their status questioned but question it themselves (Connell, 2000). While it is argued that 'modern men are suffering from a psychological wound, being cut off from the true or deep masculinity of … their heritage' (Connell, 2000, p. 5) not all agree.

MacInnes (1998) believes that 'it has become a cliché to argue that masculinity is in crisis' (p. 11). He believes that the concept of masculinity:

> has always been in one crisis or another [notably] the
> fundamental incompatibility between the core principle of
> modernity that all human beings are essentially equal
> (regardless of their sex) and the core tenet of patriarchy that
> men are naturally superior to women and thus destined to rule
> over them (p.11).

Burke (2009) argues that 'the crisis of masculinity narrative is over-simplistic, as it tends to make boys and men homogenous' (p. 96) which they are not. They are homogenous when compared to the group entitled 'girls' but the group entitled 'boys' is made up of different sets , classes and races of boys all of whom have different expectations and needs.

Boys' and Men's Relationship to Schooling and Education

Gender shapes orientations to education, and education shapes constructions of gendered identities. These gendered patterns and expectations set out what is and what is not acceptable with regards to one's gender.   For men a socially defined 'gender role' means adhering to a particular set of circumstances, types of behaviour and attitudes that are particularly male and which require conformity if they want to belong and be part of the norm. This 'lifecourse [is] constructed collectively and educationally, i.e. through the education system and families' relationships to it' (Connell, 1989, p. 297) and provides boys and men with particular identities. The conventions and expectations of what it means to be male affects engagement in schooling and affects orientations to participation in HE at a later stage.

Mac an Ghaill (1994) emphasises that irrespective of type, schools 'prepare students for the sexual division of labour in the home and the workplace [and] actively produce gender and heterosexual divisions' (p. 8). These divisions and the process of learning to be a man are not only learnt but enforced throughout the boys' time in school and knowing how to be a man is only accomplished by the time they leave secondary school.

Boys' behaviour in school is often portrayed as being less conforming that that of girls but this type of behaviour cannot simply be attributed to gender (Hammersley, 2001). Boys' behaviour is based on other factors including 'the proportions of boys

… who engage in these actions … levels of confidence in public contexts, levels of aggressiveness, interaction between gender, [and] social class' (Hammersley, 2001, p. 35). Boys' behaviour and attitudes to school are enforced on a daily basis as boys learn the rules of how to be a man, in a variety of places in school including 'classrooms, assemblies, counselling. Cloakrooms, toilets, playgrounds and leisure activities' (Mac an Ghaill, 1994, p. 163).   Reay (2001) believes that 'boys' misbehaviour is viewed as a desire to assert themselves' (p. 158) and because of that is, in some cases, excused on that basis alone, as 'boys will be boys' (Epstein et al., 1999, p. 9).

As a site for developing and defining masculinity school can be a prescriptive and threatening place. Hegemonic patterns are clearly shown in the exaltation of competitive sports (Connell, 2005). Boys who take part in sports are considered to be 'hearty' and thus belong to the school's 'ruling class [the] 'bloods' (Connell, 1989). Achieving sporting success renders them more masculine and 'cool.' These ''cool guys' … attract as much honour and indulgence from the staff as the academic' (Connell, 1989, p. 295). This indulgence makes school life difficult for the 'uncool' boys and those who reject the hegemonic pattern have to fight or negotiate their way out' (Connell, 2005, p. 37). Sporting prowess is 'a test of masculinity … for boys who detest the locker room' (Ibid.) and those who decide 'not to play football or who [display] characteristics and traits attributable to gay people [are] visible targets for the 'cool boys'' (Martino, 1999, p. 240). These boys often suffer derision and bullying (Burke, 2007b) as a result.

To avoid this bullying and protect and ensure a positive social positioning, boys may buy into 'a culture of aggressive, heterosexual manliness which deliberately rejects school learning as an unmanly activity' (Burke, 2009, p. 89). For some boys the rejection of the 'effeminate process' of learning is a 'defensive strategy' (Jackson, 1999, p. 89) and manifests itself in not working hard in school. This strategy enables boys 'to distance themselves from an academic world that is perceived as dangerously 'weak'' (Ibid., p. 89). In order not to compromise their masculinity 'real boys', it is argued, achieve success in school by ensuring that it looks as though they are not working hard or studying (Epstein et al., 1999).

Schools, as Connell (1996) forcefully states, are 'agents in the making of masculinities' (p. 213) and masculinities are arbitrated through 'the school microcultures of management [and] teachers' (Mac an Ghaill, 1994, p. 4) as well as through student relationships. Being seen as masculine includes distancing oneself from school and its management structures which may result in confrontation with their teachers (Burke, 1994). This 'laddish behaviour' (Jackson, 2003a),   which is the 'process of constructing masculinity through conflict with the institutional authority of the school' (Connell, 1989, p. 291), arises because boys want to save face amongst their peers. Conforming to 'laddishness' enables them to do so. Connell (1989) argues though that while this dominant form of masculinity is constructed 'by battering against the school's authority structure' (p. 300) other constructions/versions of masculinity are possible. For him other masculinities are constructed through the 'smooth insertion into [the schools'] academic pathways [with] others again by a tortuous negotiation of possibilities (Ibid.).

Some literature on masculinity draws attention to how class intersects with gender and shapes educational orientation. The class relationship to education is notably raised by Willis (1977) who found that the working class boys in his study had a negative attitude to school. This he says was due to peer and familial practices which rated employment as being more important than academic participation as work was an essential tenet in their masculine identification. McGivney (2004a) says that laddish behaviour often has a classed dimension and is the way in which working class boys distance themselves 'from anything that is perceived as feminine' (McGivney, 2004a, p. 57).

Various labels have been attached to boys as a result of their class and of their attitudes to and participation in school. These differences in attitudes to schooling and education occur not only between the classes but within the classes. The working class identity of Willis' (1977) 'lads' and Mac an Ghaill's (1994) 'Macho lads' meant that masculinity involved the rejection of the academic ethos of school and its 'rules, routines and regulations' (Mac an Ghaill, 1994, p. 58) in favour of a more aggressive and sports oriented approach to school and life.   These masculine rebels looked down on their middle class counterparts, the 'Real Englishmen' and those

from their own class, the 'Academic Achievers' (Mac an Ghaill, 1994) because they chose an academic approach to school thus going against the social class norm through exhibiting academic tendencies (Mac an Ghaill, 1994).   Those who conformed to school rules and worked in school were despised by their contemporaries. The working class 'ear 'oles' were despised by the working class 'lads' (Willis, 1977) because of their bookishness. The middle class 'Cyrils' were considered to be 'wimpish, academic' (Kessler et al., 1985, p. 39) by their counterparts, the 'bloods' (Connell, 1995) who espoused the masculine traits of sporting prowess and so despised 'the others' (Renold, 2004, p. 247) because of their conformity. Such attitudes between and among classes creates a hierarchy or 'typology of masculinity' (Connell, 1989, p. 295) within the same school. Such a typology colours the way in which the boys see not only themselves and their masculinity but also their education.

While for some class can be a chain that keeps a person in place (Reay, 2002a) thus constraining their aspirations and goals and horizons for action (Hodkinson, 2004) it is not for all. Mac an Ghaill (1994) argues that middle class boys are not so constrained and their horizons for actions are higher and in line with hegemonic masculinity because of their class. Class, though, is not just a question of economic resources and not necessarily a harbinger of educational attitude as noted above.

Class and gender help to position boys and men in society and help to shape their attitudes to education and whether education fits in with their ideas of what it is to be a man. These constructions of masculine identity help to explain why boys fail in school, the site of these constructions. As Connell (1989) notes:

> The strongest effects of schooling on the construction of masculinity are the indirect effects of streaming and failure, authority pattern, the academic curriculum and definitions of knowledge (p. 291).

Boys in school are constantly constructing and renegotiating their masculine identity and the masculinities that boys construct are ones that can conform to school expectations but also exist 'in opposition to institutional pressure' (Connell, 2000, p. 5). The orientation of the school can have dramatic effects on boys'

masculinities and the way they enact them and interact with education whilst at school. The identities and masculinities they construct position them with regard to academic success and failures.

Education and Failing Boys

Concern has been raised about the fact that the number of men attending HE has declined (McGivney, 1999; Owens, 2000; AONTAS, 2002; Jacob, 2002; Evers, et al., 2006; HEA, 2008a). This, Sommers (2000) believes, can be traced back to their previous education. Understanding why boys fail in school and the effects of such failures is an important aspect of understanding their later decisions to go back to education as mature students.

Various theories have been postulated for the notion of why boys fail in school. Compared to girls, boys are often portrayed as being less successful in school because they have 'more discipline problems [and are] more likely to be … placed in special education' (Evers et al., p. 111). Sommers (2000) theorises that boys are failing because they do not get the help they require in primary school as primary schools are not structured to accommodate the needs of boys. It has also been suggested that boys' failure in school is due to their social orientation, their personal feelings and/or their habitus (Kimmel, 2011). Skelton (2001) suggests that the reason for boys' under achievement is that education has been feminized and that boys do not cope well with a feminine educational ethos. Raphael Reed (1999) notes that boys do not do so well in school because they are 'naturally poorer on things which require reflection and carefully thought-through organization and sequential planning' (p. 62), things which girls are considered to be better at. Epstein et al. (1999) also believe that there is a gendered aspect to educational attainment. Their failure in school, they believe, can be attributed to the fact that they are taking ''soft' subjects and therefore [fall] into the domain of 'girls' work' (Epstein et al., 1999, p. 10). Hannan et al. (1983) contend that there are 'marked gender differences in attitudes towards, and take-up of, many subjects – particularly Mathematics, Science, and languages' (p. 31). Both parents and teachers, they believe, play a role in the decisions vis-à-vis which subjects students opt for. The expectations teachers and parents influence the pupils' performance

in particular subjects and in school which in turn shape their educational aspirations.

Reay (2002a) suggests that schools are responsible for upholding class distinctions and so the operation and focus of schools needs to be revisited in order to cater for all social classes.   What is taught, she argues, bears little resemblance to the needs of the lives of working class boys and that there is a 'failure to critically educate and creatively stimulate working-class students' (Reay, 2002a, p. 232). While Epstein et al. (1999) believe that class does affect pupils' chances in school 'Under achievement is not merely the responsibility of schools' (p. 11).   They argue that the educational attainment of the parents is more important as it is this that has a greater impact on achievement levels than the school itself.

Others have argued that boys' failure in school can be traced back to the school itself.   Schools that are considered to be failing schools fail the boys who attend them (Epstein et al., 1999). Raphael Reed (1999) contends that various factors affect boys and points to 'context, behaviours and values as well as the social practices of power [and the questions of] race, class and gender' (p. 72) as contributory factors in constructing masculinities which then effect school performance.

Some researchers have stated that the solution to the problem involves a more masculine approach to schooling.   Salisbury and Jackson (1996) suggest that secondary school boys should have a curriculum aimed specifically at boys and their needs. Skelton (2001) says that the 'feminising' of education has been suggested as the reason why men only strategies - more male teachers, boys' only classes – would be more conducive to learning for boys. Schools, contests Raphael Reed (1999), could make 'the curriculum more relevant in content to boys' interests' (p. 62).

The proposed practice of a male oriented curriculum raises concerns. It has been argued that a male oriented curriculum results in teaching styles and classrooms that are increasingly masculine and which raise concerns about gender equity (Raphael Reed, 1999).   Such an approach could result in a return to the male

hegemonic practices that excluded and subordinated women for so long in education. Skelton (2001) voices concerns about such practices and the dangers associated with this approach, basically a return to a male privileged education system.   Rather than a male oriented curriculum, Connell (2000) argues for a 'gender inclusive curriculum' (p. 169). Such a curriculum would not only include subjects that appeal to boys but would also educate them in understanding femininities and other masculinities. He reasons that the onus on such a change rests with the schools themselves as 'Educational work on gender with boys … requires institutional change in schools and systems' (Connell, 2000, p. 171) because:

> schools have a considerable capacity to make and remake gender … It has direct control over its own gender regimes, which have considerable impact on the experience of children growing up (Connell, 2000, p.175).

One way in which Ireland sought to bring about such change is through the *Exploring Masculinities (EM)* programme, which runs during transition year in secondary school. But this programme is aimed at allowing boys to understand not only their masculinity and its construction but how masculinity works in parallel to femininity. This programme has not been welcomed by all parents. Some have contested its inclusion in the curriculum over concerns about its religious ethos (Gleeson, 1999). Some parents believe that the more humanist orientation of the course goes against the doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church and does not fit with the teachings of the Church especially with regards to its teachings on homosexuality (EPASI, 2013).

Whilst acknowledging a concern about boys and their relationship to education, Skelton (2001, p. 165) queries the fact that '*all* boys, irrespective of social class [and] ethnicity' (p. 165) are seen to be underachieving in education.   While some believe all boys are suffering (Evers, 2006) in school others do not think it is that simple (Raphael Reed, 1999). This debate either sees boys as failing to achieve the educational heights that they once achieved or argues that to describe boys and their relationship to education as in 'crisis' is too strong a term. For Evers et al. (2006) 'boys have suffered' (p. 111) in education directly because more attention

has been focused on girls and their educational needs. Raphael Reed (1999) does not believe that it is simply a distinct division between boys and girls. The question that needs to be asked, she claims, is which boys and which girls are failing? For Raphael Reed (1999) the social class to which boys and girls belong can dictate their educational prowess. Those from higher social groups tend to achieve higher educational levels than those who are not from such groups.

Men's Orientations to HE

Researchers believe that men's attitudes to HE result from their previous educational experiences and these attitudes affect HE participation. Evers et al. (2006) believe that boys' anti-hard work attitudes to education means that they do not always have the necessary qualifications to enter HE. Somers (2000) too argues that the drop in the male participation rate is due to inadequate academic attention, mentoring and encouragement in schools. This, she believes, is because teachers think that 'girls [now] deserve special indemnifying consideration' (p. 2) because of their previous educational disadvantage. Poe (2004) argues that the education system rewards the self-control, obedience and concentration characteristics of students, characteristics more commonly found in girls than boys. Boys and their engagement with HE is constrained because of how well (or badly) they did in school and the support they received from their peers, teachers and families (Burke, 2009). Bad school experiences colour attitudes to education and the formation of a negative learner identity which means that some men find it harder to come back into education as a mature student because of their previous learner identity and school experiences.

This point is developed by Field (2009) who believes that apart from qualifications a person's 'social capital has some influence on participation and achievement in adult learning' (p. 22). He goes on to say that people make conscious decisions not to continue with their learning careers because such a move 'might jeopardize their social ties' (Field, 2009, p. 18). Some adults believe that such a move would put a strain on their friendships and family relationships and may even result in 'the rejection and devaluation of one's background' (Baxter & Britton 2001, p. 95).

Some men find that their culture and the type of masculinity they subscribe to affect their decisions (Connell, 2000). Such beliefs can result in 'contradictory cultural expectations … of what it means to be a man and a student' (Burke, 2009, p. 415).   HE participation 'appears to interfere with practices of maintaining residual or emerging versions of masculinity for some men since it locates them' (Burke, 2013, p. 121) "within an arena where middle-class men exercise greater power/competency"' (Burke, 2013, citing Archer et al., 2001, p. 441). This Burke (2013) believes leaves students 'struggling with feelings of dispossession and exclusion' (p. 221).

While men's interactions with HE are in part based on their ideas of masculinity they are shaped by family and school and the social class to which they belong. Class is a strong determinant of ones' identity (Johnston and Merrill, 2009).   Some men see HE as being beyond their reach because of their social class. They believe that only rich, middle class people access HE, a belief which often sees HE participation being 'associated with negative, undesirable images of masculinity' (Archer et al., 2001, p. 435).   Men from working class backgrounds see HE as 'entailing numerous costs and risks to their masculine identities' (Archer and Leathwood, 2003, p. 179).   Archer et al. (2001) argue that working-class men's (various, racialised) resistance to participation in HE may relate to their unwillingness to ''give up' locally powerful masculine identities and enter into an arena of middle class men's power' (p. 445).   Although not all working-class men espouse these ideas 'HE participation involves crossing boundaries, and to leave class positions requires resources, which many working-class men lack' (Archer at al., 2001, p. 446).

Not all men though see HE in a negative light (Archer and Leathwood, 2003). Burke's (2009) study found that men believed HE was a way forward, a way to improve themselves and their prospects. Not only would they become 'respectable men' but they would not be 'doing physical work [would have] a well-paid job, [be] comfortable … and [have] a home and a stable family life' (p. 22). HE, then, is a way of 'becoming (better) men, invoking an ideal and respectable masculinity' (Burke,

2007a, p. 422) which equates to better lives and prospects for themselves and their families.

Men who do not do so well often offer laziness an excuse for academic 'failure' (Burke, 2009). Excusing failure by citing laziness is not necessarily laziness at all but, Jackson (2003a) believes, a self-protectionist ploy centred on the concept of self-worth.   This 'self-worth protection strategy enables [men] to explain failure not in terms of lack of ability or intelligence but simply of lack of effort [and] achievement' (Jackson, 2003a, p. 585) and preserves their sense of identity and masculinity.   Burke (2009) argues that such a ploy explains the concerns men have vis-à-vis their progress and academic achievements once in HE (Burke, 2009). This may tie in with the fact that boys and men in education often do not look for support for fear of being seen as wanting or unable to cope or achieve on their own. Such an admission would mean not living up to the hegemonic masculine ideal of being strong and capable (Connell, 1989; Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Gough and Pearce, 2000; Burke, 2013).

Summary

Masculinity is a social construct that can take many forms. These constructions are shaped by experiences and expectation at home and in school. Boys and men regularly face the fact that their masculinity or manhood is constantly tested and judged and failing the 'manhood test' (Levant and Kopecky, 1996, p. 146) in school and in wider society risks boys and men being seen as outside of the norm which in a way makes them almost martyrs to masculinity. As Mac an Ghaill (1994) says 'Male heterosexuality is a highly fragile construct marked by contradictions, ambivalences and contingencies' (p. 172) where boys and men have to abide by the codes of manhood (Gilmore, 1990).

Various researchers suggest that the construction of masculinity that boys subscribe to in school affects the trajectory of their learning careers. These social constructions determined by their home and school experiences colour their attitudes to education. These attitudes can be long lasting and often determine

whether education and HE are options in their lives at eighteen or as mature students.

The fact that masculinity has and is being refashioned has brought about changes especially regarding the traditional role of the male breadwinner and female carer. The decline of the breadwinner role means that some men see the need to reposition themselves with regards to their masculine role in life, through new jobs and opportunities. Their orientation to education which had shaped their lifecourse had placed HE out of reach. These attitudes and their social capital can, like their constructions of masculinity, change over time allowing them to cross the boundaries into HE so that they can become 'better', more 'respectable' men (Archer et al., 2001; Burke, 2007a); men who would have good jobs that enable them to comfortably look after themselves and their families.

What was once the wrong path to follow can and does change through men's lives but for many, education still has its challenges. Changing attitudes, reconstructed masculinities and repositioning may allow them to face these challenges and revisit or move on to follow paths that may not have been possible earlier in life.

Chapter 4 – Defining and Understanding Mature Students and their Experience in Higher Education

Introduction

This chapter reviews literature relating to mature students and their pursuit of a higher education. Chapter 2 showed that mature students' participation in HE is a policy concern but this does not mean that there is a straightforward definition of a mature student. The concept of a mature student is not agreed upon and different countries and their policymakers and different researchers define mature students differently. The chapter looks at different definitions that can be found in the literature and at previous research on mature students' participation in HE. It examines why mature students and 'real men', men who would normally be in employment rather than HE, choose HE. It also examines what the HE experience is like for mature students and thus helps in understanding why adults return to education and, in particular, to HE.

Research into HE and mature students has often been gender neutral with researchers choosing to talk about mature students en masse rather than differentiating between the genders (Field, 1989; Maynard and Pearsall, 1994; Bamber and Tett, 2000; Baxter and Britton, 2001; Davies and Williams, 2001; Mercer and Saunders, 2004; Toynton, 2005; Grebennikov and Skaines, 2009). While some studies purport a gender-neutral stance they are skewed in favour of women in that the research group was approximately two thirds female and one third male (Reay et al., 2002, Leathwood and O'Connell, 2003; Osborne and Turner, 2004; Leder and Forgasz, 2004). While some research has focused primarily on women (James, 1995; Bowl, 2001) only a small amount of research has focused on men. McGivney (1999) has looked at men who have been missing from education and from training while Gough and Peace (2000) have looked at men in HE but focused on men's identities rather than their experiences. Burke (2006) has also completed a study that looked at the levels of aspirations of men with regards to returning to HE. Apart from this research the majority of the literature focuses on women and their relationship to education and to HE in particular.

What defines a person as a mature student is open to debate and policymakers and researchers view and define mature students differently. It is important, therefore, to look at the different categorisations and terms that are used in order to get an understanding of who and what a mature student is considered to be.

Policy Definitions of Mature Students

HE students are often initially defined by their age and are frequently seen as young people who normally go straight on to HE when they leave secondary school at eighteen. Policymakers and HEIs often refer to these students as traditional or young students (Lewis, 2002). Students who do not fit into this group are considered to be outside the norm as they have been away from school for a number of years. Although these students can be defined by numerous other criteria, age is often used as an initial indicator of mature students but it is not a straightforward, overarching way of defining them.

In the first instance, Irish policymakers use the age criteria to define mature students as those students who are 'aged twenty-three or over at the time of entry' (Clancy, 2001, p. 35). This definition has been adopted and further clarified by the Department of Education and Science (DES, 2000) who, for policy purposes and HEI admission purposes, states that a mature student is 'a candidate who is at least 23 years of age on 1st January of the year of entry or re-entry to an approved course' (VTOS, 2005, p. 6). An approved or eligible course is one that is a full-time (not part-time or distance learning) programme in a publicly funded (not private) HEI, such as the universities or the Institutes of Technology (IoTs) (Liddy, 2009). While a few independent HEIs choose twenty-one as the cut off point for mature students irrespective of policy dictates, most Irish HEIs adhere to the 23+ directive.

In the United Kingdom (UK) the HE domain comes under the auspices of three different national regulatory authorities and the age requirements differ. In England, policy dictates that mature students have to be twenty-one by the 30th September in the year of entry (HEFCE, 2002). Scottish HEIs accept mature students who are 20+ but mature students have to be over twenty-five in order to be considered for funding (UCAS, 2009) while in Wales no age limit defines mature

students as often 'each applicant is viewed individually' (Lewis, 2009). Across Europe, the policy age definitions also differ. In Germany students who are 24+ are considered as 'senior' or 'non-traditional' students. In Norway students must be 30+ in order to qualify as mature students while in Sweden they must be 25 and over.

In Australia, New Zealand and Canada ages also vary. Australia uses 20+, 21+ and 25+ to differentiate mature students with the ages being set by the HEIs themselves.   Mature students in New Zealand are aged 20+ whilst Canadian mature students are aged 19+, 21 or 22, again depending upon the individual HEIs. The HEIs often impose age differentials because they have their own mature student quotas, which once filled, may bar further mature students from taking up courses in the HEI (Deans, 2009).

Age is not the only criterion that varies. The term 'mature student' itself is one that is not used by all countries and HEIs.   In Ireland, policymakers and HEIs refer to students who are 23+ as mature students, a term also used in England. Germany talks of 'returners', a term that is also used in Norway which further divides the group into 'newcomers' as well as 'returners.' While the Southern Illinois University (SIUC, 2009) discusses 'non-traditional students' the USA does not have a policy definition for mature students but where there is a definition it is usually analytically applied to students aged between eighteen and twenty-four who are described as 'traditional students' with those outside this bracket being seen as 'older students' (Snyder, 2007). Table 10 summarises the various criteria, including age, that are used in Ireland and a number of other countries to define mature students wishing to apply for a place in a HEI.

Table 10 - Defining Mature Students: Age Differences Across Countries

Country	Age: National Policy	Age: HEI Policy	Comment
Ireland	23+	21+	Have to be 23+ by 1st January of year of entry for Universities and IoTs. Some independent HEIs set age at 21+ Other Criteria: Mature if school Leaving Certificate is insufficient for admission. Mature students have to apply via the CAO or directly to the HEI concerned for approved courses.
The UK			
England	21+	23+ 25+	UCL: Students who are 23+ are older mature students. Some HEIs set the threshold at 25+ One criterion: Above 'A' level standard. HEFCE sets mature student age at 21 + by September 30 of year of entry. Postgraduates have to be 25+
Scotland	25+	20+	20+ for entry; 25+ for funding
Wales	21+	21+ 25+	Some HEIs set the threshold at 25+ - others set it at 21 saying that there is no longer an age at which students are considered mature (Lewis, 2009).
Europe			
Germany	24+	21+	Non-traditional students study in non-traditional mode or enter HE by non-traditional routes. Also called 'returners.' Older students known as senior students. Have to be 24+ to qualify for HE via work experience and vocational qualifications (Wolter, 2000).
Norway	30+		Mature students have to be over 30. They are known as 'returners' or 'newcomers.'
Sweden	25+		Must be 25+ when they begin their studies for the first time (Bron and Agélii, 2000)
North America			
USA	24+		Traditional college-age students are aged between18-24. No formal distinction is made between students going to HE straight from school and those attending at older ages for the first time (Snyder, 2007). Students are considered to be independent at 24.
Canada		19 21 22	Different universities set different age thresholds.
Australia and New Zealand			
Australia		20+ 21+ 25+	Different universities set different age thresholds. Mature students are defined as older than school leaving age. The Victoria University of Wellington considers a mature student to be someone who is 20 years and over. These students can gain admission to university by 'Special Admission' (Jackson, 2009).
New Zealand		20+	Programmes are open to anyone irrespective of high school passes. Many HEIs have further selection to progress to second year (Deans, 2009).
OECD			The 30 state organisation, of which the above are all members, has no official definition of mature students and so there is no set age. They are seen as persons who have had several years of experience in the labour market and who do not enter HE via a secondary certificate (Copeland, 2008).

Sources: VTOS (2005); Lewis (2009); Wolter (2000); Bron and Agélii (2000); Jackson (2009); Snyder (2007); Copeland (2008)

Apart from different names and different ages, other criteria such as income earned, marital status, academic success or educational qualifications may be variously used to define mature students. Scotland uses previous earnings and marital status to define them (Scottish Government, 2004). The Southern Illinois University states that mature students are those who are:

> financially independent, or [who have] delayed enrolment in college (not entering right out of high school), or returning to college after having "stepped-out" at least once, or working full time or attending college part time, or [have] children, [are] married, widowed or divorced, or [are] ... commuter student[s], or ... veteran[s] (SIUC, 2009, p. 1).

Educational qualifications and life and work experiences are also used, either singularly or in conjunction with other criteria, to differentiate the students. While HEIs in Ireland, New Zealand, Australia and Germany admit mature students who have the Leaving Certificate examination or its equivalent they also admit those who do not. Those who do not are admitted on the basis of their post-secondary school qualifications, previous work experiences or work related courses, special interest courses or life experiences. In Germany, for example, mature students can access HE via what are classed as non-traditional routes. These routes include work experience and vocational qualifications but they must also meet the age criteria in this instance (Wolter, 2000). This is true of Ireland also. New Zealand's HEIs allow all students to avail of HE irrespective of high school passes but once they have entered HE, mature students have to meet some qualifying factors in the form of successful achievements in the first year in order to progress to year two (Deans, 2009).

The OECD, which comprises thirty countries and meets on a regular basis to discuss national and international issues often culminating in economic and social policies, talks of mature students but does not have a formal and binding definition for them. The concept of mature students is interpreted as those students who have had 'several years of experience in the labour market and who [are] not entering tertiary education via a secondary school certificate' (Copeland, 2008) a definition that many policymakers abide by to a greater or lesser extent.

What is apparent here is that various criteria are used to distinguish mature students from the younger students who go to HE straight from school at eighteen but there is no overarching policy definition that can be applied to mature students worldwide. Indeed the term mature student is recognised under different names such as returners or newcomers. Where distinctions are drawn between mature students and those entering HE on completion of second level education, the purpose of drawing such distinctions seems to be related to issues such as access and student support. With regards to access mature students are often judged on different criteria, often designed to take their post-schooling experience into account, when applying for places on HE programmes. Student support issues focus on mature students being seen as needing different forms of academic, personal and financial support to their younger classmates. Classifying particular students as mature students allows HEIs and governments to support (or not) their efforts to engage with HE in line with institutional and national policies and priorities.

Researchers' Definitions of Mature Students

Like policymakers, researchers have different ways of seeing and identifying students who attend HE. Brooks (2002) identifies those students who go straight to HE from school as 'traditional' (p. 221) students, while McGivney (2004b) and Brandt (2001) identify these undergraduates as young or younger students. 'Traditional' or 'standard' students, then, are identified as young students who, at eighteen, usually make the transition to HE straight from school without a break. This 'normal practice' is one that does not apply to the 'other' students who attend HE, the ones who do not fit under the 'younger student' heading as they are over eighteen. These students may be classified by researchers as mature students according to their ages or other criteria.

Davies and Williams (2001) identify mature students as aged over twenty-one as do Britton and Baxter (1999) and Mercer (2007). Reay et al. (2002), though, use 23+ as the demarcation age whilst Kasworm (2005) states that 25+ denotes mature students. Askham's 2008 study does not use a precise age rather opting for an average age of thirty-five. The different terms commonly found in the literature

(McFadden and Sturt, 1995; Wolter, 2000; Kasworm, 2005) include second chance students, adult students, adult learners, non-traditional students and adult returners as well as mature students. Most of the terms can be, and in some cases are, used interchangeably within the same article or document; sometimes only one term is used. Terms may be used collectively or singularly and are often synonymous with other terms, a practice that is seen not only in the literature but in policy documents as well.

Some researchers use age combined with different terms to describe mature students. University College London (UCL) (2003) talks of younger mature students, (those who are 21+) and older mature students (those who are 23+). Woodley and Wilson (2002) also classify mature students according to their ages but then use different terms to identify their classifications. For them students who are twenty-five to twenty-nine are young mature students; those aged thirty to thirty-nine are middle students, while those over forty are older mature students.

While the term mature student is quite widely used in the literature, some researchers have reservations about the term believing that it is too widely used. Woodley and Wilson (2002) feel that when applied to certain sections of the HE student community it is a 'liberal interpretation of the criteria' (p. 330) especially when applied to those students who are not much older than the young under-graduates. Although they use the term, Britton and Baxter (1994) believe that the term 'mature' is a 'blanket' (p. 215) term that does not help to explain or illustrate the diversity of the experiences of the students who come under this umbrella. Waller (2005) uses the term to form part of the title of his article but he has quite strong, almost hostile feelings for the term classing it as 'too general, too inclusive and insufficiently nuanced to be of much practical use' (p. 71).   While the term is too broadly applied for some researchers, others including Lynch (1997), Waller (2004) and McGivney (2004b) simply use the term as a demarcation between the older and the younger students in HE. While this term is often used and sometimes disputed it is not the only term that is in use.   Mature students can be classified under different criteria, where factors other than age are considered.

Literature highlights other factors that are significant about mature students. Researchers use different terms to refer to the students' relationship to HE with regards to their previous learning career or life experiences to show that it is not just about age. Osborne et al. (2004), for example, do not use age as a qualifying factor but rather group students according to their status in life. Their groups comprise, i.e. late starters, single parents, careerists, personal growers and escapees. Brandt (2001) talks of 'newcomers', Davies (1995) of 'deferrers' and Tuckett (1990) of 'adult learners.' McFadden and Sturt (1995) opt for 'second chance' as does Giles (1990). Gallacher et al. (2002), Dawson and Boulton (2000) and Kasworm (2005) use the term 'Adult Returners' rather than 'second chance' as for them second chance implies a missed opportunity. Mancuso's (2001) research looks at adult centred learning and this dictates the main terms she uses. Throughout her article, she discusses adult students or adult learners using the definition of the term 'adult' to frame her research. She defines adults as people who are independent members of society who do not depend upon their parents or guardians and have other roles in life besides that of a fulltime student. Like policy-makers, researchers do not have an agreed term to describe students who are not traditional students. The terms that researchers use tend to be more descriptive indicators of the mature students' status in life.

What is clear is that policymakers and researchers use different criteria to identify mature students. While policymakers use age in the first instance, researchers often also use life stage criteria such as escapees, returners or personal growers to identify those in the group. It is therefore difficult to find an exact and overarching definition of mature student. 'Mature student' is the term used by the Irish government, various third-level departments, agencies and HEIs in Ireland to define a person of twenty-three years and over by January 1st in the year of entry to a recognised undergraduate course in his/her chosen HEI (Clancy, 2001; VTOS, 2005). This term differentiates these students from the younger undergraduates, i.e. those straight from school. As this research is based in Ireland, the term 'mature student' and its official definition of 23+ is used throughout the thesis to define those mature students who took part in the research, but the narratives of the men in the

study also show that mature students' experiences are affected by the stage they are in their life.

Mature student numbers have increased due to the recognition by both the State and many adults of the benefits of a higher education. This is supported by Bean Ui Chasaide (1997) who suggests that 'a series of financial supports [and] specially targeted educational courses and [the] growing emphasis on the need to possess academic qualifications' (p. 40) have helped to highlight the importance of HE and so increase the acceptance of the need for a higher education. Ensuring, though, that 'the particular needs' (Brady, 1997, p. 11) of mature students are met with regards to HE means the placement of strategic supports that ensure that the barriers to HE are overcome and access and participation is widened for all who would access HE. A clear definition of what constitutes a mature student and a continued focus on policies aimed at widening participation would seem to be warranted to ensure that the numbers continue to rise and that (mature) students are seen as one group and not fragmented under different titles.

Gender and Mature Students in HE

Policy on access and increasing the numbers of mature students tends to be gender-neutral, where mature students are seen as one group comprising male and female students. While women were once a cause of concern as they were under-represented, their numbers now exceed men. Some researchers have considered the question of boys and men and their relationship to and interaction with education and HE, but currently there are no policy considerations that directly focus on men and their numbers in HE.

Women and HE

Through current research we know that there has been a steady rise in the number of women attending HE and that now there are more women than men attending HE in, for example, Ireland (O'Connor, 2008), the UK, (Izbicki, 2000), Australia (Hayes, 1999) and Canada (Evers et al. 2006). While women continue to take the traditional women's subjects such as the arts and education (Hayes, 1999) they are also making inroads into subjects that were previously considered to be male subjects. We are told that returning to HE is more of a challenge for women than

men (Houston-Hoburg and Strange, 1986); that women see HE more as a 'social risk [where] relationships are endangered' (Wakeford, 1994, p. 246) and that women do not always enjoy the support of spouses and family members when they decide to return to HE (James, 1995). Women who return to HE often do not have high levels of self-confidence (Giles, 1990) and they face more stress than men in their studies (Norton et al., 1998) especially when they are juggling a number of roles (Merrill, 1999) including that of parent, spouse and student. Despite the negative associations, Houston-Hoburg and Strange (1986) believe that HE is more liberating for women than for men and that although women may enter HE lacking in confidence they tend to leave with a greater self-image (Giles, 1990, p. 358). From a research perspective one question that could be asked is could these conclusions that have been reached about women and HE have an equal applicability to men?

'Real Men' as Mature Students in HE

There is very little research, either internationally or from an Irish perspective, that focuses specifically on men, neither on the triggers and reasons for returning to HE, nor on their experiences once they become mature students in HE. From an Irish perspective, there is some literature on mature students and HE but there is less that focuses specifically on men. In 1989 Connell researched masculinity and education but focused on the men's recollections of school. Owens (2000) for AONTAS, the Irish National Association of Adult Education, conducted a research project into adult male participation in education and training. In looking at the question of masculinity in Ireland Ferguson (2001) observed that 'in Ireland explicit attention to gender has … been considered as a women's issue … Men as gendered subjects have remained largely outside the gaze of critical enquiry' (Ferguson, 2001, p. 118). This point is also made by Fleming (2009) who notes that currently there is little research that focuses specifically on men.

Historically, HE was a male preserve open only to male students but mainly those from well off backgrounds meaning that women, rich or poor, and some classes of men, especially those from low socio-economic groups were often barred from HE due to financial and aspirational factors (White, 2001; Coolahan, 2007).   The horizons for action for men from low socio-economic groups often meant that they

were expected to follow in their father's footsteps and take up the same employment as their father (Britton and Baxter, 1999) or find 'safe jobs' (Parr, 2001) that enabled them to support their wives and families. Family background - influences and aspirations, often meant that a higher priority was placed on finding employment and earning a regular wage rather than continuing with learning. For some men from low socio-economic groups their backgrounds, both familial and educational (Connell, 1989) meant that HE was viewed as a feminized practice something that 'real men' do not do. Men who take part in HE are 'associated with negative, undesirable images of masculinity' (Archer et al., 2001a, p. 435) and higher education is associated with 'bookish … socially inept' (Archer et al., 2001a, p. 436) men.   Willis' study in 1977 into young male attitudes to work and education, for example, found that generally those from low socio-economic groups placed more store on going to work straight from school than in continuing with education. Boys and men from low socio-economic groups tend to see work as more desirable because it is what *real men* do (McGivney, 1999; Ball et al., 2000). Work is inherently masculine; 'a proper job [is] real work with working men' (Ball et al., 2000, p. 131) and casts men in the role of family provider because this is what real men do.

The traditional gender roles in Ireland where the men are the 'exclusive breadwinners [and thus the] "good provider", while women [are] … the carers' (Ferguson, 2001) are changing. Christiansen and Palkovitz (2001) argue that the idea of the male provider is still rated highly amongst men and that fathers receive strong 'cultural messages … that they should provide'; that a 'good father' is equated to a 'good provider' (p. 96). This view is being seen as old fashioned and one that is increasingly being rejected by researchers (Cunningham, 2008; McGivney, 1999). Connell (2003) has quite strong views about this when he states that such an opinion is totally 'untenable' in this day and age. While McGivney (1999) too, rejects the view of the male breadwinner, she notes that employment is still of huge significance to men. The changing view about men and their role within the family is also mirrored in their relationship to HE with increasing numbers of male mature students returning to HE.

Archer and Leathwood (2003) have found that there is not a common belief that graduating from HE will provide better jobs or more money. Some people believe that availing of HE 'constitutes a relatively insecure route to (stable) employment due to its inherent riskiness' (p. 178) as a job is not always guaranteed at the end of the course. Despite this, attitudes to education as something that 'real men' do not do is changing, and increasingly HE is being seen in a more positive light by those who traditionally would have rejected the idea. Archer and Leathwood (2003) have also found that those going to HE see it as a positive step rather than a negative one. Tett (2000) and Reay (2003) have found that the men with the positive viewpoint have definite instrumental reasons for reengaging with education as HE would provide future benefits in the form of better jobs, more money and a more stable working environment. Maynard and Pearsall (1994) believe that while men avail of HE because of the financial rewards, it is not their only reason for doing so. HE, they say, provides some men with a 'sense of having "escaped"' from unsatisfactory work situations which they perceived as 'boring and/or unrewarding' (p. 236). The men utilize the escape route to get away from 'crap jobs' (Archer, 2003, p. 123) that are not only financially unrewarding but personally unfulfilling. Bhatti (2003) argues from a more aesthetic viewpoint. She claims that going to HE is not just down to money and the benefits that it brings but also because the men enjoy learning and in this respect alone it is worthwhile. Scala (1996) agrees with this viewpoint saying that the 'joy of learning ... being able to learn about new ideas/subjects of interest [and] connections with younger students' (p. 759) are the main reasons for (re)engaging with education. Riddell et al. (2001) are a little more circumspect.   For them, men value education because of its intrinsic worth. Maynard and Pearsall (1994) also make this point but qualify their agreement by focusing on men who have been unemployed or who have been ill. These men, they believe, look 'to higher education to provide them with intellectual stimulation and the opportunity to engage with the community again' (p. 236), something they would not have if they did not reengage with education.

Factors Influencing Applying to HE

While the decision to reengage with formal education by going to HE may have a class or gender dimension, returning to education and HE in particular is often not an easy or straightforward decision for men or women. The various reasons and influences affecting decisions to return to HE may range from instrumental necessity to developmental yearnings or an enjoyment of education. These reasons along with other research findings can be applicable to both men and women.

School and Dispositions to Learning

The decision to return to HE is predicated on a number of factors one of which is the experiences an individual went through whilst at school. Archer et al. (2002) and Waller (2004) have noted that for men and women school can be the site of academic failure and this failure often acts as a barrier to returning to education later in life. Memories of unpleasant school experiences may result in HE expectations being distorted and with anxieties and fears associated with their return to education being magnified because of their fear of failure; a fear that often has its roots in compulsory education (Bourgeois et al., 1999; Archer and Hutchings, 2000; Askham, 2008). When considering HE some students believe that HE is going to be like school, where at best the 'teaching styles … [are] … didactic and formal' (Merrill, 2001, p. 8) and at worst it is a place where they will fail again. School experiences can act as an almost indelible marker when it comes to returning to education especially in the case of good or bad experiences (Gorard et al., 2001).

How students get on in school and the fit between pupil and school, affect their dispositions to education. Bourdieu (2003) argues that this is connected to their habitus and capital and likens this to the points accrued as a result of a competition, a game, one that has been ongoing for some time where the points are accrued by previous family members. Bourdieu's (2003) competition:

> resembles a handicap race that lasted for generations or games in which each player has the positive or negative score of all those who have preceded him, that is the cumulated scores of all his ancestors. And they should be compared to games in which the players progressively accumulate positive or negative profits and therefore a more or less great capital which,

together with the tendencies (to prudence, daring etc.) inherent
in their habitus and partly linked to the volume of their capital,
orient their playing strategies (Ibid., p. 74).

The type of school that a student attends and the expectations of the school with
regards to the students' learning career (Merrill, 2004; Walker, 2005) impact on
their expectations, levels of confidence and the trajectory of subsequent learning
careers of both men and women. Reay et al. (2005) believe that this has a
fundamental impact on the students and that their identities are influenced as a
result. According to Walker (2005) this affects the students' horizons for action and
'what [they] take to be possible for [them]selves' (p. 8). O'Connell (2006) also
emphasizes socio-economic influence, believing that those 'from lower social class
backgrounds perform less strongly in the Leaving Certificate examination' (p.
325/327) than those from higher socio-economic backgrounds with the knock on
effect dictating whether students do or do not progress to HE.

While the current HE entry currency for younger students is their Leaving
Certificate examination results, entry to HE for mature students does not
necessarily depend upon them. It is believed that generally mature students who
do not have a Leaving Certificate are less positive than those who do, and the lack
of a Leaving Certificate often acts as a barrier to HE (Wakeford, 1993; Mercer and
Saunders, 2004). Lynch (1997) and Gilchrist et al. (2003) point out that mature
students who have successfully completed their Leaving Certificate examinations
are in a stronger, more advantageous position than those who have not. Those
who have a Leaving Certificate are 'more likely to consider applying [to HE] than
those with no formal qualifications' (Gilchrist et al., 2003, p. 91). Other
consequences of failure at school are that students may have a fragile identity and
a diminished sense of self worth resulting in a difficult relationship between
themselves and education (McFadden and Sturt, 1995; Reay and Ball, 1997; Reay,
2002b; Waller, 2005).

Experiencing HE

Mature students 'bring with them a package of experience and values' (Rogers,
2000, p. 60) when they reengage with education and they also 'come to education
with intentions [and] … expectations about the learning process' (Ibid.). This

'package' of experiences means the HE experience for mature students is quite different from that experienced by the younger undergraduates.   These experiences as well as previous school experiences may lead them to have expectations that can be quite different to actualities and result in their HE experiences being as diverse (Waller, 2006) as the mature students themselves.

The experiences mature students go through may, in the first instance, be dependent on the HEI they choose to attend. Studies into HE and student choice have identified various factors which influence the different decisions that younger students and mature students make with regards to the HEI they attend (Moogan et al., 1999, Ball et al., 2002; Gayle et al., 2002). Brooks (2002) puts forward an understandable reason when she says that while younger students are persuaded more by the prospect of the social life of the HEI, mature students are influenced more by its location and the prospects of future employment. Taking this further, Gorard et al. (2001) have found that this influence has a familial overtone. Women with families are often restricted from travelling due to family commitments but this is something that can affect men also, especially those who are married with children. This point is backed up by McGivney's research in 2004 into male and female adult students which also found that they are more likely to be 'living at home and attending an educational institution near to their home' (p. 34).

Brooks (2002) reasons that financial considerations are built into the choices that are made, an argument that McGivney (2004b) and Reay et al., (2002) also espouse. They argue that mature students' choices are curtailed as they 'tend to experience more acute financial difficulties than younger [students]' (McGivney, 2004, p. 39) often resulting in choosing HEIs that are within easy travelling distance of home (Reay, et al., 2002) thus cutting down on the prohibitive costs of such things as accommodation and travelling.   Whilst agreeing with the financial argument Christie et al. (2005) believe the decision may not always be financial in the monetary sense but may be oriented more towards family welfare. The 'costs' may involve the relocation of the whole family, including children moving schools and this, in many cases, is 'not an option' (Christie et al., 2005, p. 11).

Having interviewed both men and women for her study, Weil (1986) states that adults who return to education are already 'experienced learners' (p. 220) as they have consistently been exposed, either intentionally or unintentionally, to various learning experiences both in and out of their working lives. While this may be true, for others HE is an 'alien' setting (Bamber and Tett, 2000; George at al., 2004). While Scala (1996) says that women often face 'anxiety or worry about their academic abilities' (p. 750) when they return to HE, Osborne et al. (2004) believe that many mature students, both male and female, 'approach the prospect of entering HE with trepidation and uncertainty' (p. 311). Once there they may experience uncertainty about their academic abilities and what is expected of them (Steel et al., 2003; Murphy and Fleming, 2000). Rickinson and Rutherford (1996) believe that by adjusting to the new regime, both academically and socially, mature students stand a better chance of success.   Murphy and Fleming (1998) say this involves learning the 'tricks of the trade' (p. 1) or acquiring 'college knowledge' (p. 4), a process Merrill (2001) calls 'adjusting to learning' (p. 9).

Although the terms may be different, what these researchers agree upon is that mature students have to come to grips with their new circumstances and learn how to cope with the structures and mechanisms of the HEI, from lectures and seminars to socialising with other members of the HE community. Returning to education after a long gap can be daunting and choosing a HEI that has other mature students or 'people like us' (Leathwood and O'Connell, 2003, p. 601) can make HE life easier. While there may be less risk of isolation and more chance to 'fit in' (Reay, 1998) and 'belong' (Reay, 2002b) understanding and being part of the whole class dynamic is an important part of the student experience and requires a positive effort on behalf of the mature student (Bamber and Tett, 2000; Johnson and Watson, 2004). This positive involvement, also noted as a requirement by Tett (2000), is according to Wilson (1997), the reason why some mature students get on well in HE, with those making the adaption faring the best. Availing of the pool of support via interaction with the younger students as well as with other mature students in the class helps to dissipate feelings of isolation by replacing them with a sense of belonging (Wilson, 1997) which allows mature students to mount a united front against the

difficulties and challenges of their daily academic lives (Bowl, 2001). Implementing other structures in order to ensure a welcoming environment can make the experience easier for the mature student. These structures include study skills courses, frequent assessments, small tutorial groups, email communication and timetabling flexibility (Walters, 1997; UCL, 2003). As mature students make up only a small percentage of the student community it is not always easy to accommodate them due to the constraints imposed by other courses and the needs of the other students within the HEI (UCL, 2003).

Mature Students in the Classroom

There are mixed and sometimes contradictory views about mature students in the HE classroom. Researchers have found on the one hand that the presence of mature students in class is generally welcomed. Beard and Hartley (1984) believe that mature students have 'a questioning and critical approach to lectures' (p. 103) and are not afraid to express their views and ask questions and this can have a positive effect on the classroom experience. They often stimulate discussion and can act as role models for the younger students (Field, 1989; Duke, 1992; Williams, 1997; Bourgeois et al., 1999) while taking 'little nonsense from staff' (Field, 1989, p. 16). On the other hand they have also found that mature students can cause problems in the classroom as they can have an 'inhibiting ... effect' (Duke, 1992, p. 70) on younger students straight from school as well as dominating smaller groups as they tend to talk too much (Field, 1989). This viewpoint of the garrulous confident student, i.e. male or female, at ease in HE applies to some mature students but not to all. Various positive approaches, which have been suggested as a means of overcoming the negative feelings, range from providing positive structures such as establishing peer support groups to recognising previous experiential experiences.

The recognition of experiential learning gained through previously attended courses and life and work experiences is acknowledged by a number of researchers as being important to the welfare and motivation of mature students. Tett (2000), Bamber and Tett (2000), Bunyan and Jordan (2005) and Toynton (2005) all suggest that such recognition is a source of solace to the mature student. Toynton (2005) is quite

specific when he says that male and female mature students 'gain confidence in learning through the recognition and validation of their prior knowledge [and the recognition of] prior tacit knowledge endows students with confidence but it also allows them to take a more central role in the learning experience' (p. 112). Despite the acknowledgement of the importance of such recognition, Murphy and Fleming (2000) believe that HEIs have a rather blinkered view of such experience as 'subjective knowledge, accumulated over a lifetime of working and raising families [has] little to do with academia' (p. 86) and in some cases is ignored by the HEI and the staff. The lack of support in this instance and with HE life in general can be detrimental to the completion rates. Various authorities have clearly stated that support is very important to mature students as it helps them to reduce their stress levels and improve the HE experience thus ensuring course completion (HEA, 1995; Weil, 1989; DES, 2000; Bamber and Tett, 2000; Thomas, 2005).

Attrition and Mature Students

McGivney (2004b) finds that men and women cite different reasons as to why they leave HE. Men, she says, often leave courses because they encounter difficulties with the course or have financial problems whilst women often cite family responsibilities and the lack of childcare. Financial difficulties are also cited (Bowl, 2001), one of which is the cost of childcare when it is available. Other researchers who have studied both men and women in HE believe that the mature student attrition rates are   attributable to other factors such as inadequate teaching, difficulties and pressures related to the course, large class sizes and too little support, encouragement and assistance (Leder and Forgasz , 2004). James (1995) and University College London (2003) have cited interaction with tutors and being able to discuss course work and receive feedback as necessary to sustain progression for the male and female mature students who took part in their studies. Rickinson and Rutherford (1996) have noted that problems need to be identified at the start of the course rather than later in order to reduce attrition and that support systems need to be in place to overcome mature student difficulties. This claim has been substantiated by Parmar and Trotter (2005) who have found that HEIs that ensure that students have in-depth information before admission

and that concentrate on helping students get to know one another, thus lessening potential problems of isolation, achieve higher retention rates amongst their students. Ensuring that there are adequate levels of support and by monitoring the whole process are, they say, factors that also help to ensure higher retention rates.

In many instances mature students believe that they have to adapt themselves to 'the academic's way of looking at things' (Usher and Bryant, 1989, p. 108). Weil (1986) does not agree with this approach believing instead that the HEI has to learn 'how to learn' (p. 229) from the mature students themselves as they 'view our traditional approaches and system from fresh and non-institutionalised perspectives' (Weil, 1986, p. 230). Bowl (2001) endorses the necessity of a fresh perspective. By failing to realise this, barriers to HE will remain in place thus making 'survival at [HE] difficult for mature ... students' (p. 158).

Grebennikov and Skaines (2009) conducted a research study into the differences in experiences between men and women in HE in Australia. Although both genders noted the importance of well structured courses with clear assessment tasks and guidelines, they found that women tend to be 'more demanding about the quality of services' (Grebennikov and Skaines (2009, p. 71) than male students. Gammon (1997) believes that the way mature students get through HE, though, is not only attributable to well defined structures but also to do with something more intrinsic, more personal and centres on self-motivation, dedication and personal viewpoint in life. Jackson (2003b) argues that men 'may be more prepared than females for the challenges and demands of university life [as] men tend to rate their abilities more highly than women do' (p. 341). This point is endorsed by Leathwood and O'Connell (2003) who say that men often give 'the impression of knowing and understanding all the theoretical issues being discussed' (p. 609). For Gammon (1997) though 'the key to being a successful mature student, is defining the goal that is strong enough to pull on through the rough spots' (p. 31). While this may be the case for some mature students, Weiner (1994) and Toynton (2005) have found that some difficulties and challenges are so overwhelming that the outcome may result in students dropping out of the course. This, they believe is not just due to the lack of a positive goal but to something more prosaic, i.e. the students did not

do the groundwork. They opted for courses in disciplines which may be totally new to them and so difficult to master.

Maher (2001) has found that with regards to women and their 'educational vision', the HE experience is a time of transformation where their lives, their thinking and they themselves change. Through her return to HE to do a Women's Studies course Giles (1990) found her 'voice' and was able to discover a new self. This self-discovery and change can happen to men as well as women. Maynard and Pearsall (1994) say that the men in their study had 'a greater consideration of those around them and an increased awareness of their [family and friends'] needs' (p. 235) as a result of going back to HE.

Supporting Mature Students in HE

The amount and type of support that mature students receive can shape the experiences that they have in HE. The support that is offered may be different from mature student to mature student and family to family. Equally, it may have a gendered bias, where for example some research has shown that women tend to receive less support than men.

Some researchers believe that when mature students decide to return to HE they may face negative reactions culminating in the absences of the necessary and vital levels of family support that mature students need (Mercer and Saunders, 2004; James, 1995; Bamber and Tett, 2000). Although Osborne et al. (2004) acknowledge that the familial response to such a decision may be negative they highlight the fact that family support is often a positive factor and can be combined with all sorts of other factors both negative and positive that boost or undermine the decision to return to education.

When a student returns to higher education s/he often has to manage a number of parallel and different lives including those of student, partner or parent. This often means 'a complete re-orientation of lifestyle' (Osborne et al., 2004, p. 295). Mature students have to consider how their non-student lives impact and impinge on their student lives and how their student lives impact and impinge on their non-student lives, which are generally conducted away from the higher education campus. Tett

(2000) says that some women regard the return to HE as a way of 'giving a better life to the kids' (p. 191) yet when they return to HE female mature students experience difficult times as they have a number of roles to play ranging from homemaker and wife through to mature student (Steele et al., 2005; Baxter and Britton, 2001; Gardner and Pickering, 1991).   It is less widely acknowledged that male students, like female students, often have to juggle various aspects of their lives including family matters, social life and jobs in order to fulfil grants, study and course requirements (Leder and Forgasz, 2004), the results of which may lead to a decline of motivation once they become students in HE.

 Research has shown that women often face more difficulties than men when they are deciding to return to HE (Maynard and Pearsall, 1994) and when they actually become mature students (McGivney 2004).   Huston-Hoburg and Strange (1986) point out that the support that men receive from home is greater than that received by women.   They maintain that wives tend to be more supportive of husbands returning to education while the husbands of returning female mature students tend to have a more traditional view of the role of a wife in the family; more positive factors are associated with the male students' return than with that of female students. Women have to fulfil the carer role, which often means putting the family first thus subordinating their own needs (Britton and Baxter, 1999). Those who return to HE challenge the 'established patterns of family life' (Huston-Hoburg and Strange, 1986, p. 393) and may suffer spousal and familial resentment (Penglase, 1993) as a result. Huston-Hoburg and Strange (1986) contend that men who return are more likely to be seen in a positive light as they have used their time to upskill thus enabling them to continue in the role of 'provider.' This view though is one that cannot be applied across the board. Research by Baxter and Britton (2001) has identified that some spouses expect men to continue in the role of the provider but that they should not have to go to HE in order to do so.

Another constraint that mature students encounter whilst in HE is time poverty (Reay, 2003; Davies and Williams, 2001; Bowl, 2001). As the name suggests mature students find that by devoting themselves to their studies they lessen the time that is available to be spent with the family and in the women's case this erodes the

traditional family ideals of the women as the nurturer of the family unit. Some researchers argue from the other viewpoint. They believe that mature students actually see family time as time that they cannot spend on themselves and their studies (Reay, 2003; Reay et al., 2002). Whether the time available is viewed as time for the family or for the students it is often equated with risks and these risks have a gendered dimension. Researchers agree that in the main women equate the risks with family disruption and possible breakup whereas men do not tend to hold this view and are often able to resolve issues more favourably (Wakeford, 1994; Dawson and Bolton, 2000; Baxter and Britton, 2001).

Entering HE imposes extra demands on mature students which 'necessitates a considerable degree of adjustment [not only] for the mature student [but also for] his or her family' (Cregan, 2003, p. 107). As the established routines of family life can often be disrupted by a return to education (Huston-Hoburg and Strange, 1986), Bowl (2001) argues that mature students need to ensure that 'life arrangements [are] made before entry to the institution' (p. 157). Mature students often have 'to convince [their] partner and/or family that study is "work"' (Kantanis, 2002, p. 6) while ensuring that this work does not lead to the neglect of family responsibilities (Bowl, 2001). For mature students adjusting to life in HE means that s/he has to balance the demands of family life against those of HE which is often a time management issue. Time management is an important factor with regards to academic progression or the successful completion of a course (Bowl, 2001; Mercer and Saunders, 2004).

Support gives mature students 'a major boost' (Bamber and Tett, 2000, p. 65) and some researchers are of the opinion that this boost not only affects their levels of self-confidence but also their stress levels. The more support received the lower the stress levels (Norton et al., 1998). Support provided by family and friends (Penglase, 1993; Steele et al., 2005) enables mature students to progress through HE and can make the difference between completion and non-completion. Receiving this support may mean the difference between success and failure as 'over a prolonged period of time [mature students] may find it particularly difficult

to persist if they do not receive sufficient encouragement and support from their immediate entourage' (McGivney, 2004, p. 42), i.e. from their family and friends.

Summary

Mature students are diverse and as such do not conform to one homogenous grouping but rather belong to a group of students that is distinguished by the variety of its differences rather than its similarities (Wilson, 1997). The one thing that the group members have in common is the fact that they fall outside of what is considered to be the norm for a student participating in HE. Their differences are mirrored in the fact that different researchers and policymakers use different terms and age brackets to differentiate mature students from younger students and amongst the group itself. Mature students have different familial and educational backgrounds, different employment histories, different expectations of HE as well as different expectations of life after HE. These differences mean that the return of mature students to HE is triggered by different reasons and the HE experience may be different as a result. These differences may equate to difficulties and the difficulties that mature students experience with HE are due to 'the rest of their lives - financial, emotional and personal [which] impinge on the only role in which HEI are prepared to recognise them - as learners' (Haselgrove, 1994, p. 6).

These differences and difficulties can mean that HE is not the easiest time for male or female mature students. Moving to HE 'represents a period of disequilibrium as students move from a familiar environment into an unfamiliar one' (Jackson, 2003b, p. 341). This disequilibrium, or what Weil (1986) identifies as dislocation and disjunction, may be the product of these outside factors and as such when in HE mature students need emotional, financial, social and educational support. Facilitating a positive outcome depends upon this support, be it 'provided by family members, friends, neighbours, college peers and college tutors' (Steele et al., 2005, p. 577). For the HE experience to be a positive one the 'most helpful role that institutions can adopt is to offer guidance and advice' (Tett, 1999, p. 108) to students and their families. As entering HE imposes a number of extra demands on

mature students and their families, support is an important aspect in balancing the dual aspects of HE and family life.

Various research studies have been conducted into mature students using various classifications. A lot of literature has focused on women and HE but in comparison only a few studies have looked at men and education (McGivney, 1999). As Heenan (2002) notes 'a good case could now be made for the lack of knowledge about the mature male student' (p. 43). Gaining an understanding of the experiences of male mature students is what this research study wishes to accomplish.

Chapter 5 - Learning Careers as a Conceptual Framework

Introduction

The previous chapter showed not just that one's experiences in the present affect one's engagement with learning but also that past experiences have a profound effect on re-engaging with learning and HE in particular. The effect of both past and present experiences, and the subsequent decisions people make regarding a return to education, can be understood through the concept of learning careers. Learning careers, as a conceptual framework, can help in understanding these experiences and their influence on the decisions that individuals makes vis-à-vis learning and the pathway that their learning career follows.

Learning careers can be briefly defined as 'the ongoing unfolding of a person's dispositions to, and their engagement with, knowledge and learning opportunities' (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 1997, p. 7). Bloomer and Hodkinson (1997, 1999, 2000b, 2002) have used the concept of learning careers extensively in their research to understand students' engagement with learning. This chapter uses Bloomer and Hodkinson's (2002) concept of learning careers as a lens through which to understand men's decisions to re-engage with formal education and so to continue with their learning careers and become male mature students in higher education. However, Bloomer and Hodkinson's (2002) work on learning careers fits within a wider literature which uses the concept.

Pollard and Filer (1996, 1999) used the concept in their longitudinal ethnographic research studies centring on children during primary and secondary school. In the study they looked at various factors which pertain to a child's learning career including peer and teacher relationships in school, family influences and their subsequent emerging identities. In the late 1990s, Gorard and Rees (2002) studied the learning careers of adults aged between sixteen and sixty-five. They looked at people's engagement with education through their lifespan, in the context of a learning society and lifelong learning. Allan and Lewis (2006) have used the concept in the context of a virtual learning community, by looking at 'individual

experiences, the meanings that [students] attribute to these experiences and their sense of their own identity' (p. 845). Gallacher et al. (2002) and Crossan et al. (2003) adopted the concept in a bid to understand both young people involved in initial post-compulsory education and adult returners to education. While focusing specifically on young people and their transitions to further education and on older adults and their transitions back to education they looked at 'the processes of re-engagement with learning for people from groups where participation rates have traditionally been low … and its implications for the identity of the learners' (Gallacher et al., 2002, p. 499). Work carried out by Ecclestone and Pryor (2003) into primary education through to further education uses the concept of learning careers to examine formative assessment strategies in terms of their impact on learning careers and on learners' identities and dispositions for learning.

What is a Learning Career?

Kerka (2003) suggests that while a learning career is made up of 'events, activities and interpretations' (p. 1), the term also explains an individual's learning style and the attitudes that are developed towards learning. Ecclestone and Pryor (2003) also suggest that learning careers explain students' attitudes, dispositions and decision-making processes. Gallacher et al. (2002) say that a learning career can be defined by the active way 'in which individuals negotiate their identities … as members of (sometimes changing) social milieus' (p. 497). Bloomer and Hodkinson (2000a) agree that a learning career is made up of events and activities but they believe that it also comprises:

> meanings, and the making and remaking of meanings through those activities and events … it is a career of relationships and the constant making and remaking of relationships, including relationships between position and disposition (p. 590).

Here a disposition can be seen as what one usually does, a habit, a tendency to act in a specific way while position, according to Bourdieu, relates to one's place within a particular social field (Thomson, 2008).

Bloomer and Hodkinson (2002) explain that a career is 'any social strand of any person's course through life' (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2002, p. 131, citing

Goffman, 1968, p. 119), one strand of which is learning. Bloomer and Hodkinson (2002) see a learning career as:

> both subjective and objective [because] it is "the moving perspective in which a person sees his life as a whole and interprets the meaning of his various attributes, actions and the things that happen to him" (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2002, p. 132, citing Hughes, 1937, p. 409-410).

This subjectivity and objectivity, which limit as well as facilitate future experiences (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2002), have 'the capacity for describing ... continuity and transformation in learning by relating the present to both the past and future' (Bloomer, 1997, p. 149).

Bloomer and Hodkinson (2002, 2004) draw on two sets of theoretical concepts to frame their concept of learning careers. Firstly Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field and capital and secondly those of Mead and Blumer's symbolic interactionism. Bourdieu explains habitus as '… a system of lasting and transposable dispositions' (McLeod, 2003, p. 3, citing Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992), dispositions that 'both shape and are shaped by individual experience of social, cultural and economic position' (Bloomer, 2001, p. 437). So, as Hodkinson (2004) later explains, the concept of habitus 'encapsulates the ways in which a person's beliefs, ideas and preferences are individually subjective but also influenced by the objective social networks and cultural traditions in which a person lives' (p. 33). An individual's habitus is continually being fashioned through his/her life experiences and practices and the context in which these experiences and practices take place (Ecclestone and Pryor, 2003; Bloomer et al., 2004).

While the use of Bourdieu emphasises the social field that shapes the habitus, wider structures of symbolic interactionism 'focus on issues from the perspective of the individual' (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2002, p. 135). Symbolic Interactionism, traces its roots back to Mead and then to Blumer and can be defined as 'the process of interaction in the formation of meanings for individuals' (Nelson, 1998, p. 1). The concept of symbolic interactionism is tied to agency as people are agents of their own lives and they have the individual capacity to direct and control their lives (Field and Lynch, 2009). Symbolic Interactionism is based on the belief that

people's attitudes result from the understanding and meaning they have developed as a result of interacting with other people (Pollard, 1985). This '[h]uman action ... [has] ... a social basis [and] individuals ... develop a concept of "self" as they interpret the responses of other people to their own actions' (Ibid., p. x).   These responses can influence a person's view of themselves, which in turn may affect the decisions that they make about their learning careers. Symbolic interactionism focuses on 'the way in which knowledge is shared, generated, conveyed and constructed within and between individuals' (Goodlad, 2007, p. 111). A symbolic interactionist view of dispositions rests not only on the meanings that learners individually accredit to the learning situations they are in and what is involved in learning but also on the value, both intrinsically and extrinsically, of these learning opportunities (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2002). Bloomer and Hodkinson (2002) link the symbolic interactionist idea of dispositions, i.e. the individual accreditation of learning opportunities, with their interpretation that Bourdieu's (2003) habitus is a 'portfolio of dispositions' (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2002) or group of attitudes to life. These attitudes, as stated above, 'strongly influence actions in any situation' meaning that people's lives are shaped by what has gone before, for example, by their family, their school life, their social class origins and their positions or fields in life. They base their concept of learning careers on the notion that symbolic interactionism focuses on issues and actions from the perspectives of the individual alongside the Bourdieusian perspective that 'field strongly influences our actions' (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2002, p. 135).

For Bloomer and Hodkinson therefore dispositions to learning are formed out of 'the interrelationships of habitus, personal identity, life history, social and cultural contexts, actions and learning' (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 1999, p. 57-58) and can be defined as 'orientation to practice - the practice of learning' (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2000b, p. 589). Everyone, over time, builds up an array of embodied and mainly unspoken dispositions to learning (Hodkinson, 2007). In some cases dispositions endure (Hodkinson, 2007), 'develop and evolve over time' (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2000a, p. 74) and so are not constant. These dispositions are affected by any number of external and social factors and by what Bourdieu

describes as one's position in a particular social field (Thomson, 2008) thus causing unpredictability (Bloomer, 1997).

 Hodkinson and Bloomer (2001) argue that individuality means that it is not possible to predict with certainty the route that an individual's learning career will take. Not all individuals follow the same linear pathway and as such their lives are full of discontinuities, so from that viewpoint learning careers is a useful concept to use to understand these learning discontinuities (Gallacher et al., 2002). Bloomer and Hodkinson (2002) have used this concept in their own research to 'describe transformations in habitus, dispositions and studentship, over time' (Bloomer, 1997, p. 153). For Bloomer and Hodkinson (2002) the concept of learning careers:

> Can help us understand that the learning individuals often follow
> is neither predominantly linear nor straightforward predictable
> pathways. Rather, learning careers are constructed by the past
> and the present and not determined by them, and can change,
> sometimes in unforeseen and occasionally dramatic ways (p.
> 139).

This change can occur due to various events that affect the decision that an individual may make. These events are often the transitions, turning points or triggers that can influence the pathway an individual may follow.

Transitions, Turning Points or Triggers

McFadden and Sturt (1995) note that both men and women believe that HE offers them a way to improve their lives. This point is reiterated by Baxter and Britton (2001) who note that mature students see education 'as empowering ...and [as] a vehicle for the development of the self' (p. 57). The reasons why men and women go back to education are varied and often caused by circumstances or events. These events are known by various names including 'transitions' (Dawson and Boulton, 2000), 'turning points' (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 1997), 'triggers' (Aslanian and Bricknell, 1980) and the dramatic 'life-transforming events' (Osborne et al., 2004) or 'critical incidents' (Crossan et al., 2003). These events result in personal 'transformations' (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2002).

Bloomer and Hodkinson (2002) use the term 'transformations' to explain the organic rather than static process (Bloomer, 1997) of the development of learning

careers. For Bloomer (2001) 'transformations in learning careers are complex … [They] are often gradual though sometimes abrupt, sometimes perceptible and sometimes not, and predictable only within broad limits or not at all' (p. 443). Bloomer's (2001) interpretation allies itself with the 'bitty, fractured' idea put forward by Crossan et al. (2003). During the period of change people 'take stock … re-evaluate, revise, resee, and rejudge' (Strauss, 1962, p. 71) as they often have 'to confront … some harsh realities of life' (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2000b, p. 595). Hodkinson and Sparkes (1993) opt for 'turning points.' These herald change and equate to a person's horizons for action or what they feel able to achieve as well what it is that is actually possible to achieve. A person's horizons for action can be narrow or wide and dictated by previous successes or failures such as examination results and career choice (Gorard et al., 2001; Bloomer and Hodkinson, 1997; Hodkinson et al., 1996).

Like the influences, triggers can be instrumental or developmental and all can be dramatic when they occur. Bean Ui Chasaide (1997) says that academic qualifications have growing value in a changing society. Better qualifications may be the proactive trigger that will enable mature students 'to distance themselves from [a] particular set of social or economic circumstances' (Blair et al., 1995, p. 641) like a job with limited prospects (Webb et al., 1994). Warmington's (2003) research has found that both men and women see education as a means of getting out of low paid 'little jobs' (p. 99). Research by The Learning Lives Project (TLRP, 2008) and Archer and Leathwood (2003) agree that both genders desire self-improvement through improved job prospects but they also note that the trigger may simply be down to personal interest.   The effects of unemployment and retirement or the need to restructure one's life due to divorce (Blair et al., 1995), bereavement, the birth of a child or an illness (Walters, 2000) can also act as triggers. These triggers can be just as forceful in enticing both male and female mature students back to education and into HE (Hodkinson et al., 2006a). This view is endorsed by Ecclestone and Pryor (2003) who feel learning careers are open to 'situational and temporal fluctuations' (p. 473) and do not always follow a linear pathway. Similarly, Crossan et al. (2003) note that often they 'are contradictory

and volatile. They do not travel in one direction, but can go into reverse, not once but many times [and are] … frequently complex and multi-directional' (p. 65).

Limitations of Learning Careers as a Concept

Not everyone fully agrees with Bloomer and Hodkinson's (2000b) conceptualisation of learning careers. Goodlad (2007) believes that there are risks associated with 'the dominance of the role of Bourdieu's ideas' (p. 112). Goodlad (2007) believes Bloomer and Hodkinson's (1997, 2000b) reliance on Bourdieu's ideas may result in an overemphasis on structure and an underemphasis on agency. Bourdieu's conceptual framework is also questioned by Ecclestone and Pryor (2003). They feel the framework is 'seen in static terms [where] habitus, when applied to particular educational situations, is often viewed as a rather ossified quality, deriving from the actor's social background' (p. 477). They argue that habitus is not static but dynamic and is fashioned by the customs and habits of the environment in which people live.

Crossan et al. (2003) question the data set that Bloomer and Hodkinson (2000b) used in their study. They believe that the research group was not wide enough in that it only looked at adolescent students who were studying in colleges of further education. As Bloomer and Hodkinson (2000b) did not take their study further than the adolescent stage, Crossan et al. (2003) question 'whether this can truly be described as a "learning career"' (p. 57). They criticise the fact that Bloomer and Hodkinson (2000b) focused mainly on 'individual cases' (p. 595) and the fact that they did not follow up on cases where students had left the course before completion (Crossan et al., 2003). In their research, Crossan et al. (2003) sought to widen the focus by looking at 'the learning careers not only of young people but of adult learners, frequently with limited or broken histories of previous participation' (p. 57). Crossan et al. (2003) also comment on the fact that Bloomer and Hodkinson chose to look only at the formal learning offered by further education. However, Hodkinson et al. (2008) felt that it is necessary to keep informal and formal learning separate as mixing the two lessens the concept of learning careers. By keeping the students' lives separate from their college learning, Hodkinson et al.

(2008) believe it is possible to show how their learning was influenced by their lives.

Hodkinson (2007) himself has questioned the appropriateness of the term in his later research. Agreeing with Lave and Wenger (1991), Hodkinson (2007) states that 'learning is simply part of everyday practices in any location, rather than a separate process' (p. 7) and so a learning career should not be seen as a separate part of a person's life. Equally, he recognises the distinctiveness of learning and that the ongoing process of learning cannot be separated from other aspects of life. It is through learning that we live and we live through learning and so 'learning is a major process through which dispositions are reinforced and/or changed' (Hodkinson, 2007, p. 7). Learning and living therefore are intertwined, they are not separate.

With reference to the present research, learning careers as a conceptual framework enabled me to identify the events in the lives of the participants that together influenced their relationships with education. The concept enabled me to look at the development of the participants' dispositions to learning and the effect of the events which affected these dispositions. The concept allowed me to analyse the participants' engagement with learning (Gallacher et al., 2002) over a period of time.

Using Learning Careers to Understand Male Mature Participation in Irish HE

The concept of learning careers can be used to examine the development of the attitudes and dispositions that the men hold towards education and the various factors that influenced this development. Bloomer and Hodkinson (2002) note that various 'facets of a person's life [including their] habitus, personal identity, life history, social and cultural contexts, actions and learning' (Hodkinson, 2007, p. 2) influence their return to education. Other facets including the gender of the person, their current employment status, levels of motivation, previous school experiences (Gorard et al., 2001) and familial obligations and support can also mediate their return to education.   These facets can render a learning career fragile and uncertain (Bathmaker, 2005) thus influencing the composite direction

that a learning career can take. These discontinuities in learning construct a learning career.

It is impossible to be able to predict the route that one's learning career will take (Hodkinson and Bloomer, 2001) so the concept of learning careers is useful for understanding the discontinuities in learning (Gallacher et al., 2002, p. 508). In this study I use the concept of learning careers to seek to understand why mature men participate in HE and to identify and explore the facets that influence their learning careers and the triggers that cause them to engage with HE. Using learning careers as a lens I will look at the facets that shaped and affected their dispositions to learning and subsequent HE experiences, including family influences, the school effect, engagement with learning after formal education, dispositions to learning and choice of HEI.

The fourteen participants had different learning careers and each was influenced by a combination of the facets listed above. All of the participants, who had different employment backgrounds, had separate turning points in the guises of, for example, (un)employment, personal illness and familial ties. As discussed in Chapter 7, these individual turning points eventually prompted the participants to return to formal education.

The overall aim of using the concept of learning careers in this study is 'to know learning' (Bloomer, 1997, p. 48) through the eyes of the male mature students, to shed some light on what it means to be a male mature student in Irish HE and on the road taken to get there. Male mature students, who take different pathways back to education, are affected by different events and triggers that lead them to HE. Research can help in knowing and understanding male mature students' experiences of higher education from the male perspective and thus help to inform understandings and decisions about increasing participation in HE.

Summary

The term 'learning career' describes the way one is disposed to learning and how these dispositions and learning experiences develop and change during one's life

course because of the various aspects which affect one's life and influence the decisions that are made.

The concept has been used by a range of researchers in education. This study draws in particular on the work of Bloomer and Hodkinson (2002). They see life as being made up of experiences, experiences which can be affected by one's position in the world.

Bloomer and Hodkinson (2002) believe that learning careers are constructed and change and so do not always go in a straight forward-moving line. Allan and Lewis (2006) agree with the notion of change and believe that by taking part in learning the horizons for action that a person has may change thus leading to new career trajectories. This notion of change is reflected in Archer and Leathwood's (2003) assertion that identities are not static but are 'continually … constituted, asserted and reconstituted' (p. 175).

However the concept of learning careers as applied to understanding learning is not accepted by all researchers. Goodlad (2007) and Ecclestone and Pryor (2003) for example believe that Bloomer and Hodkinson (2000b) rely too heavily on Bourdieu's views on agency while their focus on individual cases rather than taking a wider view is not one readily accepted by Crossan et al. (2003). Whilst acknowledging these limitations, this study examines male mature students' participation in HE in Ireland and the factors that affect this participation.

The next chapter explains the methods that were used to carry out the study. As I wanted to understand the participants' stories surrounding their return to education, narrative was chosen as the methodology. Everyone has a story or a narrative to tell and this methodology enabled the participants to tell their stories in a way that was familiar to them. In order to collect the narratives, semi-structured interviews were used as this approach gave a fluid structure to the data collection process. Whilst ensuring that similar data was collected from all of the participants, semi-structured interviews also gave those who wanted to expand on a point the chance to do so.

Chapter 6 – Methods and Methodology

Introduction

This chapter details the methodological process and the methods that were used for this study. To set the research in context the chapter begins with my position as a researcher and also looks at my positionality as a female researcher researching issues relating to men and their relationship to education and higher education. The chapter explains the reasons for the research study and discusses the concept of narrative and the way in which the data was analysed. The location of the research is discussed as well as the structure and approach used for the semi-structured interviews that were conducted with male mature students. The chapter concludes with a discussion on the validity and ethics apropos the research and the importance of recognising the voice of the researched and the researcher.

Researcher Positionality

My learning career began in the UK as it was there that I was born and grew up. When I left school I went on to teacher training college before starting my career as a primary school teacher. I met and married my husband whilst I was teaching and after three years of marriage we moved to Ireland, my husband's home country.

As I was not able to speak Irish I could not teach in an Irish primary school and so, if I was to have any chance in the job market, I had to retrain and update my skills. Just before leaving the UK I had taken a computing course as computers were beginning to be recognised as a teaching aid in primary schools. My burgeoning interest in computers and the need to reskill acted as the catalysts for returning to HE and choosing a course in computing.

When I was making my decision to return to HE I was not sure that I could handle the rigours of a full time four-year degree course so I opted for a certificate course. The two-year duration of the certificate course meant that if for any reason, family commitments or poor grades, I decided not to continue then at least I would have some qualification that might enable me to get a job. As it turned out I passed the course and continued on to the diploma and then to complete my degree.

An equally important factor in returning to HE was the proximity of the institution to home. The nearest university, which only offered four-year degree courses, would have entailed a long round trip. My decision to study in an Institute of Technology (IoT) was influenced by the fact that I lived close to an IoT and travelling to and from it was comparatively easy, especially when compared to the journey to the university.

In the first year, I was one of two mature students in a class of forty students aged between eighteen and twenty-two years of age. While I was thirty-nine at that time, the other mature student was just twenty-three. He chose to leave after the first year to go to work in the UK. From the beginning I was very aware that I was different from the younger students and so made the decision to make more of an effort to be accepted as a 'student' and not to always be seen as a 'mature student.' We eased into a comfortable working relationship and in my fourth year I was told by one student that I was regarded as 'one of us' which I took as a compliment. When I graduated, I was offered a post as a computing lecturer and so joined the computing department at the institution where I had studied.

I returned to HE because I wanted to widen my skill set and then re-enter the workforce. Returning to HE would give me that chance as well as the opportunity to rebuild my independence and self-confidence, both of which had diminished whilst I was unemployed. Further HE qualifications would enable me to get 'a good job', though one not necessarily related to my previous career. Knowing and understanding my reasons for returning to education and experiencing life in a HEI as a female mature student and knowing my own educational background and the route of my own learning career all acted as the inspiration for this research. This knowledge caused me to question why others choose to become mature students in HE and in particular why men chose to become mature students. In the seventeen years that I have been a lecturer there has been a gradual increase in the numbers of mature students opting to take full time degree courses in the institution. This increase has been quite noticeable in the computing classes in which I teach. Where the norm was one mature student out of a class of thirty

students, it is now closer to five or six students. In the computing classes these mature students are invariably male mature students.

These factors piqued my interest and I wanted to know why people make the choices they do. Were the choices and views of male mature students wildly different from my own reasons for returning? Why, for example, did they choose an IoT rather than a university? Why did the male mature students decide to register for certain courses? How did the learning careers of male mature students develop? Understanding the reasons behind the decisions that are made can help policymakers and lecturers alike to understand and enhance mature students' experience of HE. Understanding that education, for example, has not always been an easy process and that fitting back into the system may be difficult and their learning skills may be rusty has led to the instigation in many HEIs of learning study skills aimed specifically at mature students. These initiatives and others like a Mature Students society are expected to make HE more accessible thus attracting further and greater numbers of men into HE. Previous initiatives had targeted mature students with a view of opening up HE to more women as they were under represented in the sector. Once more women opted for HE it became apparent that the gender gap had swung in their favour leaving men under-represented and so successive governments have been concerned to rebalance the issue and address it by encouraging more men to take up HE. In order to address these questions, this study uses a narrative approach to focus on male mature students and their learning careers.

A Narrative Approach – Explaining Life Through Story

Understanding someone's learning career involves appreciating the events and decisions that they make and the influences that come to bear when making these decisions. Influences include social, cultural and economic issues relating to their familial position, their friends, the schools attended and the jobs that they have worked in. These events affect one's dispositions to learning and can bring about change; 'learning careers describe those changes' (Bloomer, 1997, p. 149). These stages or events can be woven together with the various influences to form a person's individual story of his/her learning career and show how these events and

influences that occurred during their life histories impacted on the decisions that were made. A learning career, then, is where one sees life as a whole, filled with various events and activities and ultimately meanings (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2002).

These stories or narratives make it possible to detail the turning points and critical incidents that people have faced throughout their lives. The reason for using such a qualitative approach has been succinctly put by Patton (2002). 'Some questions lend themselves to numerical answers; some don't. If you want to know how much people weigh, use a scale... If you want to know what their weight *means* to them, how it *affects* them, how they *think* about it ... you need to ask them questions ... and *hear* their stories' (p. 13), *their* narratives. People commonly use narratives in order to explain, describe and interpret their lives through their stories.

Narrative it seems is everywhere. Hardy (1977) observes that people 'dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticize, construct, gossip, learn, hate and love by narrative' (p. 13). It can take various forms. It can be a 'written account' (Gay et al., 2006, p. 429) or it can 'be oral … filmed or drawn' (Linde, 2001, p. 162). Narrative can be expressed in the form of a biography, an autobiography, a life history or life story, 'memoirs, memory work, testimony, diaries, photographs, reflexive tales [and] critical fictions' (Walker, 2001, p. 3). It is also autoethnography, literary journalism, personal narrative and oral history (Alvermann, 2000). Although narrative can be expressed in such a variety of forms it is seen as 'a form of knowledge, a form of social life, and a form of communication [that gives] … an account of an event or series of events [which are] chronologically connected' (Czarniawska, 2004, p. 650/652). These events form one's life history and are ordered 'so that the significance of each event can be understood through its relation to that whole' (Elliott, 2005, p. 3), to that life history. In the context of this study, returning to HE is part of one's learning career and can be seen very much 'from the perspective of someone's life and in the context of someone's emotions' (McEwan and Egan, 1995, p. viii).

For most people stories have and do play a part in their lives. We take part in stories from an early age either through recounting them or listening to them. Stories are there when 'we read novels, biography and history; they occupy us at the movies, the theatre [and whilst watching] the television' (Gergen and Gergen, 1988, p. 17). This most human of activities is practised on a daily basis and it is through stories that we are able to make sense of the world in which we live. We use stories to explain and to make sense of the experiences that we encounter in our lives, they are 'meaning making structures' (White, 1989, p. 4), so it is through these stories that we not only understand ourselves and our lives but it is through them that we 'create meaning and knowledge' (O'Byrne, 2005, p. 6). The sense that we make of our lives, according to Somers (1994), is a restricted one. 'People are guided to act in certain ways, and not others, on the basis of the projections, expectations, and memories derived from a multiplicity but ultimately limited repertoire of available social, public, and cultural narratives' (Somers, 1994, p. 614, citing Mink, 1966). Whether the repertoire is narrow or broad we, in fact, 'live and invent our lives through stories' (Witherell and Noddings, 1991, p. 1).

The process of telling stories is one where the storytellers are looking back on an event or series of events that have taken place throughout their lives and then giving these events life. The lives that are recounted in the narratives have been edited in a pre-construction process. Labov's (2006, p. 1) pre-construction process is 'a cognitive process that begins with a decision that a given event is reportable.' The storyteller chooses the reportable events and the meaning that is given to these events help to explain a current or past action or position or to act as justification for past or future deeds. 'The telling of the story is in a real sense the construction of a life' (Hatch and Wisniewski, 1995, p. 129) and it is through recounting these events and their attributed meaning that the storyteller constructs a picture of him/herself. It is through this narrative process, this constructive storied process, that we produce 'selves or identities (who we take ourselves to be)' (Walker, 2001, p. 3/4). Bruner (1987) reminds us, though, that this process of construction, of 'recounting one's life is [an] interpretive' one as the way in which it is remembered is 'a selective achievement' (p. 13). The constructions

are not stable in the sense that they remain the same with each telling. The versions that are produced change with each telling and correspond to when and where the story is being told and to whom (Hatch and Wisneiwski, 1995). Huberman (1995) believes that this construction is in fact a process whereby the narrator is reinventing his or her past so that the present has meaning.

Narrative permeates our lives yet reaching an overarching agreement on what constitutes narrative is not easily accomplished. For many, narratives and stories are intertwined, yet for others, narratives are distinct from stories. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) believe that there is a distinction to be made between the two terms. Story is 'the phenomenon whilst narrative is the inquiry' (p. 2). Frid and Öhlén (2000) say that 'narrative is an account of events experienced by the narrator, while story-telling is … the repeated telling or reading of a story by persons other than the narrator' (p. 695). The equation of narrative with events features in Paley and Eva's (2005) definition where narrative 'refers to the sequence of events and the (claimed) causal connections between them [but story is the] interweaving of plot and character, whose organization is designed to elicit a certain emotional response from the reader' (p. 83).

For some researchers (Craib, 2000; Emihovich, 1995; Gaydos, 2004; Hendry, 2007; Lemon, 2001; Squire, 2006; Zeller, 1995) there is no clear distinction; narrative and story are synonyms with the two terms often sitting side by side in research papers. Franzosi (1998), states that 'it is the story – the chrono-logical succession of events – that provides the basic building blocks of narrative [and] without story there is no narrative' (p. 520). While Philips (1994) is 'somewhat vague about the differences between a narrative and a story' (p. 14), Halverson (2011) notes that:

> Seeing the distinctions between stories and narratives [is] essential when it comes to organizing and making sense of narrative and the way people deploy or use them. Stories are pieces that can come and go, change, and morph, but the narrative remains (p. 1).

On the other hand Polkinghorne (1995) talks of 'narrative as story' (p. 6) and it is this interpretation of narrative that I have used in my research.

Narrative research looks at the ways in which people interact with their world (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990) and can be both descriptive and explanatory (Polkinghorne, 1988). In the 'descriptive narrative research [process], the researcher may seek to describe … particular life episodes … and the function that certain life episodes serve in individuals' emplotment of their lives' (Sandelowski, 1991, p. 163). These 'prosaic discourse[s] … consist of full sentences linked in a coherent and integrated statement' (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 6) and have a start, middle and end.

A 'narrative is a representation of past events' (Linde, 2001, p. 162) and as such are the participants' interpreted stories that are constructed   and retold as a means of communication (Zeller, 1995). 'Narrative research is not only the stories … contributed by the participants [but] … the evaluating and analysing [of] those accounts' (Overcash, 2003, p. 180) and as such are a means of understanding human behaviour. While narrative is 'well suited to transmit the part of social knowledge that concerns history, values and identity' (Linde, 2001, p. 163) it is also feasible to use narrative to look at issues connected with gender (White, 1989) and it suits researching the lives of the male participants in the study.

All of the fourteen participants had stories to tell and these stories or narratives were individual and personally constructed. They were influenced by events that ran throughout their lives and had characters and plots; while the stories were individual there were similarities. Male mature students have different life experiences and participate in HE for different reasons, and their different orientations to HE are expressed in their narratives. Their stories not only revealed these different orientations but the similarities in their attitudes and dispositions to education and HE.

As a researcher my role is not just to listen to the participants' narratives but to analyse their stories bearing in mind how factors such as race, class and gender can affect people's stories. Analysing the stories provides insights into understanding the process of becoming a male mature student as well as how male mature

students experience HE, how they experience policy and imperatives on the ground.

Interpreting the Data – A Narrative Analysis or Analysis of Narratives Approach

For Polkinghorne (2007), who believes that 'narrative research is the study of stories' (p. 471), there are two ways in which to view any collected narrative data when using a narrative methodology. Data can be seen either through the lens of 'Narrative Analysis' or through the lens of 'Analysis of Narratives' (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 12).

Narrative analysis involves the researcher collecting 'descriptions of events and happenings and synthesiz[ing] and configur[ing] them by means of a plot into a story' (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 120) where the resulting story is 'an attempt by the researcher to answer how and why a particular outcome came about' (Gay et al., 2006, p. 435). Garson (2005) defines Narrative Analysis as 'a chronologically told story with a focus on how elements are sequenced, why some elements are evaluated differently from others, how the past shapes perceptions of the present, how the present shapes perceptions of the past, and how both shape perceptions of the future' (p. 4). Through the use of plot, narrative analysis 'moves from elements to stories' (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 12).

Analysis of Narratives on the other hand 'employs paradigmatic reasoning [resulting in] descriptions of themes that hold across stories ... analysis of narratives moves from stories to common elements' (Ibid., p. 12). Analysis of Narratives is a process where 'the researcher collects stories as data and analyses them to produce a description of themes that applies to all of the stories in the narratives' (Gay et al., 2006, p. 435). Using this approach 'the researcher produces a statement of themes as general knowledge about a collection of stories' (Ibid.).

In the Analysis of Narratives approach the researcher analyses the collected narratives and 'locates common themes.' This approach is akin to Hendry's (2007) process of deconstruction where 'we ... deconstruct lived experience into parts and then look for relationships' (Hendry, 2007, p. 492). Analysis of narrative ensures

that by 'working with individuals' stories [the researcher] is clearly provide[d] … with a means of understanding ... individuals' (O'Byrne, 2004, p. 8). The researcher is able to 'enter into other people's lives' (Witherell and Noddings, 1991, p. 4) and 'delve below the outward show of human behaviour to explore [not only the] thoughts and feelings [but also the] intentions of agents' (McEwan and Egan, 1995. p. 7). Both approaches have been used in the study and both are useful for providing insights and understanding of male mature students' learning careers. The data chapter, Chapter 6, uses a Narrative Analysis to present the history of the participants' learning careers. Chapter 7 uses an Analysis of Narratives approach in order to consider similarities and differences in the participants' attitudes and experiences of HE.

Sample Selection and Access

The research was based in one of the fourteen IoTs that are located throughout Ireland. The Irish HE sector, as explained in the Chapter 2, is a binary system that offers students the opportunity to study either in a university sector or a non-university sector which includes the IoTs. The IoT which hosted the research study is sub divided into a number of schools including Health Sciences, Science, Engineering, Computing, Business, Humanities and Education. These in turn have a number of departments which offer courses in various relate disciplines. Table 11 provides a breakdown of the individual schools and the departments within the schools. At HE level all of the schools offer students a variety of courses ranging in level from ordinary degrees to honours degrees and above.

Table 11 - School and Department Structure of Declan IoT

Science	Engineering	Business	Health Sciences	Education	Humanities
Chemical and Life Sciences	Architecture	Accountancy and Economics	Nursing	Adult and Continuing Education	Arts
Maths and Natural Science	Construction and Civil Engineering	Management	Health	Literacy Development	Languages
Computing	Engineering	Business Studies	Sport and Exercise		Tourism and Hospitality

I wanted to look, in depth, at a limited number of participants who were classified as mature students (+23), were male and were taking full-time courses in the IoT. As the IoT is split over various campuses I wanted to recruit students who studied on the campus where I worked enabling me to be able to contact them and meet up with them easily and vice versa. I used convenience sampling to recruit my participants which meant the participants, who all came from the campus where I was based, were chosen because of the ease of availability or access (Joppe, 2007).

As the HEIs ethics policy prohibits any lecturer involved in research from involving their own students in any research study, I asked various colleagues to help me identify male mature students who might be willing to take part in the research. My colleagues agreed to approach such students, briefly explain my research and my search for volunteers and ask the students to either contact me directly or supply contact details so that I could contact them. As a result I was in contact with twenty-five students.

The conduct and behaviour of the researcher which equates to an acceptable way of conducting the research includes establishing communication. Effective communication is necessary in research and informed consent forms part of this communication. Research participants need to know their position re the research and that they have the right to 'informed consent ... [the] right to privacy [and] ... protection from harm' (Fontana and Frey, 2000, p. 662). I therefore set up a number of group and individual explanatory meetings designed to explain the research in detail and answer any questions that the students had. During the initial meeting with the prospective participants I explained the research and what I was hoping to do and outlined the process and explained my expectations. I gave each student a research brief explaining what I hoped to achieve and invited them to ask any questions. I explained that the session was not the only question and answer session but that their queries would be addressed *whenever* they arose. I also stressed the fact that they could withdraw from the research at any stage without having to give a reason for doing so. Although the participants took part in a question and answer session initially, questions that need to be asked are not always obvious in the first instance. Each student, therefore, was given my office

number and email address and could contact me with any questions or seek clarifications about the research at any time. The initial briefing session lasted about an hour and was designed to ensure that it, and any further sessions they might require, would ensure the participants' consent with regards to the research was 'informed.' While only one of the students declined to take part after the initial meeting, the remaining twenty-four agreed to be interviewed and I set up an interview schedule. Arranging the interviews did not go to plan as email details were not always correct, emails were not answered or time table clashes meant we were not always free at the same time.

By the time that the interviews began four of the participants had dropped out and I was left with a schedule listing twenty names and interview dates. Of the twenty students on the original list, two students did not respond to the email asking to confirm a date and time for the interview and four students who agreed dates and venues did not turn up on the days agreed. By the time that the interviews were completed fourteen participants had been interviewed with each of the respective year groups being represented.

Table 12 details the participants, their job status immediately prior to attending HE, the jobs that they had before becoming a student and the courses they opted for. The table is colour coded for easier identification: orange indicates computer courses; green is for construction and building courses, mauve for business courses and light blue for health sciences.

Table 12 - Participants' Previous Employment and Chosen Course of Study

School	Pseudonym	Job Status	Age	Previous Job	Course
Academic Achievers: Constructing Masculinity and Identity Through Engagement with Education					
School	Pseudonym	Job Status	Age	Previous Job	Course
Engineering	Conn	Employed	25	Bar Assistant Manager; Call Centre	Building Services Engineering
Engineering	Pierce	Employed	25	Corporate Broker	Construction Economics
Construction of Masculinities Through Conflict with Education					
School	Pseudonym	Job Status	Age	Previous Job	Course
Computing	Lorcan	Employed	40	Art Installation; Mechanic; Carpenter; Computer Repair	Applied Computing
Engineering	Colm	Unemployed	38	Mining Assistant; Carpenter	Construction Economics
Computing	Ronan	Employed	30	Factory Operative; Labourer	Multimedia Application Development
Discouraged Learners					
School	Pseudonym	Job Status	Age	Previous Job	Course
Engineering	Fionn	Employed	40	Construction; Plasterer	Construction Management
Computing	Cormac	Unemployed	31	Purchasing Officer/Manager; Electrical Contractor/Supplier	Software Systems Development
Computing	Eamon	Unemployed	34	Programmer; Care Assistant	Physics with Computing
Computing	Gearóid	Unemployed	35	Medical Receptionist	Applied Computing
Engineering	Malachy	Unemployed	26	Security Guard, Chef; Steel Fabricator	Building Services Engineering
Health Sciences	Donal	Employed	37	Motor Mechanic; Lifeguard; Maintenance Worker	Sports Studies
Maintaining a Masculine Identity in the Face of Retirement					
School	Pseudonym	Job Status	Age	Previous Job	Course
Business	Séamus	Retired	51	Rescue Services	Bachelor of Business Studies
Computing	Niall	Retired	53	Teacher	Information Technology
Business	Aongus	Unemployed	62	Accountant	Bachelor of Business Studies

Table 13 shows the different schools that the participants came from and the number of men from each school.

Table 13 - The Number of Male Mature Students from Each School

	Science	Engineering	Business	Health Sciences
Number of Students	6	5	2	1

Most of the participants came from the Schools of Science and Engineering as more men are in Engineering and Science than in other areas.   Upon reflection I feel that I should have put out a general call for volunteers by advertising in the college newspaper and on the various bulletin boards around the campus. While I might have reached a wider audience it would have lacked the direct approach and so may have been prone to long delays before a reasonable quota of volunteers was achieved.

The Use of Semi-structured Interviews

To gather the participants' narratives I used semi-structured interviews. Patton (2002) states that 'the purpose of interviewing … is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective' (p. 341) and 'interviewing practices that empower respondents … produce narrative accounts' (Mishler, 1986, p. 119). Using semi-structured interviews allowed some latitude. Using fairly open questions rather than being confined to a rigid set of precise questions allowed the participants the opportunity to explain their lives through the use of various examples. I hoped to be able to allow the participants the opportunity to tell their own stories in their own way thus giving them a degree of control over the content and direction of the interview. As I was using a narrative approach to analysing the data, the structure of the interview schedule and the questions asked, had to be flexible. This would allow the participants some latitude in guiding the direction of the interview whilst giving their answers and explaining their life circumstances, whilst enabling me to capture the same type of information from each of the participants.   After a number of drafts, where I sought outside views and opinion on the order and form of the questions, I had a list of fourteen questions, eleven of which had prompts.

The prompts asked in 'a conversational … (open ended, unstructured approach) can be used with an interview guide approach. [This] … strategy offers the interviewer flexibility as it allows the interviewer the chance to probe some areas in more depth depending upon the interviewee's previous replies' (Patton, 2002, p. 347). The questions that were asked and the order in which they were asked are set out in Table 14.

Table 14 - Semi-structured Interview Questions

	Questions	Prompts
1	Tell me how you came to be doing this course at this point in time? Do you regret not going earlier?	Why have you decided to do this course now?
2	Why this course?	
3	Why this IoT?	
4	What have you been doing between leaving school and coming to IoT?	
5	Tell me about school. What was school like? Why did you not go to HE 1st time at 18?	Where? Type of school? When did you leave?
6	Have any members of your family attended college?	Parents, siblings, children, extended family. What did they do and where?
7	What do the people at home, your family and friends, think of what you are doing now? (studying)?	Immediate and extended family
8	In order of importance which people have been important in supporting you in coming to college. How did/do they support you?	Who are these people (relationship)? Why these people?
9	Was it difficult making the decision to go to college? Was it a difficult process getting into college?	The actual process itself – applying, form filling, grant application?
10	What is the course that you are doing like in terms of the curriculum content: the subjects that you are studying and the teaching and learning, assessment and support.	How do learn? Like to record notes? Like CA + Exams CA? IoT support service? Classmates? Work placement Opinion?
11	What were your expectations when starting your course and have they been met? Did you attend Open Day?	
12	What has it been like being a male mature student?	Is it an unusual, unexpected thing to be? Are you treated differently? Do you feel different?
13	Could the college experience be improved? How? Has college been good for you?	Teaching? Support?
14	What are your future plans?	Education? Work?

Although 'narratives may occur in response to closed as well as open-ended questions' (Mishler, 1986, p. 98) I opted mainly for open-ended questions as I did not want the participants to feel constricted but wanted them to be able to

elaborate and so add in any information that they felt relevant. 'Open-ended questions … offer the persons being interviewed the opportunity to respond in their own words and to express their own personal perspectives' (Patton, 2002, p. 348). Such questions open up the interview and provide an insight into the feelings and motivations behind the decisions that are made. They also help to encourage the quieter interviewee to relax and be more forthcoming. This worked to some extent. Some of the participants gave very expansive and illuminating answers, generally the three oldest participants, while others, two of the younger participants, were clipped and precise at times and required some coaxing.

The questions were grouped together so that in the main questions related to each other were asked one after the other. This plan did not always work though because when some of the students expanded on one question they also covered several of the other questions that I had on my list. In those cases I just ticked off all of the questions that had been covered and then returned to those areas that had not. I opened the interview by asking the students to explain why they had chosen to return to education at this point in their lives and why they had chosen this particular IoT. I hoped that these questions would enable the participants to ease into the interviews and become relatively comfortable. I then asked the students to explain what they had been doing since leaving school and what they thought about their jobs. This question led onto questions about their school days and how they had fared there. I was very aware that this can be quite a sensitive question as many mature students do not look back on their school days with fondness. As Waller (2004) has observed school days can be 'a time of great personal trauma during which people can feel devalued or excluded' (p. 28), a viewpoint also espoused by Burke (2000) who believes that school can leave people feeling intimidated around education resulting in them seeing it as a place where they do not belong.

The next set of questions focused on the educational attainment levels of other members of the participants' families and the level of support they received from their families and friends. My desire to return to college as a mature student was fully discussed with my husband and his support was paramount when I actually

returned to HE. I wanted to know if the participants also sought the support of other people, particularly family and friends. Questions focusing on the students' expectations and experiences of HE came next. I wanted to know if their expectations matched the reality of the situation and whether they felt that the fact that they were male and mature meant that college was different for them, whether this point in their learning careers had matched their expectations and where these experiences would lead them. After the first two interviews I added two new questions to my list. The first asked if they regretted not going to HE earlier and the second asked if school was the reason why they had not gone to HE at eighteen. Both of these issues had come up in the first two interviews and shed important light on the direction taken by the participants in their learning careers.

As 'the form and content of the interviews affect respondents' (Mishler, 1986, p. 120), I imposed a quasi-structure on the interviews by using the same format for them all. I wanted to keep the interviews 'casual and positive' (Selltiz et al., 1965, p. 575) as I believed the participants would respond in a more positive manner. After I introduced myself, I welcomed the participants, thanked them for helping me with my research and offered them a seat. The ideal seating arrangement, according to Denscombe (2004), is one where the seats are arranged at a '90 degree angle to each other [as] this allows eye contact without confrontational feeling arising from sitting directly opposite the other person' (p. 173). Some participants did sit in the '90 degree' seats, but some, when offered these seats, (even after gentle coaxing) preferred to sit alongside or opposite me. In most cases the participants answered all of the questions quite frankly with some making lots of eye contact while some others made very little. From the beginning, the three older participants engaged in the process quite openly whilst the others were more circumspect at first.

Once the preliminaries were complete, the participants had time to reread a copy of the Participant Information Sheet (See Appendix A) and ask any questions before signing the consent form (See Appendix B). At this point I again assured them that they could withdraw at any stage without having to give a reason and then I asked permission to record the interviews and make any necessary notes. Only one of the

participants asked to see any notes that I took during the interview. In the end I did not make any notes. I felt somewhat intimidated by the request and also felt that he would become distracted and would be more interested in my note taking and not really answer my questions and perhaps decide to abandon the interview.

I began by asking the participants to complete a background details questionnaire that asked for their home addresses, contact numbers and details of any courses and examinations they had taken. As exam grades can be emotive, I asked them to list the year of the exams rather than the grades. Some participants ignored this and entered the grades received. The participants were also asked to list any jobs that they had worked in and whether they were currently employed. I was hoping to see if there was a correlation between the courses that they had opted to study and their previous, current and future employment careers. Completing these questionnaires was an easier and faster way of collecting this quantifiable data than by asking them direct questions in the interview and thus possibly overrunning time. The questionnaires acted as ice breakers as the participants relaxed and started to talk and ask questions and did not appear concerned when I switched on the tape recorder.

Limitations – Potential Hazards of Interviewing

There are a number of dangers associated with interviews, one such being interview bias, where the participants' answers are influenced by the interviewer's presence. It is also important to remember that the participants may re-craft their stories in order to cast themselves in a good light or that they may not truly remember the incident or 'their reasoning may not be fully deduced in order to give a true account' (Holoborn and Langley, 2002, p. 173).   As most of the participants were aware that I was a member of the college staff, they preferred not to mention the names of any lecturers they dealt with. Some pointedly told me that I did not need to know the names, others just passed over it without further reference. This guarded response may have been out of deference to my position as a lecturer but I think they were protecting themselves whilst also giving them some control over the interview. I tried to assure the participants of my neutrality through my body language, by nodding my head as well as (hopefully) my failure to react

judgementally to any expletives or critical comments directed towards their lecturers. I remained detached when they spoke about college but I could not always remain detached when talking of other episodes in their lives. When several of the older mature participants related 'horror stories' of the time spent in primary school, I found it a little hard not to respond with a sympathetic nod or comment.

When I felt that it warranted it I gave the participants snippets of my background, telling them for instance that I had also been a mature student at one stage. Knowing that I could identify with them to a certain extent made them a little more loquacious. I found that some participants were intrigued by my English accent and wanted to know a little about my own learning career and specifically what had brought me to Ireland and my current research. I tried to gauge the amount of information that I gave out about myself partly because I did not want the interviews to run over time but mainly because I did not want to prejudice any of their answers. I felt that too much information might end up leading the participants or cause them to mould their answers to fit in with the study.

Fontana and Frey (2000) feel that it is important not to get too close to the people who are taking part in the research as the researcher may not be able to maintain his/her distance or objectivity. Patton (2002) describes the state that the researcher should reach as 'empathic neutrality' (p. 50) which means finding 'a middle ground between becoming too involved, which can cloud judgement, and remaining too distant, which can reduce understanding' (Patton, 2002, p. 50). 'The trick is to ... provide an atmosphere conducive to open and undistorted communication between the interviewer and respondent' (Gubrium and Holstein, 1998, p. 108) in order 'that he will talk freely and fully' (Selltiz et al., 1965, p. 576). I was always conscious of my role as the interviewer and of not stamping my own personality on the interview but I think that this is impossible to avoid totally. Getting people to talk is not a one sided exercise. If I was going to get the participants to talk to me I wanted to get close enough to earn their trust and I did this through being chatty and sharing some of my own history. The trick, though, was not to get too chatty and so dominate the interview and in turn influence their answers.

The participants knew that they did not have to answer all of the questions and while ten appeared comfortable with this, four participants appeared to be concerned. While one said he would evaluate the questions before answering he actually answered them all without objection and divulged a lot of personal and at times emotional information that was not directly solicited. Telling his story was hard as was evident by the fact that he kept banging his pen on the table. Although I was concerned about the quality of the recording I did not ask him to stop as he was using this as a coping strategy. Another interviewee used a lot of expletives throughout the interview and again this was his coping strategy and so I tried not to react when they were used. The two youngest participants both had concerns. Initially one was quite guarded in his replies but whether this was because I was a lecturer or whether he was naturally reserved is difficult to say. He asked a lot of questions about my learning career and about my research but only after the interview, when the tape was turned off! The other younger mature student who was also initially quite shy did settle into the interview. I think that he saw me as a lecturer rather than as a researcher. For one participant the interview was a period of reflection. At the end of his interview Ronan, in his late thirties, expressed his thanks for being given the opportunity to tell his story and remember why he had chosen to go to HE in the first place.

I believe that I established a rapport with all of the participants and in the end all of them answered all of the questions. When there were rather long and meandering answers I tried to steer the interviewee back to the original question. Where the question was still not fully answered I used a reflective strategy whereby I asked how the experiences they were relating were connected to the original question thus linking their current thoughts to the question. This was especially true of the older participants who appeared to have more confidence in themselves and in what they had to say and answered many of the questions at length.

Analysis of the Interviews

All of the interviews were tape recorded and transcribed by a professional secretary. The benefits of this service meant that I was able to listen to the interviews again quite quickly after the actual interview had taken place and was

able to check the tapes for any mistakes or omissions against the softcopy of the transcript. Sometimes parts of the tapes were difficult to understand and then I relied on the context of the question to help to decipher the answer given. When this did not work a question mark was entered in the text to indicate that it was indecipherable. As conversations ebb and flow and do not occur in precisely worded and edited sections, it was necessary to add punctuation and impose some kind of sentence structure, especially when the ideas meandered, to make the transcripts readable. Also, as the participants were to receive a copy of their individual interviews I deemed it prudent to clean up (Denscombe, 2003) some sections of the transcripts. This was not extensive but involved ensuring that the tenses were correct as was the agreement of subject and verb so if an interviewee used 'we was' I tended to change it to 'we were.' Allowing for characterisation, when a person reads a story the rules of basic grammar are generally observed and so I felt that I would also observe them with regards to the interview transcripts as I felt that the participants might feel uncomfortable if they were quoted verbatim with regards to their grammar.

The second advantage of using secretarial services was that I was able to add in further comments and observations quite quickly after the actual interviews. In most cases the transcript was sent to me within two days of the original tape being given to the secretary. At this point the interviews were still fresh in my mind and this helped to spark further observations and comments. Confidentiality was an important factor and I discussed this with the secretary who agreed to respect the participants' confidentiality during and after transcribing the data.

According to Wiersma and Jurs (2005) 'data analysis in qualitative research is a process of categorizing, description, and synthesis [and] [d]ata reduction is necessary for the description and interpretation of the phenomenon under study' (p. 207). My approach to the data analysis using a narrative approach meant that I would listen to the interviews tapes and read the interview transcriptions with a view to identifying a number of themes.   To do this I printed off the interview transcripts but ensured that they only took up half of the width of the page leaving the other half blank. I then reread them highlighting any areas of particular note as

well as making notes and listing key words and phrases on the blank side of the page. Denscombe (2003) has suggested using numbers to code the content but I decided upon using the keywords themselves to start off with. As learning careers was my theoretical framework I was looking for words and phrases that connected the participants with themes relevant to learning careers. Once this had been done I went through the highlighted sections and the hand written notes and made a list of the areas that were common to all of the interviews. This process was repeated a number of times until no new areas were highlighted and no new words were on the list. Table 15 lists the main themes that emerged from the narratives. The resulting list of areas is the one that I expand upon in the analysis section.

Table 15 - Data Analysis Themes

	Themes	Details
1	Justification	Why go back?
2	Choice	Going back: easy/hard – long/short decision; HEI; course; getting in: hard/easy
3	Support	(not) important; family, friends; students (type?); college
4	School	Liked/disliked; influences; regrets
5	HE life	Attitudes to/from: lecturers, students, classes, content; expectations
6	Future	Better job; don't know; something different

Currently there are a number of computer data analysis applications that are available to the researcher. Creswell (2007) says that a computer application allows the user to go through the data line by line. I felt though that this was equally achievable with a highlighter pen and a hardcopy of the transcript. As there were only fourteen interviews I chose the latter approach as I wanted to immerse myself in the data through a close and careful reading of the text.   I felt that the amount of data was such that it was an achievable task and I much preferred to get to know the data rather than spending precious time mastering a new software application.

Creswell (2007) notes that one of the challenges associated with narrative research is the researcher's reflexivity.   He believes that the political and personal background of the researcher can shape the way in which the participant's account is restoried. This point is also taken up by Denscombe (2003) who feels that when the researcher is analysing the collected data s/he 'should be aware of the role of the "self" in the interview process' (p. 188). The researcher inevitably uses some amount of judgement and interpretive skills throughout the whole process of

interviewing: in the conduct of the interview itself, in the transformation of the discussion into transcript and in the analysis of the data. This is why 'it is good research practice to acknowledge the impact of the researcher's own identity and values in the analysis of interview data' (Denscombe, 2003, p. 188). I tried to factor in, to be aware of my positionality through reflexive practice immediately after the interviews and when rereading the transcripts and listening to the tapes.

These narratives are intensely personal and as such the research had to be 'carried out in ways that [were] sensitive to the nature of human and cultural social contexts, and ... guided by the ethic to remain ... true to the phenomenon under study' (Altheide and Johnson, 1994, p. 488). When analysing the interviews I was aware of staying true to the participants' stories but also aware of my own identity and positionality vis-à-vis the participants – the fact that I had been a mature student, that I had studied in an IoT, my experiences and expectations when in education and the story that I was trying to tell on the participants' behalf. I also was aware that my positionality included the fact that I was a woman interviewing men and that 'men and women tell different stories, which not only reflect differences in their life experiences but also different understandings of the self' (Britton and Baxter, 1999, p. 192).

A Female Researcher Working with Male Participants

Gender can be one part of a person's identity that can affect the research process. People 'will likely respond [to the researcher] as a 'gendered' individual and, without even realizing it, [the researcher] will most likely respond as a 'gendered' self [so the] rapport and trust [that's built up], the slant on the stories … and the memories … extract[ed] can be very dependent on gender' (O'Leary, 2004, p. 44). This view is espoused by Bailey (1994) who believes that men respond more honestly to female interviewers than to male interviewers. Arendell (1997) found that men were more macho when interviewed by male researchers but more likely to distance themselves from sexist attitudes when interviewed by female interviewers.

The interview process, then, can be complicated by gender (Gurney, 1985; Pini, 2005; Fontanna and Frey, 2000; Burke, 2012) and understanding that 'Gender is performative, gender is always doing' (Denzin, 2000, p. 903) can help the researcher to understand not only the position of the researched but also the position of the researcher and interviewer.   It is important to understand that the relationship between the participant and the researcher can be complicated and Cohen et al. (2007) note that in some case men 'may feel uncomfortable being interviewed by a female' (p. 131).   However, conversely, female researchers may have to cope with overt and covert sexism' (Letherby, 2003, p. 137).   It has been argued that young female researchers may be able to use their gender as a key through which they can gain access to the participants (Gurney, 1985; Lee, 1997) but in the main sexism makes the interview process harder.

The question of power and who is 'in charge' during an interview is not always straightforward.   Although 'an interviewer can make a participant vulnerable because the researcher assumes an authoritative position (Gailey and Prohaska, 2011, p. 366), male gender power can reverse the situation and can result in a power play during an interview. As Burke (2012) points out:

> the researcher does not always 'hold' the powerful position in
> the research, but power is negotiated over, for example what is
> said and not said, who 'leads' the interview and then of course
> finally who analyses and writes up the research (p. 89).

The power that is held in the interview and the stories that participants relate during an interview can be reliant on who is conducting the interview and who is being interviewed and the gender of both. The stories that are told and the ones we tell and fashion are our interpretations of life events – actualities and constructions - as we know them (Wellington et al., 2005).   While interview participants often construct their stories for their audiences, gender has 'profound implications both for what is disclosed and withheld' (Lee, 1997, p. 554) as in the cases of the study's participants.   The question of gender often means that interviewees give different answers to male and female researchers (Herod, 1993, p. 308) as they 'paint themselves in different ways to male and female researchers,

particularly when talking about potentially sensitive issues such as gender' (Sallee and Harris, 2011, p. 411). This can manifest itself in the way in which the interview runs. The male interviewee may, for example, attempt to control the interview in the way in which he behaves (Gurney, 1985; Lee, 1997; Pini, 2005). This behaviour may be the adoption of a paternalistic stance (Herod, 1993), relating sexist views (Lee, 1997) or overt sexual hustling, an approach, though, that is 'more likely to occur when the female is perceived as single or unattached' (Gurney, 1985, p. 47) and is young (Gurney, 1985; Gailey and Prohaska, 2011). This taking control of an interview, this performance of masculinity (Pini, 2005), may also involve being hostile to the subject under discussion, making jokes that have a double entendre and directing the conversation and the flow of the questions being answered (Gurney, 1985; Arendell, 1997; Pini, 2005).

As explained above one participant wanted the final say on what he would and would not answer and demanded the right to view all of the notes that I took during his interview. In this case, as with the others, I did feel that I had to negotiate my position with the participants. If I wanted answers then I had to be prepared to share my notes or in the case of the more confident participants, sit and listen as they answered my questions at length and often in a forthright way or try and draw out those who opted for short sharp replies.

This 'taking charge' persona was evident in several of the participants who took part in my study. The men's attitudes were in some cases very masculine in that they wanted to direct the conversation by elaborating at length on topics that were tangential to the topics in my questions. It could be said that one participant was exerting his position of power with his constant use of expletives (student versus lecturer where such language would not be tolerated in the classroom) and by continually reminding me that I did not need to know the names of lecturers he was criticizing. Another assumed power through assuring me that he would vet all of the questions carefully before deciding if he would answer them. This power play, 'in charge' attitude, was also present when I discussed confidentiality. Arendell (1997) found that when discussing confidentiality most of the men in her study did not consider it an issue. Their attitude was summed up by one participant who

asked 'Who needs confidentiality? (Arendell, 1997, p. 343).   Several of the participants in my study, some of the more assertive participants, exhibited this attitude. They felt that interview confidentiality was not an issue and assured me that I could openly use their names and other personal details that they had supplied.

Protecting the identity of those who took part and ensuring their 'right to privacy' meant that their names were never used whilst taping the interviews or in any of the transcripts.   Pseudonyms were used so that they could not be identified. Initially I chose short names, like Sam and Tom for the pseudonyms but they did not reflect the fact that I was interviewing Irish students in an Irish context. With this in mind I chose Irish names to reflect, for me, the personalities of the participants and the fact that they were all Irish men. When discussing research confidentiality Sikes (2010) highlights the possible dangers of using pseudonyms as she believes that they 'can only really work in the wider world where readers don't personally know, know of, the people concerned' (p. 16).

When this question of confidentiality was discussed and several said that they did not mind if their real names were used I assured them that pseudonyms would be used at all times. As far as possible the location and identities of the participants involved in the research were disguised to ensure their confidentiality.   Also a further link with the participants has been broken as they have now all graduated from the HEI.

Confidentiality, along with 'establishing trust and familiarity, showing genuine interest … and not being judgemental' (Glassner and Loughlin, 1987, p. 35), is an important aspect of the interview process.   All of these factors play their part in establishing rapport and help in making the interviewee comfortable and helping to ensure a smooth interview. It is important, though, that the interviewer is also comfortable during the interview and while 'all interviewers should be able to balance their own comfort with that of the interviewee' (Lee, 1997, p. 559) some female researchers may find that they have to sacrifice this comfort. As Gurney (1985) notes some 'female researchers may be forced to tolerate, or at least not

openly object to, sexist remarks and behaviour in order to maintain rapport (p. 43). To avoid this 'interviewer vulnerability' (Lee, 1997, p. 563) the interviewer should, counsels Gurney (1985), 'try to project a professional image' (Gurney, 1985, p. 49). It is argued that this image and what can be termed as a subservient role to male domination (Gurney, 1985) is achieved not just by sitting through sexist remarks but through the clothes and makeup that an interviewer chooses to wear (Gurney, 1985; Lee, 1997; Pini, 2005; Gailey and Prohaska, 2011). It can be argued that this approach to interviewing is cognizant of the risk factors that can be attached to a lone female interviewing men but Gailey and Prohaska (2011) believe that such actions enable a female researcher to have 'the confidence to be assertive and deflect sexual innuendos whilst maintaining poise' (p. 370). It is possible that my lecturer status and my age as a mature professional also helped to ensure a more equal approach during the interview.

Only two of the participants were older than me and, apart from Séamus, who was a year younger than me, I was more than ten years older than the remaining eleven participants. As I was older than the majority of the participants, I believe that my age rendered my female gender less visible. Only one participant made a joke that came close to being a double entendre. As he was leaving at the end of the interview Séamus made a joke that I did not catch at the time. I was aware though, because of the way he laughed, that it was rather risqué and being surprised that he said it. He obviously felt that too as he rushed from the room as he delivered the punch line and before I could really 'get the joke' or make any comment.

My position as a lecturer interviewing students in the IoT was more of a concern than my gender. As I chose to dress casually, which is the norm for the department in which I work in Declan IoT, I was in keeping with my normal work practices and so not acknowledging my gender rather my position as lecturer. Despite the fact that gender was not an issue for me I was aware that safety was an important part of the interview process, especially when males and females are involved. This meant that, without compromising the identity of the participant, I left word about where I was going and for how therefore subconsciously acknowledging the

difficulties that may arise as a result of interviewing men (Lee, 1997; Arendell, 1997).

This element of trust, which is evident when conducting interviews, extends to what the participants actually recount. While it would be naïve to believe that the narratives that are recounted are the whole truth I believe that the participants in the study were very honest in their responses as they related many personal stories some of which were very difficult. Only one participant wanted some of the most difficult and highly personal aspects of his story withheld in the write up of the study. This is an example of the fact that stories are constructions and in this instance while he was not shaping his story for me (as I had already heard the 'true' version) he was shaping his story for the others that he thought might read his comments. But whose story is heard when the interviews are over and the study has been completed – the participants' stories or my interpretation of them?

Ethical Issues in Re-presenting Men's Accounts

Various factors have to be considered when conducting and writing up a research study. These factors include:

- 'The conduct of (all stages and aspects of) the research
- The behaviour of the researchers
- … 'acceptable' ways of doing things
- Broad issues of 'voice', values and validity' (Goodson and Sikes, 2001, p. 90).

Validity has been an important aspect of qualitative research for a number of years (Altheide and Johnson, 1994) yet it is a questioned concept (Pyett, 2003; Creswell, 2007). Graziano and Raulin (2010) associate validity with methodology where the 'most basic [meaning] refers to methodological soundness or appropriateness' (p. 162), a view point held by O'Leary (2004). For her 'validity … considers whether methods, approaches and techniques actually relate to what is being explored' (p. 58). For Creswell (2007), validity is 'an attempt to assess the "accuracy" of the findings' (p.206/207). He, like Denzin (1989) and Cohen et al. (2007), believes that researchers should use guidelines to achieve this. (See Creswell, 2007 for a full list of guidelines). Using guidelines is applicable to narrative research and in that

context the completion of 'a "good" study [means that the researcher] report[s] themes that build from the story to tell a broader analysis' (Creswell, 2007, p. 214).

Validity can be seen as truthfulness where 'an account is valid or true if it represents accurately those features of the phenomenon that it is intended to describe [or] explain' (Hammersley, 1992, p. 69). Like Hammersley (1992), O'Leary (2004) posits that validity goes hand in hand with the research data. For her 'validity is premised on the assumption that what is being studied can be ... captured and seeks to confirm the truth and accuracy of this ... captured "data"' (p. 61). To do this it is necessary for the 'researcher to justify every move – demonstrating ... how the overall strategy is appropriate to the social setting and the researcher-subject relationship within it' (Holliday, 2002, p. 8/9). Producing a detailed report that describes the steps or *methodology* used in the research study and results in 'the production of a convincing narrative report of the research [can serve] as de facto validation' (Angrosino and Mays de Pérez, 2003, p. 109). As Holliday (2002) succinctly puts it 'qualitative research has to show its workings' (p. 8).

There are several areas that affect the validity of narrative research (Polkinghorne, 2007) including how much information an interviewee actually reveals in a study and the actual narrative that is produced at the end.

The Voices of the Researcher and the Researched

Although the researcher needs to form the links between the researcher and the voices of the researched (Burke, 2012), a key issue for a researcher is 'locating [onself] within the research and staying true to [one's] own voice and understandings (Wellington et al., 2005, p. 115). The researcher often faces 'a struggle to figure out how to present the author's self while simultaneously writing the respondents' accounts and representing their selves' (Lincoln and Guba (2000) citing Hertz, 1997, p. 183). Adopting a reflexive stance allows the researcher to reflect on the questions asked during the interview and the construction of the research. This enables the researcher to consider his/her stance and personal perspectives and the way these impact the research thus identifying his/her 'sense

of self as relational, to acknowledge and pay close attention to complex power relations and to consider identity formations across intersecting and embodied sets of difference' (Burke, 2012, p. 77).   Interviews 'are affected by the identities that we bring to the interview context' (Lundgren, 2012, p. 669) and as Arendell (1997) notes the identity of the researcher and the researched in the research process is accompanied by their own personal baggage. 'This *baggage* - personal history and identity, themselves interrelated – inevitably influences the interactional processes and the ultimate research outcome' (Arendell, 1997, p. 343). Considering my 'sense of self' and my own 'baggage' occurred when I considered my positionality. This reflexive approach helped me to place myself within the research study as well as to establish an interviewer/interviewee relationship that would yield rich data.

The participants' 'experiences, perceptions, behaviours, attitudes … are the focus of the study' (Goodson and Sikes, 2010, p. 90) and it is their voices that recount these experiences and perceptions and which construct the stories they tell. Understanding that the stories are constructs and that the amount of information that an interviewee recounts during his/her interview, and the actual narrative that is produced at the end of the study, has a bearing on the validity of the study. Often people edit their stories because they do not want to project a negative self-image, a point made by Sikes (2010) who notes that participants do this in order 'to create a particular impression' (p. 18).   This impression though has to be deciphered as 'the validity issues about the assembled texts is about how well they are understood to express the actual meaning experienced by the participants' (Polkinghorne, 2007, p. 480).

It is a very human trait when telling a story to 'restory' (Creswell, 2007, p. 56). This restorying means that the participants 'rearrange, redescribe, invent, omit, and revise' (Ellis and Bochner, 2000, p. 745) their stories. Polkinghorne (2007) notes 'participants' stories may leave out or obscure aspects of the meaning of experiences they are telling about' (p. 480) depending upon the audience to whom they are speaking (Altheide and Johnson, 1994). Alongside this it is important to understand that with the recounting of the stories two roles are being played out. Whilst the storyteller is fashioning an identity (Rosenwald and Ochberg, 1992) the

researcher is 'like a reader, a listener, a scribe, that is, an audience for a performance which may allow the narrator to make a new or deeper sense of his or her own trajectory' (Huberman, 1995, p. 129). Whilst the storyteller is making sense of his or her 'own trajectory', the researcher has to remain aware that the storyteller is often creating a character that 'will satisfy the interviewer' (Huberman, 1995, p. 138). Having said that, however, the storyteller is providing the researcher with clue(s) to the person behind the story and it is this person that the researcher is often trying to see and understand.

What is included in the participants' storied versions is determined by 'human agency and imagination' (Riessman, 1993, p. 2) as well as the audience to whom they were told and the context in which they were told. Dennet (1991) thinks that the stories we tell are in fact an action of 'self-protection' and that this act does not involve 'spinning webs or building dams, but telling stories, and more particularly concocting and controlling the story we tell others - and ourselves about who we are' (p. 481).   The fact that stories are a construction, guided by agency and imagination has implications for the researcher.

As a researcher I was conscious that it is very important to remember *to hear* what is actually being said by the participants as 'we often bring our pre-conceived notions and understandings [to the research] and want our data to fit what we already know and want to believe' (Hendry, 2007, p. 493). Doing this obscures the data and we are in danger of manipulating the voice of the interviewee so that he is not really being heard. One of the important aspects of research is to stay 'true to our informants' stories and not impos[e] our narratives on them' (Ibid.).

When undertaking narrative research, the researcher is trying to discover some new knowledge and understanding of a situation (Hendry, 2007 p. 49).   In attempting to do this it is important that the knowledge is shaped in a way that the interviewee intended and not to fit with the researcher's own political or academic aims. Ethics requires that the voice of the interviewee should not be destroyed through the imposition of the voice of the researcher. As researchers, as

interviewers we have 'narrative privilege' (Adams, 2008 p. 181) and this privilege should motivate 'us to discern who we might hurt or silence in telling stories' (Ibid.).

The voices of the men are privileged. The interviews allow the men's narratives to be heard and for their voices to be presented through their stories. The stories present the men's perspectives and their understanding of the events that make up their narratives which explain their learning careers. These understandings take precedence over the researcher's critical gaze. Research has to be honest to and generous to the participants' experiences whilst also wanting to, as a researcher, analyse the narratives critically and robustly. In an interview:

> the researcher is reliant on the interviewee to provide honest and open answers, yet … people want to be liked, want to maintain a sense of dignity, and want to protect some level of privacy. If respondents feel judged, ashamed, or offended, or, on the other hand, deferential or awestruck, gathering credible data is far from assured (O'Leary, 2004, p. 162).

The men had a position to maintain – the position of the male dominant voice. While it can be said that they wanted to present themselves in favourable light they were more than willing to explain in detail, the various aspects of their lives including the difficult ones. Knowing that these stories are constructions and are 'complex, complicated, and sometimes convoluted' (O'Leary, 2004, p.162) and that respondents intentionally filter (O'Leary, 2004) the information enables the interviewer to have more of an understanding of the interviewee's voice.

While it is impossible to state categorically that the participants constructed their narratives to suit the interview they were given the opportunity to reflect on what they had said to me. This was achieved through a form of 'member checking' or 'respondent validation' (Sikes, 2010). While this enabled the participants to read my thoughts and observations that arose out of their individual interviews they were not asked to approve the final narratives as they appear in the thesis.

Respondent Checking and Validation

Sikes (2006) believes that when writing up the stories we need to be honest in the way we write and this can be achieved through employing a form of 'respondent validation (or 'member check')' (p. 16). This process involves showing 'our writing

to the people we are writing about, even though their identities are likely to be disguised [as it] could be a useful and good method of checking that they are happy with our depiction' (Sikes, 2006, p. 114). Respondent validation is a useful tool in ensuring the participants' voices are still being heard and that the voice of the researcher is not over shadowing the researched.

Polkinghorne (2007) also advocates the use of a similar process, a process that he calls the 'iterative process of returning to participants' (p. 482). He believes that such a process should be used in order to clarify the researcher's interpretation and understanding of what has been said. Following Sikes (2010), he believes that the participants should be given the chance to read the transcript not only to ensure 'the description captures the essential features of the meaning they felt [but] if it does not, [allowing them the opportunity to] suggest alterations or expansions of the text to more closely display *their* meaning' (Polkinghorne, 2007, p. 482, emphasis added).

I used a form of 'member checking' (Creswell, 2007) with my participants and while I did not send each one a copy of the interview transcript I sent them a copy of my comments and observations surrounding the interview. In return I asked for their opinions on the accuracy of my observations and comments. While participants are happy to take part in the interview itself it does not always follow that they want to continue the relationship by reviewing the researcher's comments and observations and the researcher may find that 'having passed transcripts … on … for … comments, they hear no more' (Goodson and Sikes, 2001, p. 36). This was true in my case. While nine of the participants responded with detailed comments on my observations, I heard no more from five of the participants.

I had assured the participants that if they wanted sections of the interview to be omitted then I was happy to do so. As stated above, only one of the nine participants who responded to my observations asked that a section of his data be removed. The section referred to a very sensitive time in his life which he had talked about in detail during the interview. I did as he asked and removed the

section and the removal of this section did not change the essence of his story or upset the rhythm of his narrative.

Goodson and Sikes (2001) warn about the detrimental effects that interviews may have on the interviewees but they can have beneficial effects also. As explained before, one participant found the experience very positive. He had become a little disenchanted with college and the interview reminded him of why he had decided to become a mature student in the first place and as a result was pleased that he had taken part in the study.

The interviews two-way process between interviewer and interviewee allows for two voices. While a lot of attention is rightly placed on the voice of the interviewee, the 'voice' of the interviewer is also important in this process.

Deciding How to Tell the Stories

The learning career and the relationship a person has to education are predicated on past and present experiences. People's experiences, be they familial, environment, learning and/or work experiences 'interact over time to produce different decisions' (Krumboltz et al.,1976) and a person's learning career is shaped by and shapes attitudes and relationships to education and learning as a result of these experiences and decisions. The decisions that people make based on experiences can see people continuing with or moving away from formal education at eighteen but also see them re-engage with formal education at different stages later in their lives.

The focus of the study was on this re-engagement with formal education – why the participants chose to become male mature students, their reasons for choosing to be mature students in HE and their experiences once there. After completing secondary school the participants' lives had taken different directions – HE, work and/or redundancy in Ireland or work abroad. Various factors affected the participants' relationship to education and influenced their relationship to HE and their decisions to reengage with their learning careers in HE were influenced by these various factors. The decision to divide the data into two sections was a result of the fact that the participants' decision to reengage with their learning careers

was connected to their previous experiences both at school and at work. Understanding how they came to be in HE as mature students and the experiences they had whilst there came directly from their earlier experiences. The first half of the data analysis chapter therefore gives the participants space to tell their own individual stories of how and why they chose to become male mature students in the IoT. These narratives shed light on their previous learning careers and factors such as the 'School effect' or 'institutional habitus' (Reay, et al., 2001, p. 1), i.e. the influence of the school one attends as well as the participants learning experiences whilst in school and family support and expectations all of which affect the decisions that the participants made concerning their learning careers.

This first section of the chapter has four themes which resulted from the participants' stories and the participants fell into four groups as a result of the various factors that emerged from the data that was collected during their interviews.

Group A: Academic Achievers: constructing masculinity and identity through engagement with education, saw two of the participants fully engage with their education. Despite the positive identities that they constructed around education in secondary school they did not have successful interactions with HE when they graduated from school.

Group B: Construction of Masculinities Through Conflict with Education. The three participants in this group chose to rebel against school and its authoritarian regimes. The 'protest masculinity' (Connell, 2000, p. 162) that they constructed was in response to the fact that they did not see themselves as academic or were not allowed to prove themselves on the sports field.

Group C: Discouraged Learners. When in school, the six participants in this group felt that there was a lack of support and encouragement from their school teachers. This lack of encouragement left them unsure of their academic abilities and so they rejected HE when they first left school as they felt that they were not capable of achieving at such a level.

Group D: Maintaining a Masculine Identity in the Face of Retirement. The participants who made up this group were of retirement age. As 'Retirement represents a key life transition in the lives of older men … retirement can be threatening for many men in gendered terms. They can be anxious about losing the work activities and social relations that have primarily defined their masculine identities' (Jackson, 2007, p. 538). This was the case for the participants in this group and as such they were avoiding retirement.

Researchers have found that:

> engagement with formal learning is often triggered by a significant change in a person's life and in the situation in which they find themselves. This can happen when changes to their position, disposition or external conditions, modify their horizons for learning' (Hodkinson, et al., 2006, p. 31).

All four themes illustrate that the participants in the study were in HE because they had reacted to external triggers. Moving from an environment that they knew to one they did not was not easy.   The 'transition to [HE] … represents a period of disequilibrium as students move … into an unfamiliar [environment and] … For many students, their identity as a [HE] student, is imbued with expectations about academic performance and academic competence' (Jackson, 2003, p.341/342). The second half of the chapter looks at the outcome of the triggers that brought the participants into HE, how they coped with the unfamiliar aspect of being a male mature and their expectations and the realities of life in HE and their resulting academic performance.

There is 'considerable ambiguity regarding the kind of 'male role model' [men] feel they are expected to portray' (Sargent, 2000, p.410) and re-engaging with education does not always sit with what is considered to be masculine as 'to be a man – to be masculine – [is] to participate in the world of 'work' and to be economically independent' (Alloway and Gilbert, 2001, p. 104). While there is a belief that re-engaging with education is not something that real men do as 'Real men do not study: real men work [as it] is not really a man's place to study' (Alloway and Gilbert (2004, p. 104) for the participants in the study 'Accessing HE

[was] seen as crucial to achieving … financial security [- being a breadwinner] and career success' (Burke, 2007b, p.1).

Choosing the Quotes

Geertz (1995) asks 'When we speak of others in our voice do we not displace and appropriate theirs?' (p. 107). The point of the research is to allow the various voices connected to the study to be heard whilst recognising that the acquired knowledge and collected data is filtered through (various perspectives) including the researcher's age, status, race and ethnicity as well as through his/her sex and gender (Fontana and Frey, 2000). The results of my research were framed by the my subjective perspective which is fashioned by my age and gender and social status but also by the fact that I wanted to report the story in a way that, to my mind, allowed the men's stories to be heard within the frame of a masculine learning career. My concern was that data that was used in the transcript conveyed the meaning of the oral presentation/stories that were relayed in the interview (Creswell, 2007). My interpretation of their stories was predicated on the fact that it is a feminine perspective of male attitudes as reflected in their stories as told to me, a female interviewer. The format of the individual stories, in the first half of the data analysis chapter, and the group story explaining life in HE, in the second half of the chapter, was one that was designed to tell a chronological story. Various aspects affect data collection from, for example, the use of informal unstructured interviews, semi form semi structured interviews or formal structured interviews meaning that 'the type of interview selected, the techniques used, and the ways of recoding information all come to bear on the results of the study' (Fontanna and Frey, 2000, p. 660).

Recognising that 'The researcher has a great deal of influence on what part of the data will be reported and how it will be reported' (Fontanna and Frey, 2000, p. 660) is as important as the way the study is framed.   My theoretical/conceptual framework – understanding the participant's learning careers - framed the stories the participants' related during the interviews and also dictated the data that was used in the study. The aim was to develop a narrative, a story of the participants'

educational lives (Creswell, 2007) and their attitudes to education.   As Goodley et al. (2004) note:

> It is plausible that researchers' views and theoretical frameworks may overwhelm the voices and perspectives of the researched. It is also possible that data analysis itself could be disempowering. As researchers, we can dissect, cut up, distil meaning and portray readings in particular ways.

The way in which this is done must be sympathetic to and reflect the stories that the participants were telling and the points they were trying to make. Striving for this ensures that as researchers we are not 'taking voice, agency and ownership … away' (Goodley et al., 2004, p. 155) from the participants.

An interview is not 'a mutual exchange of views' (Czarniawska, 2004, p. 47) but rather it is an attempt to explain and answer what the interviewer really wants to get from a research study*.* The interview data are the perceptions and interpretations of the world and the interviewer's interpretations of that (Czarniawska, 2004) and as such 'An interview is not a window on social reality but … is a part, a sample of that reality' (Ibid., p, 49). The researcher is constructing a story based on the accounts produced by the participants. This story though must be based on facts yet they are facts as told by the participants in their interviews. The aim is to give the participants their own voice and the quotes taken from the data aim to do just that but 'it is unrealistic to pretend that the data on transcripts are anything but *already interpreted* data' (Cohen et al. p. 367).

Understanding that data does not rest on the transcripts alone recognises the importance of non-verbal communication. Understanding 'the tone of voice of the speaker … the inflection in the voice … emphases placed by the speaker … [and] the mood of the speaker' (Cohen et al., p. 368) all help the researcher is choosing the quotes that reflect the mood and the (argumentative) point that the participants were making. The choice of quotes also has to reflect the aim of the research which is to educe a sense of the whole through eliciting the participants' meaning and then writing an intelligible account of why something is or is not done.

The aim of the interviews and the subsequent thesis was 'to provide a stage for the [participants'] *voices* … [for] providing testimony' (Barbour and Schostak, 2005, p. 42/43) of the factors that affected their engagement with education and with their learning careers. The quotations that are used should shed light on the study but need to be balanced. The ones used, therefore, were taken in context meaning that they had to be 'particularly clear, useful, and the 'best' of the data (the 'gems')' (Cohen et al., p. 373).

My aim was to write a 'thick description' (Creswell, 2007, p. 214) of the participant's educational stories and the data 'gems' were chosen to provide the thick description of their narratives. The quotes from the participants' stories were chosen to show the development of the participants' learning careers; the sequence of events that connected the various phases and aspects of these careers and which brought them into HE as mature students and which made up the participants' stories thus telling a persuasive story about the pathway to and through HE in a literary way (Creswell, 2007).

Summary

To understand the reasons why men return to education and the experiences they go through once there it is necessary to hear their stories. While there is some debate as to the distinction between narratives and stories, researchers such as Craib (2000) and Hendry (2007) believe the two terms are synonymous. This research sees narratives as stories where the collected data using analysis of narratives (Polkinghorne, 2007) were examined for various themes running through the history of the participants' learning careers. The stories were organised into chronologically told narratives allowing for a narrative analysis to consider the similarities and differences in the participants' attitudes and experiences of HE.

A narrative approach gave the participants the opportunity to tell their individual stories and allowed for the collection of in depth insights into male mature students and their association with HE. Convenience sampling was used to establish a potential pool of twenty-five participants which was eventually reduced to fourteen. Eleven prospective participants decided not to take part in the study and,

as had been agreed beforehand, did not have to give any reasons for doing so. The semi-structured interviews, comprising fourteen questions, imposed some structure whilst allowing some latitude on the interviews and were conducted in the IoT at a time suitable to both interviewee and interviewer. Before carrying out the interviews I explained my positionality as it was important that the participants knew I was lecturer in the IoT and had been a mature student before taking up my post as a lecturer.

For the participants 'education was unfinished business' (Munns and McFadden, 2000, p. 60). For some, it was a means to an end, a chance to reskill and/or upskill providing an opportunity to achieve aspirations of better careers and financial rewards (Burke, 2007b). For other participants in this study, education was unfinished business in ways that went beyond better careers and financial rewards as becomes clear in the next chapter.

Being able to understand this means recognising that people are a 'complex amalgam of their past and present but an amalgam that is always in the process of completion and therefore open to change' (Tett, 2000, p. 185). Trying to understand the events and episodes that made up and dictated the direction of the men's learning careers involved looking at the factors that caused them to make the decisions that they did. The various factors that occurred before HE – school, familial attitudes and relationships to education, work - all affected the participants' learning careers and shaped the trajectories of each individual learning career.

Explaining their trajectories and their influencing factors also meant recognising that the research process focused on a process of change for both the researcher and the researched especially when different genders are involved. This chapter has discussed how gender relations are an important issue when conducting interviews and it is 'important … to keep in mind about the ways the men might have fashioned their accounts for and with female interviewers' (Burke, 2007a, p. 413). It is important therefore to keep in mind when conducting interviews and analysing the responses that 'gender filters knowledge' (Denzin, 1989, p. 116 – cited by Fontanna and Frey, 2000). It is important to recognise that 'gender is …

one core factor in understanding lived experience and the stories that people tell about themselves in order to make sense of the past in the light of their changing experiences' (Tett, 2000, p. 185) and that the gender of the researched and the researcher has implications for the way in which the study's narrative is written and explained.

Using narratives as the research framework and framing the questions in language that was approachable was deemed the best way to gain an understanding of the factors that made up and affected the participants' learning careers. This chapter prepares the way for Chapter 7, the data analysis chapter, which looks at the participants' narratives in detail.

Chapter 7 - Data Analysis

Introduction

This chapter, which presents data on the learning careers of the fourteen participants in this study, is divided into two sections. The first section traces the evolution of the men's learning careers from childhood through to joining a HE course at Declan IoT. Tracing the evolution of their learning careers provides understanding of the participants' reasons for becoming mature students and engaging with their learning careers in HE. Their course through HE was predicated on the various events and experiences they encountered inside and outside of school including family attitudes and support, the school ethos and encouragement or lack of and their career decisions and experiences. The participants' narratives are organised into four different groups.   Group A: *Academic Achievers: constructing masculinity and identity through engagement with education,* Group B: *Construction of Masculinities Through Conflict with Education,* Group C: *Discouraged Learners and* Group D: *Maintaining a Masculine Identity in the Face of Retirement* look at gender and masculinity, at school experiences and the decisions that impacted HE attendance and using HE as a stepping stone to a new future.

The two narratives that make up the first group come under the heading of *Academic Achievers: constructing masculinity and identity through engagement with education.* The successes that they achieved whilst in school meant that they had a successful relationship to education (Connell, 1989) but this did not translate into a successful engagement with HE when they left school at eighteen.

Construction of Masculinities Through Conflict with Education groups the narratives of the three participants who rebelled against school and distanced themselves from education. School did not offer them the opportunities that they wanted and the participants in this group used the rebellion against school as a way to construct their identities and to be a man.

The next six narratives are *Discouraged Learners.* The participants in this group all felt distanced from school as they did not see themselves as academic or sporty. This meant that they turned away from school and chose not to focus on HE in a bid to construct a viable masculinity. For the first three in the group, Fionn, Cormac and Eamon, school was particularly difficult as their parents were all going through marriage breakups and this affected how the boys saw themselves and their levels of self-confidence. This in turn affected how they interacted with school and their levels of achievement. All of the participants in this group felt distanced from school as they believed there was a two-tier system in operation. Pupils who were sporty and/or academic achievers and who conformed to what it meant to be masculine were encouraged whilst those who did not fit into either of these categories were, these participants believed, allowed to drift through school.

The final three narratives deal with the subject of retirement under the heading of *Maintaining a Masculine Identity in the Face of Retirement.* The participants in this group wanted to abide by the codes that dictate manhood (Gilmore, 1990) namely being real men by going to work. They hoped that HE would offer them the opportunity to continue their working lives thus continuing their traditional roles of being the 'good provider' (Ferguson, 2001, p. 119) and doing what men do - working in 'proper jobs' - jobs with other men (Ball et al., 2000).

This section of the chapter is followed by a section which moves away from individual narratives. The participants' experiences are combined and presented thematically in order to consider what it is like to return to and experience education as a male mature student in HE. Returning to education can be daunting for mature students as they hope to be able 'fit in' (Reay, 1998). This fitting in is not only centred on their interactions with their lecturers and peers but on their expectations that they have of HE (Bean Ui Chasaide, 1997) which are predicated on their previous lives and experiences.

Section 1 – Participants' Narratives of Returning to Learning

The fourteen participants had various reasons for returning to HE, reasons influenced by their previous learning and employment careers and their hopes for their future and those of their families. Six of the participants were in full time employment and six were unemployed (with one facing retirement) when they applied to higher education. The remaining two participants were retired. One had retired two years before applying to HE while the other moved straight onto HE from work. Eight of the participants chose to follow courses that built on their previous work experiences thus building on the expertise and confidence they had acquired through their careers. Two of the others chose to build on previous HE courses while the remaining four moved away from their previous life experiences and career paths in favour of new courses and new experiences.

Academic Achievers: Constructing Masculinity and Identity Through Engagement with Education

The two participants in this group, Conn and Pierce, felt at ease in school and were happy to construct their identities and masculinities against an educational background. By being able to smoothly insert themselves into the academic pathways of their respective schools (Connell, 1989), their academic achievements allowed them to leave school with good leaving certificate results.   Their travels and respective summer jobs, though, gave them a taste for an independent life where they made their own decisions with regards to the trajectories of their lives. So despite doing well in school and being comfortable in the academic field whilst there, neither went on to complete a higher education. Table 16 provides various details about the two participants in this group including their ages, employment status before going to HE as a mature student, the jobs they had and the HE courses they opted for.

Table 16 - Academic Achievement: Constructing Masculinity and Identity Through Engagement with Education

Name	Age	Employment Status	Previous Employment	HE Course
Conn	25	Employed	Assistant Bar Manager; Call Centre Manager	BEng Building Services Engineering
Pierce	25	Employed	Corporate Broker	BSc Construction Economics

Conn

At twenty-five, Conn was one of the two youngest participants in the study. His previous employment had afforded him a number of financial opportunities and whilst at work he had bought his own house in the town and lived within walking distance of Declan IoT.

Conn's parents were among the youngest of the group and unlike some of the other sets of parents did not have to pay fees to go to secondary school had completed their secondary school education. Of his parents only Conn's father had attended HE where he studied engineering and graduated with an engineering degree. His mother 'didn't really go' as she became pregnant with her first child when she was nineteen and with her second at twenty-one. Although women were beginning to move away from the traditional homemaker role in the 1970s and 1980s, Conn's mother chose to take on this traditional role and stay at home and rear her family. Education was important to Conn's parents and as they believed that their children should go to HE they encouraged them to follow in their father's footsteps. Despite the encouragement HE did not hold any interest for his sister who chose to go to work when she left school. His three brothers though did follow their father and went to HE after leaving school. HE was a means to construct their male identities. His eldest and youngest brothers completed Arts degrees, whilst his second eldest brother took time out from his studies to work in the Student Union for a year before graduating with a law degree.

When Conn was growing up he lived in a number of different places and attended a number of different schools as his father's job necessitated various moves around Ireland. Despite the moves Conn enjoyed school and tried hard. He attended both mixed and boys' only schools and by the time he sat his Leaving Certificate

examinations he was attending a boys' school.   On reflection he was happy to have been attending a boys' only school when he sat his final exams. In his mind, 'a mixed secondary school is just a distraction' and this would not have been best for him at that time as it did not fit with his view of himself or his male identity, that of being a successful student who fully engaged with school.

Conn 'enjoyed school thoroughly [as it] was interesting' so after discussion with his parents he decided to defer his Leaving Certificate examinations in favour of doing the Transition Year. Secondary schools in Ireland give students the opportunity to do an optional one year course that allows them to develop non-academic personal, social and educational skills between completing their Junior Certificate examinations and sitting their Leaving Certificate examinations. Being able to avail of these extra courses meant that he was able to stretch himself and acquire and develop new skills.   After Transition Year he began studying for his Leaving Certificate. He chose what were 'considered to be tough subjects.'   Nevertheless, he explained, 'I felt I was learning from them. They were interesting to learn so that helped.' Conn was confident about his academic abilities and this confidence enabled him to construct a positive masculinity, a masculinity that fitted in with the family ideal of what men did. This self-confidence and positive belief was further affirmed through his choice of tough subjects, subjects that were challenging and which validated his masculine identity.

School was good for Conn and while he believed that his teachers could have helped more as 'they weren't as involved with the students as they could have been', he accepted some of the responsibility for his grades. The examination period and the extra year took its toll on Conn and by the time he sat his leaving certificate examinations he believed that his immaturity meant he was neither dedicated nor motivated enough to study properly. Although he achieved a good mark in the Leaving Certificate examinations he felt that he could 'have done a lot better.'   This attitude, developed as a result of his scores and a demanding examination period, meant that when Conn finished the Leaving Certificate he did not want to continue to HE:

> I didn't want to or I didn't have the maturity at the time to dedicate myself to the course at the time.

Conn 'kind of knew at the time that [he] should go to college' but he had always harboured a desire to go travelling as he said 'I wanted to enjoy life better a bit more before I went straight into education.' Despite his wish to travel, his parents desire for him to have a higher education and their wish to see their son follow their father's example meant that 'When the CAO came around my parents really pressurised me into doing a course in college.' While he bowed to this pressure and applied to HE he spent the summer before attending HE working and travelling around Europe where he 'just got a taste for how life can be.' Conn had found the Leaving Certificate quite confining and stressful and this contrasted with the freedom and the masculine identity of an independent employed person that he had established for himself whilst working and travelling. How he saw himself no longer fitted the academic profile of the 'academic achiever' and this left him unsettled and unsure about HE.

Conn returned home in time for the first semester joined the engineering course. Although he had a 'love for engineering', inherited he believed from his father who was also an engineer, the electronic engineering degree course he chose did not reinforce that 'love.' He explained that 'It was just so small compared to what I thought it would be, electronically' and by the middle of the semester he had switched to Environmental Engineering. By this time, he had missed a lot of work and was trying to 'play catch up.' He had missed a number of 'the basics' and so only sat a few of the end of semester examinations. At this point, Conn was so discouraged about his academic abilities that he dropped out as he felt incapable of passing the course, effectively meaning that he no longer identified with the confident secondary school student. The male identity that he had constructed of the confident student, sure of his academic abilities, had been undermined.

After dropping out Conn went to work and during that time achieved a certificate in bar management after completing a two-year bar management CERT[8] course. He became an assistant bar manager, a pressurised job that entailed 'a lot of

---

[8] CERT: students taking CERT courses train for the Tourism and Hospitality Industry

responsibility.' He stayed in the job for a year before moving on to work in a call centre.   After working there for eighteen months, he took stock of his life. Conn was quite self-aware about his current job saying that 'To be honest it was considered a dead-end job.' He knew that if he was to make anything of his life he needed to go back to HE. His original experience of HE meant that he 'got a taste for college' so whilst working in the call centre he applied to HE. Along with a better job, Conn had other material aspirations and explained that there:

> were ... things that I wanted to have before coming back to college again. I always wanted to have [a car] when I left school ... or at least to have use of a car ... So this way I have that sorted now. I have a car and a house.

Conn's idea of himself was centred on his ability to be successful and affluent. Being independent and having material possessions, all gained through work, were important to him. They helped to define who he was and for him continued the successes that he had first experienced when at school.

Conn's parents had been concerned with his choice of career when he dropped out of HE but they had 'had to grin and bear' it. He believed that they:

> had sort of given up on me because when I was working in the bar ... they saw that it wasn't a job they had imagined me doing because ... All my life I have been taking things apart and putting it back together and making things ... Engineering is really what my calling is.

While the masculine identity that he had created since dropping out of HE was not one that his parents readily identified with they had little option other than to put up with his career choices.

When he decided to apply to HE Conn knew that his brothers and his sister 'were real proud' of him, but he believed that his decision to take up his studies again made his 'parents extremely happy.' He passed his parents happiness off as simply being due to the fact that 'it's nice to see their kids set up', but he also acknowledged that his parents were 'delighted' with his decision to return to education and get a degree as they placed a great deal of store on academic achievements. Everyone rallied around and offered him 'Just general support, just

being there, verbal support' which was important to him. Changing his life course through going back to education delighted his parents and they showed this through their willingness to rally around him. They believed that going to HE was a good move for a man as for them education equated to a good job, one that was better than those which Conn had been in up to that point.

Equally important was his personal motivation and his view of himself as a successful man. He explained that 'the most important [thing] is for myself to succeed' and the realisation that he was in a job that had no promotional prospects was the trigger that brought him back to HE at twenty-five. Although he had dropped out at eighteen this experience, he believed, was not a totally negative one as he knew what he wanted to achieve and had some idea of the rigours of HE. If he had not had that experience at eighteen then he 'might be in even more depth in an actual job and may not have considered HE as an option' and, at twenty-five, would not have been able to consider becoming a mature student.

Pierce

At twenty-five, Pierce was the other youngest interviewee and one of the most confident of the group. Although originally from Dunbeg, he was renting an apartment in town as it was too far to travel back and forth to his home each day. He had left school and got himself a 'good job' as a corporate broker yet the lure of a permanent post offering high wages was not enough. He wanted a job that was not just financially rewarding but one that would hold his interest and stretch him. As a result he resigned from his secure but 'boring' job and at twenty-five decided to apply for HE.

Pierce's parents had grown up when secondary education was free and both had had a secondary education. While his mother did not have any interest in HE his father went to HE and studied engineering and became an electrical engineer. Attending HE had allowed him to construct a traditional masculine identity whereby he was able to get a good job and in turn provide for his family.

Pierce's brother 'had no interest in college whatsoever.' His brother had trained as a Garda (a police officer) but did not enjoy his career and gave it up:

> He prefers manual work. I wouldn't even see him as an engineer
> or anything like that it just doesn't suit - it's hands on or
> something like that. He's a manual worker like.

Pierce's brother chose to construct his masculinity through manual work, one that was labour intensive and which required physical prowess; a job that was typically male. This change in career suited his brother who went on to set up his own tiling business and 'he loves that.'

While the school Pierce had attended was 'an alright school it [was] not excellent', it did not hold any unpleasant memories for him.   He got on well in school and 'had no problems' because he believed school was 'as good as you make it yourself.' Although he had challenged himself through his choice of subjects, which he considered to be quite tough, and tried hard for most of the time at school he felt that he could have done better and the fact that he did not was because he 'was just lazy', a fact he attributed to his desire to be 'the same as everyone.' Despite this he recognised that 'you only you can do your best like, academically' and graduated from school with a 'good Leaving Cert.' Upon graduation he fully intended to continue his academic career in HE but during the summer Pierce began a summer job. The job was training him to be a corporate broker and while:

> [I only intended] to see how it goes. I did well, very well,
> monetary wise and stuff like that, so I just stuck it.

The masculine identity created in school of a successful student was continued in the successes he experienced in his job and by the time the offer of a place to do a degree in computing in HE came through Pierce had changed his mind. He 'turned it down' not only because he was successfully settled in his job and because he 'didn't want to move away from home' but also because none of his friends were going to HE. He felt that he 'was too young, definitely too young [for HE and] wouldn't have lasted, no way like.' While the decision may have been seen as 'foolish' at the time, in retrospect Pierce believed he made the right decision as he would have ended up in a job he disliked:

> At the time I thought the [computer] market was great and the
> market has since crashed ... I'm actually delighted now I didn't

> go because I would have been doing computer programming,
> stuck on computers. I hate them with a vengeance.

While Pierce's job was 'quite difficult to get into' he was very happy to be working in a masculine environment, in a job that 'pays extremely well; [is] a good dependable career ... [is] a job for life.' Through work Pierce was able to continue his identity as an academic achiever through studying and completing 'good exams' which he needed for promotion. Despite this he:

> did not like sitting in an office all day, every day. It doesn't suit
> me, doesn't suit my personality ... It's not very exciting ... Now to
> be honest with you it doesn't get exciting.

Pierce came to realise that, despite the monetary rewards and the job security the job was not challenging and he felt that he could achieve more. For Pierce the thrall of job security and a job for life, aspects that he first valued, were rather restrictive. He wanted to be successful and while monetary rewards were important to him, he wanted to achieve them through a challenging career. A challenging career was more in line with his view of himself and his construction of a masculine identity. His perception of masculinity was that of a successful achiever and this was not being met in his current job. He realised that despite the advantages of being a Corporate Broker, the job 'just wasn't for me' as he did not regard himself as a successful achiever. He believed that the only way that he could change this was through changing his career. The way to bring about this change and continue to be a successful man was to reskill, something he could only do through going to HE.

Pierce discussed his decision to go to HE with his girlfriend who was 'pretty supportive ... pretty good.' She had attended HE and when she graduated she got a full time job, the rewards of which meant that she was 'bringing in a thousand and stuff like' a month. While she had been 'pretty good' and supported his decision to return to education Pierce noted that 'I don't really like to call on her with problems because I always like to sort things out on my own.' Pierce only told his parents of his decision after he had made it. They told him that 'if you want to do it, it's a very good idea.' Although he had their support he pointed out he made his own decisions and that he 'didn't ask anyone's opinion, I just said, I'm doing it.' Later

when talking of his mother he initially said she 'didn't care' what he did but then said while she believed that it was 'a good idea [it was] up to [him] at the end of the day.' He explained that his mother understood his need to be in charge of his own life and so left him to 'make my own decisions [as] she wants to see me finish the course ... [was] happy to see me do it [and backed his decision] one hundred per cent, very much so.'

Construction of Masculinities Through Conflict with Education

The section looks at a group of participants who did not engage academically in education. They chose to construct their identities by rebelling against their studies, a move that meant that none of them went onto HE when they left school.

The participants in this group distanced themselves from school and education. Their 'laddish behaviour' (Jackson, 2003) saw them construct their masculinity in opposition to school. While Colm and Ronan wanted to indulge their love of sports at the expense of their academic studies, Lorcan chose to rebel against both and to confront his teachers as a result (Burke, 1994). Of the three participants in this group two were in employment and one was unemployed before going to HE as mature students. Table 17 provides details about the men in this group.

Table 17 - Construction of Masculinities Through Conflict with Education

Name	Age	Employment Status	Previous Employment	HE Course
Lorcan	40	Employed	Art Installer; Mechanic; Computer Repairer	BSc Applied Computing
Colm	38	Unemployed	Mining Assistant; Carpenter	BSc Construction Economics
Ronan	30	Employed	Labourer; Factory Operative; Leaflet Distributor	BSc Multimedia Applications Development

Lorcan

Lorcan was forty at the time of this study and lived on his own in his own home which was approximately thirty miles away from the IoT. Lorcan's parents were unusual in this study, as both his father and his mother had attended HE. His father

was a university professor and his mother a secondary school teacher. He only had one sister and she had gone to university to study English before becoming a teacher and a journalist. Lorcan candidly noted that:

> They would be far more academic than me. They are the brainy
> hens of the family. I'm the thicko.

Lorcan's memories of school were quite negative. Lorcan's initial view of himself and the masculinity he had created were based around his sporting prowess and academic abilities. Although he had been a top 'A' student who enjoyed sport he chose to rebel against school and reject his sporting prowess and academic studies in response to what he saw as the school's uncaring attitude to his fellow pupils. He explained '[I was] bigger than the rest of my class and very good at rugby' and as such he was expected to lend his weight quite literally to the team. His enjoyment of the sport lessened as he came to believe that he had been trained 'to high levels of violence.' This meant that he had to be hard and quite physical in his matches as 'I would have been given out to if I hadn't had my opposing player in tears by half time' and this did not fit in with what he came to believe was his masculine self. He continued to play rugby for a while but the gradual dislike for what he regarded as an unsportsmanlike sport, saw him give up rugby and change his image. Lorcan could not condone the violent side of masculinity that the school condoned and as a result he chose to reconstruct himself. As he no longer identified himself as a sportsman he rebelled against school both on and off the sports field.

A masculine identity in school was constructed on the sports field and the result of 'abandoning the game' and becoming a free spirit, of being 'more the hippy', was that he was ostracised by the school. He remembered that 'when I gave up rugby the whole school came down on me.' Lorcan's response to this was to become 'quite disruptive in school', which meant that he went from 'from straight 'A's to failing everything.' Initially his rebellious attitude saw him come into conflict with his teachers but in the end he decided that 'bunking off' at every opportunity was the best course of action for all concerned:

> I think the teachers were kind of happy to get an unwritten
> understanding that they wouldn't hassle me if I didn't turn up so.

He happily reported: 'I took the whole of school off.' Despite these protestations that school was a place that he 'didn't turn up to' Lorcan passed his Leaving Certificate but attributed his success to the fact that he was:

> quite bright. So if you can't get past the Leaving Cert with a modicum of interest there's something wrong.

While his rebellious lifestyle included 'taking minor drugs and having fun' he maintained a good relationship with his parents. 'I always got on ... and never fell out. I still get on with them brilliantly up to this day.' Lorcan believed that his parents, despite their own levels of education, appeared to adopt a laissez-faire attitude to his education. When he rebelled against school, they were happy not to push him though he did acknowledge that they were worried about him:

> They have just always kind of let me do my thing, so they didn't mind. I think they were worried about me.

Changing from a 'model student' whose attendance was good to a failing student, where he hardly attended school and where his grades dropped from an 'A' rating, left him quite bitter. He developed an anti-school and to some extent an anti-education attitude so much so that he said that he 'definitely would have a chip on me shoulder about the whole thing.'

As a result of his 'run in' with the school there were contradictions in his perception of himself. Although he was happy to distance himself from school he still wanted to pass his Leaving Certificate examinations and so be seen in a positive light. Despite this he was still quite bitter about his treatment in school and from reading between the lines it could be said that he was somewhat angry that his parents did not step in when school life became difficult.

After leaving school Lorcan's working life had been varied but he emphasised 'I've always worked for myself.' He preferred this because:

> I don't really like working for other people as I find the whole interaction on politics of companies and ... they're just horrible people. First up against the wall come the revolution, I reckon, yea.

Lorcan had constructed himself as different at school and in opposition to authority. It follows then that he chose to work for himself as he could make his own decisions, therefore being in charge and not having to defer to the authority of others. He constructed himself as his own man, one who did not toe the line for others and so was not defined by them but by himself.

He worked for four years in Ireland installing art exhibitions and when this work dried up, he moved to London and worked as a carpenter before returning to Ireland and becoming a motor mechanic. This was physically demanding work and when he developed problems with his knees he decided that he needed to do something less arduous. Although he had distanced himself from education, Lorcan's self-perception and identity meant that he was confident of his academic abilities. He knew that he could cope with education albeit on his own terms and as a result he came to the realisation that if he was to have any career he needed some qualifications and so signed up for a basic FÁS[9] course in repairing computers. When he completed the course he set up his own computer repair business but it was not to last:

> The job is going. When new computers cost three-hundred quid
> you can't be charging people two hundred quid for repairing
> their old ones.

The realisation that saw him return to education to complete his FAS course and then start his computer repair business also helped him recognise that his business was in decline and that if he was to move on with his life then he needed to upskill. A newspaper advertisement detailing an honours degree computer course in his local Institute of Technology (IoT) gave him the incentive to apply to HE. He explained the turnaround in his attitude to education by saying that 'I like education. I enjoy learning things' thus intimating that school had been at the route of his problems, rather than a dislike of learning. Lorcan did not discuss his decision with his family; however he did need the support of his sister when it came to filling in the forms:

---

[9] FÁS – a Government organization that provides training for the unemployed.

> My sister was brilliant at filling out all the forms because I'm
> dyslexic. I suppose I have a mental block on writing and filling
> out forms. I could be with a form under me for three weeks and
> there's just no way I'd ever fill it. So everybody kind of chipped
> in to help me get everything together that I would need to. All
> the applications for grants and things like that.

When his parents learned he was returning to study they too were supportive of his decision and offered him both practical and emotional support:

> They are certainly giving me support. They have given me a
> couple of thousand to help me get through, but sure they're
> brilliant. They support me in everything I've done. They are a
> very, very, very good supportive family, so we're a tight unit ...
> the family would support me whatever I did I think.

When looking back on school, Lorcan wanted to be seen not only as a capable and bright student who had passed his Leaving Certificate examinations with ease but also as a happy-go-lucky person.   Although still hurt by his school days, life had been and was good to him and he did not regret any of his decisions:

> You can't be regretting what happens in your life, it's what happens
> in your life ... I've had a ball of a time. I can't remember between
> about fourteen and twenty-five because it was a world of lots of fun.
> Loved every part of it, and I've still not grown up properly!

Lorcan created an identity that he believed was not defined by others.   This manifested itself in his opposition to working for others and as such to being self-employed and thus being in charge of his own career path. This identity and self-belief enabled him to return to education as a mature student.

Colm

Colm was born and grew up in Dunbeg and lived there for a number of years before he and his wife moved to Australia.   When they emigrated they sold their home but when he returned to Ireland as a divorcee he was insolvent. His self-belief had been eroded and as he was unemployed he felt that he had few prospects.   He was no longer independent and as he was unable to provide for himself or direct the course of his life he had to move back home to live with his parents as he did not have the finances to buy a home of his own.

While the men in Colm's family followed very masculine career paths, his paternal grandfather and father were officers in the Irish army, a life that held little appeal for Colm, education was also a part of the family identity and part of the male identity. Unusually for the time both sets of grandparents believed in education and as Colm's paternal grandmother had been a schoolteacher she sent her son, Colm's father, to secondary school before he joined the army. His mother's parents:

> were farmers and saw millers so they were relatively well off
> people. They could afford ... now they had big enough families
> too. They felt it was important enough that their kids would go
> to school, even the girls. All the girls went to school, yea.

The fact that both of his parents had received a secondary education was quite enlightened, especially with regards to his mother. Secondary school 'would have been a very big deal for both of my folks' as many children, and especially girls, did not get a secondary education and those that did had to pay for it. Both sets of grandparents had been comparatively wealthy and their wealth enabled them to send their children to secondary school.

Colm's siblings had opted for jobs that followed traditional gender patterns. His elder brother graduated from HE with an honours degree in electronics while his elder sister went to work in the banking sector and his younger sister became a nurse. His younger brother, who had no interest in HE, worked in construction before becoming a fire fighter. Colm was pleased that his brother had seen 'the light and got out of [construction] early and [had] been a fireman for most of his life.'

Colm's Mother was keen for him to have a good secondary education and be taught by the same religious order that had taught her. While the school, which was on the other side of the city, 'didn't force [religion] down your throat at all', it had a good academic reputation with examination 'results [that] weren't that poor out of the school.' Despite this, Colm's attitude towards school was mixed. For him school was an opportunity to develop his non-academic interests and so on the social and sporting level, Colm enjoyed school. He got 'on well with everybody

[and] had good social interaction with people.' He had a passion for music and was 'mad into the musicals and back stage and all that.' Despite this he constructed his masculinity through being heavily involved in the sporting side of the school. He was the 'school captain ... captain of rugby team, the senior rugby team and when I was a kid I was big into canoeing.' The successes achieved outside the classroom in the sporting arena, though, were not replicated inside. The school Colm attended had a largely academic focus and Colm believed that the teachers operated a two-tier system in favour of those pupils who were academically gifted:

> If you were academic you got good instruction and people who
> were clever did well, you know.

Colm constructed his masculinity around the sports field and while his interest in sports meant that he found some level of acceptance in school he was not accepted in the academic sense. He put all of his efforts into sports and as a result did not do very well academically.   This lack of academic achievement and acceptance manifested itself, he believed, in a lack of support from his teachers, and meant that he did not try very hard as school as it 'wasn't stimulating enough.' This meant that he was 'not a high achiever' in class and was not in the top tier. Despite not getting along with his teachers Colm had great respect for his head teacher. He felt that Headmaster was the only teacher in the school who really understood him:

> The way the guy ran the school was very much about my skills
> rather than a focus on academia ... He was very much into
> educating people for life rather than the academia. Like, he
> understood that everybody wasn't academic. He was servicing a
> part of town that had a mixed clientele. You know there were a
> lot of ordinary working class kids.

Irrespective of this, Colm distanced himself from school and became 'a bit of a rebel', which meant that he became 'less conforming.' Despite his negative attitude to school and his education he still wanted to be successful and so was conforming enough to engage with his academic work to the extent that enabled him to graduate with his leaving certificate. Although he only 'got a very basic Leaving Cert you know' it was enough to allow him to apply to HE. He filled 'out the CAO [but] there was very little career guidance, there was very little instruction' from school or from home. His parents 'found it very difficult to communicate with

me [and] there wasn't much discussion and when they did try and talk to me [about HE] it was probably a bit too late.' Colm's perceived lack of support meant that his self-confidence was low which meant that the identity and masculinity that he constructed for himself did not include HE as he did not see himself as a HE student. This identity meant that he did not bother to submit his CAO form and left school feeling rather disillusioned and without any idea of what he wanted to do.

Colm's future was eventually shaped by the intervention of his mother. A few weeks after he left school and fed up with the fact that Colm was not doing anything to help himself his mother approached her boss. She worked as a book keeper for a local builder and asked her boss "Is there any chance of giving [Colm] a job?"

Colm got a job on the building site but was not happy with 'painting escrows, these are yokes they prop up the formwork on building sites' and so asked his employer if he could 'have a job as an apprentice carpenter' thus following a typically masculine career. He spent the next four years completing his carpentry apprenticeship before taking a City and Guilds course in a related discipline. Once qualified, Colm spent eight years living and working in the construction industry in London and America before returning to Ireland to settle into family life with his new wife. Despite his success the job was not challenging; in fact for Colm 'Construction [was] a pretty boring industry.' Colm wanted to construct his identity outside of the industry and away from the 'day job' in an area that was more stimulating and interesting. He chose geology and history:

> I had a little foundry, which was my passion … I have a big
> interest in history ... Actually, the first sort of exposure I had to
> academic people was through that bit of archaeological work
> that we did. I was asked to help a Master's student ... with his
> thesis. So he wrote up the experimental work that we did and ...
> sent it to Oxford, to be analysed ... so it was great you know.

Colm wanted to change his way of life and wanted a more rewarding job so that he could have a more successful life for himself and his wife. When he was thirty, then, he and his wife moved to Australia. Once there he chose to follow his own interests and so he set up a small archaeological business. He worked for the

Australian Government as a field assistant for geologists, a role that was interesting and motivating and removed from the 'boring' construction industry. During this time though his marriage failed and the rewards that he thought he would find in Australia disappeared. He had no other option other than to return to Ireland and move in with his parents. As he had sold his home to fund the trip to Australia when he returned to Ireland he 'had nothing to go back to basically.' His self-belief and view of himself was compromised as a result of the divorce and he was so emotionally 'devastated' by the divorce that he 'lost interest in life [and so] dillydallied around for quite a few years.' The confidence and self-esteem that he had built up since leaving school through his marriage and starting his own business were gone and his life 'came off the rails.' Although his parents continued to support him it was three years before he was able to start thinking about resuming his life. He had few skills or qualifications and knew that the only realistic employment option was to return to the hard male environment of the construction industry. He knew the industry was a demanding career both on and off site and its hard living and depressing lifestyle was one that he did not want to go back to:

> I don't think anybody would like to see me go back to the manual construction lifestyle. It's a real man's world. There's heavy drinking, there's heavy drug taking in it …it can be very depressing at times.

As he began to reconnect with his life and his confidence began to return he knew that he needed to reposition himself and 'to get a bit of direction [but] It was actually very difficult to decide what you wanted to do.' He looked at a number of male oriented FÁS courses related to construction. He wanted to be successful again and the way to do that was to make use of the construction skills he already had. Eventually he:

> did a course in CADCAM, which is Computer Aided Machining. So you'd be programming machines to cut things out. They use them in woodwork and in joinery shops. They're mostly for engineering, so I didn't like that. Then I transferred and did a CAD course.

Reconnecting with his life also meant that he considered 'changing direction' and doing an architecture course in HE but he 'didn't have the self-confidence to go for' it as it would mean disregarding the security blanket that his previous skills gave him. Although he believed he 'probably would have been quite good at it', his self-belief at that time was low. He believed that he did not have the 'academic wherewithal' to succeed in HE and so did not try just in case he failed in the same way as he had 'failed' in his marriage. When he finished the Computer Aided Design (CAD) course he discussed his options with the local mature students' organisation, before deciding to do an honours degree in construction economics. He 'specifically picked this [course] because I felt it would be achievable.' His parents were very:

> happy that you're getting a second chance ... delighted as well, that I'm not making a mess of it and getting through it - the whole lot as well.

The support and direction that he received from his family when his self-esteem and self-assurance were low, enabled him to begin to rebuild his life. The support of the local mature students' organisation enabled him to choose a course that allowed him to use the skills that he had built up over his working life thus adding to his self-confidence. He was re-constructing his masculinity along familiar lines as he was doing something that was familiar and so was achievable. This move allowed him to redefine who he was and as a consequence be a real man through his reconnection with the working world.

Ronan

Ronan was thirty when he took part in the study and lived at home with his partner who had also returned to study in HE albeit on a part-time basis. Whereas both Lorcan and Colm came from reasonably well off middle class backgrounds and had families who were very educationally minded, Ronan came from a poor background where education was not valued. Rather it was something that men did prior to going to work and as it was not important he had not received any encouragement to go onto HE when he left school. Work was the driving force for the men in his family and physical work at that.

Roanan described his parents as coming from a poor background. They had grown up before secondary education was free and when men and women followed traditional roles. His father had left school at fourteen and had spent his working life as a labourer. His mother had 'left school about fourteen, which was a pretty normal thing then.'

Fees had been abolished when Ronan and his brother went to secondary school. Ronan's brother had no interest in HE and left to become a labourer like their father when he finished the Leaving Certificate. Ronan had attended a vocational school and while he appreciated that he had been 'given the chance that my father never had' he did not enjoy being there. Without an academic family role model to encourage him in his educational studies Ronan chose to construct his masculinity through his physical prowess on the sports field.   Academically school 'was not a great experience. It was always a struggle as I was a bit of a rebel [because] I was only interested in sport.' His rebellion manifested itself in trying to be one of the lads and spend as much time as he could on the sports field at the expense of his studies. He found class work 'very hard' and as a result struggled in class and with his teachers. Despite these struggles he had done enough to graduate with his Leaving Certificate. Neither his family nor his school had given him a role model nor encouragement vis-à-vis his academic abilities. This resulted in low levels of self-confidence in his academic abilities and a subsequent lack of motivation which meant that he did not apply to HE despite his Leaving Certificate successes. As education was not considered important in his home he:

> didn't appreciate the bigger picture. Succumbed to small town
> mentality of school being a formality and then getting a job and
> a wage.

Ronan's subscription to this 'small town mentality' saw him start work immediately after leaving school. He had constructed his masculine identity around what was normal in his small town – being a worker and therefore a family provider. Education did not have a place in such an attitude and so when he graduated he went to work.   He worked in a series of 'dead-end jobs' starting off as a construction labourer working on building sites for three years before moving on to

become what he described as a factory operative. He held this job for five years before he became a leaflet distributor. It was while he was doing this job that he realised that he wanted to do something more with his life. He knew that the jobs that he had worked in had not offered him a secure and viable future and so he needed 'to broaden [his] horizons' and break free from the limited choice of 'dead-end jobs.' To do this he needed HE qualifications that would enable him to move on and become a skilled worked thus enabling him to follow his dream, to 'change his career and move into IT and perhaps become a lecturer.'

His first step was to sign up for a part-time Adult Education European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) course. He chose a part-time course for two reasons. Firstly he did not readily identify himself as an academic as school had left him feeling unsure of his academic abilities and so he was unsure if he would succeed in a full-time course and secondly he could not afford to be without the financial support the job gave him. He passed the course and the success boosted his confidence and his motivation to the extent that he gave up work the following year and began a full-time FETAC course in E-Business. He then completed an Information Systems Examinations Board (ISEB) in computing. His personal and academic confidence had been boosted by this success and it motivated him to apply to HE.

While Ronan had wanted 'to get away' from school as fast as he could at eighteen, he had no regrets about his decision 'because at the time I did not want to go to college.' He justified his decision to follow the male family pathway of going to work by saying that the work had given him skills and experiences that were important and without the life experiences he had accumulated since eighteen:

> I may not be the person I am now. I have a greater appreciation
> of college life because it's based on life and work experiences.

Unlike Lorcan and Colm who had a lot of family support, Ronan's decision to return to education had 'little to do with [his family]' but a lot to do with his partner, her opinion mattered a great deal. Her belief in education had widened her horizons and therefore influenced Ronan's. Her support helped him to decide to go to HE and was central to his success. Ronan believed that she was so understanding and 'very supportive' because she too was studying on a part-time basis. Ronan got a

lot of motivation and encouragement from this and her actions helped him to believe he was doing 'the right thing' by returning to study. Through her support Ronan was able to construct a viable masculine identity that was removed from the physical male environment of construction and factory work to that of academia. Going to HE and doing a degree in computing worked on several levels for Ronan. Not only would it fulfil his love of computing but HE would allow him to increase his skill level and open up the opportunities that were denied to him when he left school. Graduation would be the next step in constructing a masculine identity as an academic and achieving the rewards of a new life of being a teacher.

The next group of participants did not consider themselves to be academic or sports-oriented and so were distanced from school and education. As a result these participants constructed their masculinities away from school and the sports field.

Discouraged Learners

The six participants who make up this group believed that the support structures – school and family - needed for academic success were lacking and as a result found engagement with school and education difficult. They were neither academic achievers nor sports oriented and they believed that the schools they attended overlooked them. Masculinity in their schools was constructed on the sports field or around academia. For these participants, the ethos of the schools was the promotion of the academic and sporty pupils at the expense of those who did not fit either criterion and so they believe they were failed by their schools (Epstein et al., 1999). This left the participants feeling angry and/or despondent with education. The effects of this failure and their lack of acceptance meant that the participants looked elsewhere to construct their masculinities. Table 18 details background information about the participants in this group.

Table 18 - Discouraged Learners

Name	Age	Employment Status	Previous Employment	HE Course
Fionn	40	Employed	Construction; Cabbie; Plasterer	BSc Construction Management
Cormac	31	Unemployed	Purchasing Officer/Manager for Electrical Computer Contractor	BSc Software Systems Development
Eamon	34	Unemployed	Barman Care Assistant Programmer	BSc Physics with Computing
Gearóid	35	Unemployed	Doctor's Receptionist	BSc Applied Computing
Malachy	26	Unemployed	Security Guard; Chef; Steel Fabricator	BEng Building Services Engineering
Donal	37	Employed	Motor Mechanic; Maintenance Worker	BA Sports Studies

Fionn

Fionn was just forty when he was interviewed. As he and his wife and their two young sons had just returned from New Zealand they lived with his sister whose home was close to the IoT.

Fionn's parents grew up in the 1950s when secondary education had to be paid for and so neither of his parents reached secondary school. Despite his lack of formal education, Fionn believed that his father was:

> very intelligent, very self-educated [who] doesn't have any
> official education apart from national school[10].

Fionn explained that his parents grew up in a time when women did not always receive an education. Women were expected to be the home makers and did not need a high level of education. Fionn believed that his mother was lucky that she had received any education as:

> Herself and her older sister are the only two girls in their family
> that can read and write. That was kind of considered
> extravagant in her generation or certainly in her family.

---

[10] In the UK and Europe, National School is equivalent to Primary School.

When his two sisters left school his:

> older sister went to college ... and she did a couple of different
> courses - Recreation Management ...   My younger sister did
> chemistry ... I call her a scientist lady.

When they graduated, his eldest sister became a youth worker while the younger one became a chemist. His younger brother, who went to work straight from school, returned to HE as a mature student and graduated with a physics degree before going to work in computing. Fionn's siblings saw education as a means through which to create successful identities. The siblings had used education to create an upwardly mobile family narrative as is clearly seen through their going to HE.

Fionn attended a technical secondary school which he felt focused on vocational subjects rather than academic ones. He 'enjoyed school [and] was quite good' but his parents were going through a separation when he was sitting his Leaving Certificate examinations and so he 'didn't do as well as [he] should have done or could have done [and] failed [the] Leaving Cert the first time.' He re-sat the examinations the following year but did not get high points. Despite its vocational orientation Fionn's school placed emphasis on those students who displayed academic abilities. Students who did well in their Leaving Certificate examinations were more likely to be steered towards HE by the school than those who did not do so well:

> I don't think there was really the opportunity to go to college
> when I was ... when I finished school. You had to do really well
> in your Leaving Cert, which I didn't do. I mean I passed it but I
> didn't do really well.

Fionn's view of himself and his abilities was compromised by the breakup of his parents' marriage and his lack of success in school. The effect of his poor exam results was the belief that his chances of getting into HE were diminished and so he did not apply. His family life and its effect on his Leaving Certificate examinations reinforced his belief that HE was only for bright people who had studied academic subjects and had a high number points in the Leaving Certificate. Fionn justified his decision not to go to HE by saying that 'It never occurred to me I needed to actually

get a third level education' even though his elder sister was already there. While Fionn regretted 'not doing this course … or doing some third level course after I'd left school' he acknowledged that he had not wasted his time as he had learnt 'other things. You do other things, don't you?'

Fionn chose to create his masculine identity through work but he found it hard to find a job in Ireland after he left school and so after a year he headed to London. He opted for typically masculine work and quickly found a job as a construction worker but after three years work dried up and during this 'lean period' he worked as a cabbie. While this 'was a good laugh … it wasn't ever going to be a career.' When he met his future wife they returned to her home country of New Zealand where they married and had two children. Fionn now had responsibilities and his identity was now one of husband and father and the responsibilities that accompanied that, namely that of provider. As a result he needed a job. Once in New Zealand work was easy to find and he chose to reengage with the skills that he already had and so went back into the construction industry where he trained as a plasterer. Although his confidence had been shaken by what he perceived as his Leaving Certificate failure he realised that he needed new skills if he was to get a good job in the construction industry in New Zealand. Like his siblings he realised the importance and power of an education and so he enrolled as an apprentice plasterer and worked his way up to the top of his profession saying that 'Of all the work that I'd done [this last job] was the pinnacle.' The job though was a strenuous one, requiring a lot of physical effort. This effort would be harder to maintain as he got older:

> I knew I didn't want to be doing that until I was sixty-five, or
> would I even be able to? … It was hard enough to make it but
> people kind of pointed out to me things like there are no old
> [plasterers].

Fionn's questioning of his male identity as a member of the construction industry and the growing realisation that his job may not be a job for life started him thinking about other things. He had spent most of his working life in the construction industry:

> looking enviously at the guys working in the office and we were
> out in the rain and the frost and all that made me realise there's
> probably better things in life than climbing scaffolding at 7.30 in
> the morning.

He knew that he did not want to 'to retire with a gammy shoulder at fifty' and so had to do something else. His decision to return to education was not 'a difficult decision' as it was one that had been brewing for some years. Every time he visited Ireland his brother and sisters would tell him of the many new 'second chance' opportunities in education. Fionn's family had all benefitted from education and wanted him to benefit also so much so, Fionn declared, that they had in fact 'put pressure on me to do this' for a number of years:

> I remember coming back for Christmas ... in the mid-nineties and
> they told me that I should be doing this.

Working in New Zealand had enabled Fionn to work in acceptable male jobs but that was a double edged sword. The jobs paid well but had few prospects past middle age. So despite being in a job that for him was the best he had ever been he realised that it was not enough. He wanted more from his job – his masculine identity meant that he wanted greater job security and prospects. He wanted to do what men traditionally did and that was to be able to provide for his wife and his young family. He knew that returning to education was the only way in which he was going to achieve this aim.

Fionn regretted that he had not gone to HE at eighteen and he started to think seriously about returning to education. He wanted a job that moved him up from his working class origins to one that put him in line with the middle class identity that his siblings had established for themselves. The identity that he wanted to construct for himself in middle age was that of a successful man who could provide well for his family. This was prompted by several factors: his family's belief in academia, their upwardly mobile move and their subsequent pressure on him to return to education. It also rested on the belief that his job was not one that was as rewarding as it could be. He knew that time was running out and that the decision had to be made soon:

> I realised I was going to be running out of time; it's going have to
> be now or never. I turned forty last week so you kind of see that
> these figures are looming so you know that you've only got so
> much time left to actually make a change if you're going make a
> change.

He had been away for eighteen years and had a settled life in New Zealand and worked for 'the best company I had ever worked for' so the incentives to return home had to be strong. The increasing demands of the job and the growing desire to have a better job, one that would not only enable him to continue to care for his family but be personally rewarding, combined with the not so subtle entreaties of his family and the generosity of his sister saw Fionn, with the support of his wife and children, return to Ireland. One sister:

> opened her house to me and my wife and two kids ... my sister is
> putting us up basically, so she is covering what would be our
> mortgage or rent. So we just have to find money for food and
> bills and that, so that helps.

His other sister and brother-in-law offered 'moral support' and helped him:

> when you've got a problem with anything. They're always there.
> My brother-in-law is very good with information - how things
> work, what you need to do, and how you go about it, very good
> like that.

The sisters were a tour de force and determined to help him but the support he received from his parents, support that he really wanted, was muted. With a shrug of the shoulders, he despondently explained that:

> My mother doesn't take too much interest in it; she's got her
> own little world. My father would think it's a good thing but he's
> pushing on and doesn't take too much notice of it.

Although he regretted not going to HE at eighteen, Fionn reasoned that the experiences he acquired whilst in New Zealand were ones 'you can't get by living at home' and if he had gone to HE he 'probably wouldn't have left Ireland' and would have constructed a different identity to the one he had through leaving Ireland. He would have liked to have created his identity through academic achievement which was evident when he said that he thought that he could have done better at school if he had tried harder and had more support. He wistfully noted that 'If I went at it

again I probably could do a lot better.' With this in mind he was determined to make full use of the opportunity to try again when it came along and follow the .

Cormac

Cormac was single when he took part in the research study. Aged thirty-one, he lived at home with his mother and chose to make the twenty-six mile journey to and from Declan institute each day.

Cormac came to see himself as a worker and when he left school at eighteen he worked for six years before being made redundant. Unemployment did not sit with his constructed masculinity, that of the worker, and so it sapped his confidence. This despondent view of himself meant he found it hard to find the self-motivation to get out of the situation. It was through the help of his aunt that he eventually applied to HE to become a mature student.

Cormac was a quietly angry participant. His relations with his parents had been compromised by the break-up of their marriage when he was in secondary school and this seems to have permeated his relationship with his brother. His parents had split up about the time he was preparing for his Junior Certificate examinations and he did not know a lot about their education. He was unable to 'really tell [anything] about my father and my mother' other than he believed his mother had 'got as far as Junior Cert.' His brother had 'finished Leaving Cert' but it was obvious from the conversation that there was some family tension and that he did not want to elaborate on his brother's circumstances.

Fees had been abolished when Cormac started secondary school. He attended a boys' high school close to home but had had mixed feelings about his time there:

> I did like school [but] looking back on it ... I suppose at the time I
> didn't really want to be there.

His parents' separation had a detrimental effect of his levels of motivation and engagement with school and his academic studies but also on the construction of his masculinity and his identity. While he believed that he had less support that he might have had from his parents at this time, he did acknowledge that he had had a

lot of friends and it is not 'until that's gone you don't recognise how special that was.'

Where he had not received support from home he had hoped to replace it with support from school but this was not so. He believed the school did not cater for the needs of all of the students as it operated a two-tier system with some students getting 'more focus' than others:

> I genuinely believe that there was more focus put on the, some
> of the maybe - maybe it's not a good way to describe it - but
> what was maybe seen as the more important students doing the
> more important subjects.

Cormac was not interested in sports and did not identify himself with the academic side of being in school due to his lack of confidence in his academic abilities. This was reinforced by the fact that he was not studying academic subjects and because of this, he believed, he was overlooked by the school and his teachers:

> I felt that there wasn't an awful lot of focus on me. I felt maybe
> the subjects, the broad range that I was in - I started out
> woodworking and eventually went into construction studies. I
> believe, certainly at the time, that it was kind of looked at as the
> lower end of achievement in high school.

He was quite bitter about his experiences at school and the lack of support from home and school and this attitude affected the way in which he viewed the school and how hard he tried with his studies. It was a 'case of less is best' and he just aimed to 'get through the five years' without much effort. While he graduated with his Leaving Certificate the belief that he was 'at the lower end and ... given maybe less attention' alongside his perceived lack of encouragement from home meant he was unsure of his abilities. He lacked confidence and had a shaky view of himself and his identity. Having the support of people around him was important but he believed that he never had received it from home:

> There was never that push at home either, the "Maybe you
> should try and push yourself or maybe you should consider this
> or this."   Being left to your own devices is maybe how I would
> describe it best.

Support was important to Cormac and the lack of it caused him to create a less than positive masculinity, the knock-on effect of which saw him distance himself from education. Due to his low self-esteem and the lack of familial support Cormac decided not make the transition to HE. In retrospect he did question this decision:

> If I had, maybe, questioned more. Maybe if I had asked the question in my own mind, possibly I would have put a bit more focus on going to college.

He justified his decision by saying that the time had not been right and he was not ready to go to HE at eighteen. He imagined that he would have dropped out as he would not have been 'focused [and] wouldn't have been able to give it my fullest attention.'

Cormac chose to construct his masculinity through work, but like Fionn, when he left school in the 1980s Ireland was experiencing a recession and there were few job opportunities. Cormac worked in a department store for two years but as there were few chances of promotion Cormac moved to the UK as he believed there would be opportunities for getting a better job there. He started working for a large supermarket but:

> in less than a week ... I got a job in an office ... It was a little bit more of a serious kind of job, something to get your teeth stuck into.

As the job entailed selling computer parts and computer accessories it revived his interest in computers. As he wanted to prove that he could be a success something that he had not achieved in school, he signed up for an evening course in computing in the local HE as he believed that a computer qualification would enhance his job prospects. He attended the course for about three months but as the job required a lot of travelling he found the demands of the job and HE were 'too much basically. I had to focus on the job ... I had to kind of keep a focus on that.' In the end he could not commit to both and as 'It was a new country, new work, new college ... one of them had to go and college went.' Cormac's compensation at not being able to prove his academic abilities through college was achieved through working hard at his job. This paid off and he was quickly promoted to the position of Sales Executive. Despite this promotion he still did not

see himself as successful and this lack of self-belief and fragile identity saw him return home after a year. Back in Ireland he got a job in a distribution company but 'the bad politics in the place' caused him to resign after four months. Next he got a job as a purchasing officer for an electrical contractor and stayed there for two and a half years before moving to his next job in the same type of field. He remained in that job for just under three years before being made redundant. It was important to Cormac that people saw him in a good light – a diligent and successful worker and so for the next two years Cormac hoped to get a job similar to his previous ones as he was unwilling to try for jobs where 'there wasn't an awful lot thought of you.' He came to realise that his level of education was working against him. He was 'educated up to Leaving Cert [and] would maybe have been easily replaceable.' He knew that in order to go further in his career he needed to have a higher standard of education and so decided that he needed to 'focus and maybe get a qualification' that would enable him to do achieve his aim. His view of himself was not high and his low self-confidence and self- belief affected his motivation and as a result he did not follow through on the decision to return to education:

> I had been talking about it quite a bit every year when it came
> round to CAO time. Why I hadn't gone to college sooner was
> because I always missed the CAO day.

Cormac's main source of support was his aunt. Education was not rated highly by his parents or his brother but it was by his aunt. Cormac had great respect for his aunt as she had returned to education as a mature student even though she was:

> not a young woman ... certainly middle aged and she went to Art
> College. Art School I should say.

She gave him the level of support that he craved and regularly spoke to Cormac about going to HE. She constantly encouraged him to 'just do it' and alerted him to the CAO deadlines. In a rather diplomatic way, she advised that "If you're considering doing it, now is the right time to do it, CAO wise."

Unemployment had further blighted Cormac's view of himself and his masculine identity, the one constructed whilst in school, and as a result it took repeated efforts to sign up for HE. Finally after being unemployed for two and a half years

and missing the HE deadline a number of times, Cormac 'eventually got my act together' and applied to HE. Even though his parents were separated and he lived at home with his mother he wanted the support of his father as 'I suppose maybe to just try and get some feedback.' Although Cormac did not get the level of support that he really wanted and needed to feel able and successful he was able to:

> explain everything I am doing and just actually hear the words
> out loud can sometimes just sort the thing out for you whether
> the person that you are talking to says a single word, says a word
> back to you.

Cormac was very aware that the rewards that he wanted from his job, that of being a successful man in a good job, could only be achieved through having a degree. Despite this he found it hard to admit that he regretted his decision not to go to HE at eighteen. When asked why he did not go at eighteen he hedged his reply by saying that there was 'not a straightforward answer' to the question. Eventually he admitted that:

> I probably do regret that I didn't go straight to college after or
> within a year of leaving secondary school. So short answer –
> yes!

While Cormac was very happy to have finally made the decision to return to education he defended that decision not to go at eighteen by saying 'that I was right at the time regardless' and then explained that:

> I wouldn't complain about it, like you know. At this stage of my
> life I have the focus and I have the interest in developing my
> education.

He did not want to be seen as indecisive and in a negative light. He wanted to be seen as someone who was in charge of the decisions he made and in charge of the direction his life took.

Eamon

When he took part in the research study Eamon was thirty-four years old. He left school at nineteen and held a variety of jobs both in Ireland and in Europe. When he succumbed to the 'family illness', Eamon's term to describe his alcoholism, he

returned to the security of his family home in Ireland. His illness meant that there were times when he was incapable of working and times of sobriety when he could work.

Like Fionn and Cormac, Eamon's parents had separated when he was in secondary school and he found it hard to talk about them. He knew though that they had received a primary education but had not gone further than that. Secondary education was not free when his parents went to school and many families could not afford to send their children to secondary school. His parents had grown up in the 1950s where women were the homemakers and men the breadwinners.

Eamon, the youngest of nine children, had two sisters and six brothers and they all followed traditionally gendered pathways. Three of his brothers went to work when they left secondary school while the other three went on to HE. One brother became a priest, 'another brother is a property lawyer in England', who when he completed his degree, moved to the UK and did a Master's in Property Law while the eldest brother 'has a diploma or something like that.   I can't remember which one he has done.' His two sisters had not wanted to go to HE when they left school, preferring instead to go to work. One 'sister is a tax inspector and my other sister is a housewife.'

Eamon's secondary education was overshadowed by the breakdown of his parents' marriage. They deliberately decided not to separate until after Eamon completed his Leaving Certificate examinations but this had a deeply detrimental effect on him as it affected how he saw himself and how he constructed his masculinity. He had little interest and so did not engage in sports and distanced himself from his studies. He was in his Leaving Certificate year but the atmosphere at home meant that he found it very hard to study.

During this difficult and pressurised time in school he had little motivation. He was angry and bitter about his parents and was quite vehement when he said that:

> they did the wrong thing and waited until I had the Leaving Cert done, which was the wrong thing. They should have split up when I was about twelve or thirteen. It would have been a lot better.

Eamon 'did OK [and] was alright at school' but was not very enthusiastic about it as school was clouded by his home circumstances. As a result he failed his Leaving Certificate examinations and so had to re-sit them the following summer. This initial failure was due to the fact that he did not get the support that he badly needed from home and because he had distanced himself from his studies and was not studying hard enough he felt that he was not being supported by his school. All of this affected his self-confidence and his self-belief. He did not see himself as being an achiever and believed that his only option was to leave school and to build his life and construct his masculine identity away from his family and from school. Once he re-sat and passed the examinations he immediately left Ireland for London. He explained that although he wanted to 'go out and see the world a bit', he really wanted to escape from his family problems, 'I just wanted to be away from school and Ireland. I was just in that kind of humour.' He drifted between bar jobs for three years before returning to work in a bar in Ireland. He enjoyed the social life and discovered that he was able to talk with people. This newfound skill increased his self-confidence and caused him to reassess his life and the fact that the job that he was in did not offer him any long term security. He decided to develop this interpersonal skill and use it in a more useful occupation and so applied to be a nurse in a London teaching hospital. He sat a number of examinations during his training but he 'failed on one exam' so he had to leave the course. He 'thought that was the end of that' but rather than return to his previous job he applied for agency nursing:

> I did some work at a rehabilitation centre and I loved it and they
> thought I was very good and they offered me a job … That was
> a very good experience helping people with mental health
> problems. It was kind of a stop gap, halfway house. After they
> have an acute phase of their illness they would come to us and
> we would rehabilitate them into community life, and then we
> would set them up in a flat or a house.

Although he chose a career that is not immediately associated with men, his time spent helping others in the rehabilitation centre increased his confidence and self-esteem and in turn his sense of achievement and success. It was a hard job, though, and eventually it took its toll on his mental and physical health. After four

years, he was 'a bit burnt out' and so decided to change careers. His next job, which was a more traditionally masculine occupation, came about by chance. He bought a computer and found that he 'was very quick to pick up on all things computers' and so took a temporary IT job in a large department store in London where he worked for some months. Through this job he found that he could be successful and have a more positive sense of himself. He wanted to build on this success and knew that in order to reap the rewards of this successful new career he needed to have a computer qualification and decided to use education as a way to build his new successful identity. Over the next few years Eamon undertook a number of courses. When he first moved back to Ireland he applied for a FÁS course in computer programming. As he 'did well on that [he]... got a job in Holland working as a software engineer' where he stayed for a few years. When he wanted to upskill he returned to Ireland and completed another FÁS course in computing before going to work in an IT call centre. It was while he was working there that he developed the 'family illness.' He was unable to work for the next year and so relied upon the help and support of his family and friends:

> My father was there for me all the time as well. My friend ... he
> is like my best friend from when I was a teenager. He was
> supporting me too, saying, 'You'll be able to do it.'

Through family support, Eamon again turned to education as a means to rebuild his damaged masculine identity. When he was recovering in hospital one of his brothers suggested that he return to education to build up his computing skills. He told Eamon that he should 'Do something that you enjoy and that you'd like to do.' While he knew that he needed to upskill again in order to compete in the rapidly changing world of computing, Eamon had been thinking about HE rather than a FÁS course. Despite his successes to date the fact that he had gone straight to work after leaving school and had bypassed HE played on his mind. As he explained:

> in the back of my mind was that I had left school and gone
> straight to work, and it was as if there was a hole, something
> missing in my life. So I started thinking about university[11].

---

[11] Eamon referred to the IoT as University.

Eamon applied for a computing course and his family and especially his younger sister 'pulled out all the stops' and were at pains to reassure him that he 'could do it.' As he was already a computer programmer he played to his skills and opted to do an honours degree in computing. He chose to do a computing and physics degree as 'I'd love to do Physics.' This degree would offer him greater opportunities to find a good job, one that would enable him to use his enhanced skills and which would reward him by being well paid.

Gearóid

At the start of this study Gearóid was thirty-five and lived at home with his parents as he was not financially secure enough to live away from home. His parents grew up in the 1950s and only received a primary education. His father did not get past fourth class [aged 9/10] in primary school and his mother left school when she was twelve. They were unable to go further with their education as they could not afford the secondary school fees. Secondary education was not free to all until the late 1960s. Despite the fact that his parents did not receive a secondary or higher education they did believe in the benefits that such as education would bring and were supportive of their sons' decision to continue their education after leaving secondary school.

Although Gearóid's elder brother chose to study business in HE after leaving school 'he just hated it.' As Gearóid explained:

> I don't even think he showed up for lectures. He went to the
> [bar] a lot. He didn't … *he hated it*.

Gearóid believed his brother was a capable student but 'hated' HE because the HE routine was not dynamic enough to engender his interest. Despite family encouragement, his brother dropped out during his first year because '[he] just doesn't like to be sitting down for five minutes. He's a workaholic.' Education did not fit in with his brother's constructed masculinity – for him men were involved in physical work and so he went on to set up his own tiling business.

When talking of his own school days Gearóid dryly observed that he:

> fell asleep through I don't know how many years - seven? eight?
> - in primary school and then five in secondary school.

Gearóid attended a strict Catholic secondary school, which he positively disliked. The school ethos focused on graduating successful students either through sports or academia. In his mind the school operated a two-tier system which favoured those pupils who were good sportsmen or those who were academically high achievers and 'so if you weren't smart enough or really good at sports then they didn't give a sh** about you.'

As Gearóid believed he was neither of these he was very angry and bitter about his secondary education. When he first spoke about it said he had 'no interest' in school but later admitted that 'I liked Art - that was it.' He qualified this by saying that he 'wanted to do Art but basically … wasn't good enough.' Later he admitted that he found history and science 'interesting' but his interest did not equate to top grades which meant he was not part of the 'smart' group and not in the top tier. Support and direction were important to Gearóid and he was particularly vehement about the school's lack of interest in pupils who were not very academically minded. He saw himself in this group of students and believed the teaching staff failed him when they failed to engage with the weaker students or did little to inspire or direct them as a result:

> It was kinda you're either really smart, you're good at sports or
> you didn't exist. You're just a number.

Despite his dislike of school and the fact that he saw himself a discouraged student, Gearóid followed his brother's example and went straight to HE when he left school. He chose the same IoT and the same Business Studies course as his brother had followed when he went to HE. Gearóid found HE to be quite different from the very formal and disciplined atmosphere of school and because of that Gearóid believed that he 'lost the run of himself' when he first went there. He felt that he was not self-regulated enough or 'ready for that [freedom] and no one actually told you … actually … work!' Despite his belief that the course was not difficult and 'you could have missed half of it and still passed' Gearóid failed his first year. Gearóid's view of himself meant that he wanted to be successful and did not like to be seen

as a failure and so even though he believed he was not self-regulated he retook the first year and went on to graduate with a certificate in Business Studies two years later. He expected to be able to use his certificate to get a job when he graduated but his expectations did not materialise quite as he had hoped. Upon graduation he applied for many jobs or as he put it he sent his CV to 'there, there, there, there.' Having 'tried for everything - for jobs for ages [a job] just came up one day [and he] just took it.' He explained that 'It wasn't a case of, Oh I'd love to do that' it was a case of taking the only job he had been offered. The job was a doctor's receptionist 'doing everything - kind of a dogsbody.' Gearóid settled into the job that 'was hard but nice' and worked with people who 'were really nice' but he had reservations about the job. His construction of masculinity meant that he saw himself doing a masculine job with other men. This job did not fit in with his belief and perception of the type of job that a man did. He believed that it was unusual for a man to be a doctor's receptionist:

> It was the type of thing, if I was going to stay at it, I would be at
> it the rest of my life and it's the thing people would ask - 'You're
> a receptionist! But you're a bloke!'

Other people's reactions to his job confirmed his own belief that what he was doing did not fit in with his idea or other people's ideas of what it meant to be masculine. The fact that it was considered by some, and secretly by himself, to be a woman's job unsettled Gearóid and after six years he was 'really sick of it.' This attitude combined with his own illness saw him 'quit the job.' As he could 'never could get a job after that' Gearóid was unemployed for over six years. It was whilst he was unemployed that he decided that time was running out and he had to do something to change his life and so opted to return to education. One aspect that did worry Gearóid about returning to HE was the fact that he would be an older student:

> It was kind of: Will I? Won't I? Because the thing is I'm thirty now
> and do I want to be in college when I'm thirty-four?

The fact that he wanted to be employed and in charge of his own life was an important motivational factor for Gearóid. He wanted to be able to be independent and make his own decisions and not rely on the 'charity' of his parents. As he was interested in science Gearóid 'applied for just about every

different type of science course' but finally ended up doing a computer course, which was his second choice. Gearóid did not discuss his decision with his parents or his friends, insisting his decision to return to HE was all down to 'Me, Me, Me, Me, only me. Me, Me, Me.' Despite the fact that his parents encouraged him when he was eighteen he was surprised by their reaction to his decision to go back to HE again.   He felt that they were rather indifferent to his decision to become a mature student:

> They think I'm cracked.   My mother just says it's better than
> doing nothing, sitting on me arse all day.

Despite this perceived indifference he grudgingly acknowledged that his parents support. Their support was evident in the fact that they were happy for him to live at home and always asked how his week had gone. While Gearóid was not very forthcoming or accepting about his parents support he did admit that they would talk to him about HE on a regular basis and enquired if he needed anything by asking 'Can we do anything for you?' Gearóid insisted, though, 'That's as far as it goes.'   He did not want to be seen as dependent. In his mind his constructed masculinity meant the he should be an independent person who was self-reliant rather than reliant on his parents. For him it was more acceptable to rely on his friends and so he was more enthusiastic about his friends' interest in his learning career and the fact that they thought he had made the right decision. One friend 'thought it was a good idea to give it a go again' and Gearóid was pleased to have that endorsement and support from his friend.

Gearóid was quite an angry interviewee and reflecting on his experiences was hard, especially his school experiences. His attitudes to education were highly coloured as a result yet he wanted to be successful and thought that he could achieve that by following in his brother's footsteps and going to HE straight from school. Despite the resentment he harboured about his school days, and that he failed his HE examinations first time around at eighteen, Gearóid wanted to give HE a second chance. He wanted to prove that he could be successful again and so, at thirty-five, he opted to re-apply to HE.

Malachy

Malachy came from a small town 'a million miles from anywhere' where everyone knew everyone else and where everyone had a place. He disliked the small town environment and always wanted to get away to the city and start a new life as a garda (policeman), a man's job that required 'a good' Leaving Certificate.

Of the fourteen participants he lived the furthest from Declan IoT. At twenty-six he shared his home with his girlfriend in Carraig's Town.

Malachy knew little about his parents' education, but believed they had 'left school at primary school level ... twelve or thirteen probably' and had certainly not gone to HE. Malachy's older sister, who was a social worker, had a degree in Social Sciences and was studying for a Master's in Social Science. His older brother had left school after sitting his Leaving Certificate and joined the army where he continued his education through his army training.

Malachy had disliked school and was quite angry and forceful when he said that 'I had no interest in school at all when I was going there.' He attended a mixed technical school but felt that he would have been better off at a religious school as they were 'supposed to be better schools.' His school had a good sporting reputation nationally but did not, in his mind, put much focus on academic subjects:

> It's one of only two schools in the country that does sailing on
> the curriculum. So a lot of people ... used to come there from
> other towns, other parts of [Ireland].

While Malachy was proud of the school's unique reputation he was not a sporting pupil or very academic. He did not see education or sports as a way to construct his masculinity. As a result of his lack of interest he felt that the school did not offer him the encouragement that he needed. He said that the lack of encouragement and his lack of interest in academia meant that he did not try hard with his lessons. This lack of motivation and interest had a demoralizing result. Although 'he passed a few [Leaving Certificate subjects I] failed my maths [and] a couple of subjects', which meant that he failed the Leaving Certificate overall. He was unhappy with the results and despite passing a few subjects, felt they were 'nothing to note.' The lack of a Leaving Certificate meant that he 'didn't really have anything to fall back

on like [and so] I couldn't have got into [HE] not with my Leaving Cert. They would have thrown me out the door.'   His failure meant that he could not achieve his ambition of becoming a Garda and left him very discouraged and deepened his desire to get away from his 'tiny ... village' where everyone went to work or to HE when they left school. So when he left school at eighteen he moved to Carraig's Town, an hour's drive from home. He hoped that despite his poor results, living in a larger town would afford another route to becoming a Garda or even a prison officer. He knew that education was the key to fulfilling his ambitions of being successful and so enrolled on a yearlong PLC[12] course in security which he said 'was supposed to be a stepping stone' towards his ultimate goal. He passed the course but 'got stuck in a rut [and] ended up working five or six nights a week, twelve hour shifts', as a security guard. After eighteen months, he gave up the job. He:

> took on different jobs for a while - doing a bit of building
> labouring. Did a bit of chefing, trying out whatever, just to see if
> I could find my niche as well. It didn't happen.

Eventually Malachy realised he would not achieve his ambitions to become a Garda and decided to apply for an apprenticeship, a course of action that was a traditional route for many young men who left school without leaving certificate examinations. Such a move would give him a skill set and open up more avenues than would have been possible without the Leaving Certificate to fall back on. When he signed up to become a sheet metal fabricator in the construction industry he chose a very traditional male occupation. Although quite a physical job it was not necessarily dangerous but four years later while working on site he had a serious accident. Malachy fell through the roof where he was working and ended up in hospital 'for couple of months or whatever. Spent a year recovering.'

Ireland's National Learning Network (NLN) works with people who have suffered a work related injury or trauma and in a bid to get back to work people often have to change careers because of their injuries. The nature of Malachy's injuries meant that he could not return to his previous job and so needed a new start. The Fresh Start Rehabilitative Training course, offered by the NLN, 'was a nine month course

---

[12] PLC – Post Leaving Certificate courses are for those who have completed their Leaving Certificate and who want further vocational or technical training.

like. Builds you up gradually. What you like, what you do, whatever' that gave Malachy the chance to retrain. When he completed the course, Malachy:

> had the clear idea that I wanted to go working. I wanted to get a
> get a job and start earning money again.

His construct of masculinity and identity saw him as a man who was not dependent but who earning and able to support himself. He was anxious therefore to leave the accident and his dependent state behind him as quickly as possible.

Unlike school, the Fresh Start course tutors were very encouraging but felt that he was too young to be going back to work and so counselled him to continue with his education instead. Whilst retraining he had proven that the identity that he had constructed for himself whilst at school as a less than able student was untrue. Even though he had proven that he was academically able and had completed a course he 'kind of wrestled [with the idea] for a while then I decided to go back [to HE].' Despite his accident, Malachy still saw himself working in the construction industry. He decided to call on the skills that he had acquired through his apprenticeship when he opted to do a yearlong PLC course in construction technology. It was only after he had successfully completed that course that he decided to continue his education and applied to HE.

Unlike some of the other participants, Malachy did not have a lot of communication with his parents who he believed were:

> probably a bit surprised, a bit sceptical whether I was actually
> going to study or not - past form and all that like. I don't know
> what they think.

The lack of encouragement and support from his parents meant he did not discuss his options with them. He was quite dismissive of the thought that his parents' opinions would have any bearing on his decisions. He was keen to point out that 'I don't live at home. I live with my girlfriend in Carraig's Town.' His girlfriend's opinion was very important. Her initial encouragement and continued financial and emotional support were essential to Malachy. It was through her support and encouragement that he was able to reconstruct his masculinity as a male mature

student. Her support had enabled him to apply to HE in the first place and then continue as a mature student:

> I know it's difficult coming back to college when you're a mature
> student like but she has made every effort to support me.

However, Malchy was aware of the role reversal and the fact that she was supporting him was testing her patience. He noted that while she was initially 'very supportive' Malachy felt that after his three years as a student, her patience was wearing thin:

> She's probably a bit fed up - that at twenty-six she'd like to have
> the money. She sees her friends having money. What does she
> think? I don't know. She's looking forward to me finishing
> college.

Despite not being able to achieve his dream of being a Garda and the belief that HE 'was like school':

> it was probably always at the back of my mind that I'd like to go
> to college and do something but I probably never had the money
> or the courage to go back like.

While his girlfriend's support had given him the courage to be able to achieve this ambition he had regrets, regrets which were mainly instrumental. Malachy felt that going to HE at eighteen would have meant that he would now be qualified and so in a better financial position. He would 'be earning – three or four years work now at this stage.' Despite this he was glad of the current opportunity to graduate as a mature student with a qualification that, he believed, would enable him to get a good job. Returning to education in HE would allow him to prove to himself and to others that he was able to achieve and that this new masculine identity would allow him to silence the self-constructed doubts first created whilst in school.

Donal

Donal had just turned thirty-seven when he was interviewed. He was single and lived in his own home in Mount Pleasant which was forty-one miles from the IoT. He had done a variety of jobs since leaving school yet none of the jobs had been very fulfilling or offered security or future prospects. It was this realisation and the

realisation that he wanted something more out of life that were the triggers that brought him back to education.

Donal had not talked to his parents about their education and so was unsure how far they had gone. He believed that they both completed their primary education but did not know if they had done anything beyond that. While his younger brother had dropped out of Art College he returned to HE as a mature student to do a Business Studies degree and then a Master's in Management in Education. Donal noted that his brother had 'always gone the main stream.' Their parents sent their sons to two different secondary schools. His brother had attended a religious school but 'wanted to do woodwork and … couldn't' as the school ushered him along the academic path. Donal, on the other hand, had attended a vocational school. Of the six participants in this group Donal was not bitter or angry about school. He said that he was not very enthusiastic about it and had mixed feelings about school but:

> I enjoyed it I suppose. I had been in every day. I never hated it,
> that's for sure, but in terms of you're giving homework etc. … …
> … I would have done it but would never have tried to do well in
> it. Pass, great!

The vocational school offered more practical subjects such as metal work and mechanical drawing. Donal, who did not consider himself an academic, preferred the practical subjects as: '[I] was always very good with my hands anyway.' Donal also enjoyed physical education (PE) 'even though it wasn't on the curriculum as such.' Despite his love of sports, Donal knew that it was not going to lead to the academic qualifications that he wanted so that he could achieve his ideal career as a PE teacher. His harboured dream of becoming a PE teacher when he left school was dropped as he 'knew you had to be very intelligent to [be a PE teacher] so there was no point in trying.' Due to his lack of confidence in his academic abilities he did not believe that school would open any new pathways or opportunities for him and this belief meant that he did not try that hard at school. He explained: '[I] always considered myself to be kind of stupid to be honest so why would I bother trying?' As a result, he said:

> I never tried when I was in school because I left so early, when I
> was fifteen or sixteen, so I never bothered.

As he had constructed himself as being stupid he left school at fifteen without completing his Junior Certificate (roughly equivalent to English 'O' Level standard) or sitting his Leaving Certificate examinations. Whilst Donal believed that this lack of qualifications meant that he would not have been admitted to HE, he sought to justify his reason for not going by saying that he felt that he did not have the academic wherewithal or maturity to continue to HE:

> If I had come here when I was eighteen there was no way I
> would have applied myself. I'd be involved in sports and would
> be too busy so I would never have been able to last it I'd say ... I
> just hadn't the maturity to do it when I was eighteen.

Donal chose a very traditional male occupation when he became a motor mechanic when he left school, a job which he stayed in for eleven years.   Whilst in the trade Donal's confidence improved enough for him to complete an applied Motor Vehicle Mechanic's FÁS course, a course that was a labour intensive and by extension an extensive hands-on course. His next job involved repairing machinery and was very similar to his previous job except this time he was 'just repairing air tools, pneumatic tools, hydraulic equipment, etc.'

This new job was basically a continuation of his previous one and not very demanding or challenging. To counteract this he decided to stretch and challenge himself outside of work by becoming very involved with sport. He was especially interested in swimming and became a Lifeguard. This involvement in sport as an adult was allowing him the opportunity to achieve the masculine identity that he had first wanted when in school.

After two years of repairing machinery, Donal had to take time out because of illness. During this time, he reflected on his life:

> I realised this is where I'm going to be. I'm in a work shop and
> it's always going to be a work shop. Is this what I want for
> myself?

When he returned to work Donal continued to question his job and the direction of his life as he no longer saw himself as a mechanic for the rest of his life. He wanted

more and believed his current job was not much of a challenge as it did not offer him many viable prospects. He believed that 'the biggest mistake I made was leaving school so early' and so limiting the opportunities that he might have had if he had completed his Junior and Leaving Certificate examinations. He wanted to rectify this mistake and get out of the job that had few prospects and therefore few rewards. He spent a year considering his options and his lack of qualifications before deciding that in order 'to change and improve myself I had to go back to education' and get his Leaving Certificate which was the first step in being able to reskill and therefore widen his employment prospects. His first step in achieving this was overcoming his lack of confidence in his academic abilities. He did this by enrolling in an Adult Education Centre so that he could raise his level of education which he knew to be poor because he left school so early. He decided to achieve this by taking small steps, the first of which was to enrol in:

> [FETAC[13]] subjects ... basic Numeracy, English and then coupled
> with that I tried to do Irish, which was impossible.

Having increased his academic self-esteem through qualifying in Numeracy and English, he tried a basic computer course 'because I never worked with computers.' When he passed this course he realised that he could be an achiever and so he began studying for the Leaving Certificate, which was 'the hardest thing' he had done. Again he started off slowly by taking:

> some Leaving Cert subjects - so much to test the water.
> Geography was one and history was the other because I liked
> history.

Seventeen years after leaving school, Donal passed his Leaving Certificate examinations. The Leaving Certificate 'was the summit for me really' and passing the examination was a massive boost to Donal's personal and academic confidence. Despite this achievement he still had not constructed a successful masculinity and his academic and employment horizons were still limited. They were only widened after a discussion with one of his tutors and it was following that conversation that Donal began to consider HE:

---

[13] FETAC: Further Education and Training Awards Council

> I never thought about it [until then but] I had to see could I do it.
> I had to get it out of my system ... I figured well, the next step is
> going to college. I had to sample it. I had to see what it was like.

Despite his parents lack of a higher education they were very supportive of his decision to return to education.   Donal noted that everyone was 'very encouraging to me. "Is there anything we could do? etc. We'll help you out".' While he felt that his parents and his friends 'have always been there really', he felt his brother was particularly supportive as he offered hands-on, practical help.

In retrospect, Donal believed that he could have done better at school if he had applied himself but his inability to construct a viable masculinity through academia or the sports field had left him with a lack of self-esteem and self-confidence, both of which hampered his chances of doing something more challenging. This led to the belief that he was stupid and so he believed that he did not have the application to complete a course in HE because of his stupidity. By passing his Leaving Certificate he was able to construct a new masculinity, that of a learner. It helped him prove to himself that he 'wasn't dense, that I could do a course and stay with it.'   This realisation acted as the motivation to apply to HE and continue learning.

Maintaining a Masculine Identity in the Face of Retirement

The final group of participants had spent their adult lives in work before reaching retirement age. Retirement did not sit well with these men. Their constructions of masculinity meant that men were always employed and doing something useful – retirement want not really an option for them for various reasons.

Ireland in the 1960s, when the three participants grew up Ireland, was a very different place from today. The country was differentiated along traditional gender lines, where men were the breadwinners and women the homemakers who reared the children. The masculinities that the three participants in this group constructed were differentiated along traditional gender lines. Aongus, Séamus and Niall had grown up with and adhered to this gender differentiation meaning that to a work ethic that called for them to provide for themselves and their families (Ferguson, 2001).   Despite the fact that as the oldest participants, they could qualify for

retirement under the retirement plans of their respective employers, the three participants wanted to work. Seamus and Niall saw retirement as the steppingstone from one job to another via HE. Aongus, the oldest participant and the one closest to retirement age, was unemployed when he applied to HE. He too was using HE as a steppingstone as he neither wanted to be unemployed nor retired. Table 19 shows their ages and employment status at the time of the interview and the courses they chose to follow in HE.

Table 19 - Maintaining a Masculine Identity in the Face of Retirement

Name	Age	Employment Status	Previous Employment	HE Course
Séamus	51	Retired	Fire Fighter	BBs Business Studies – HRM Stream
Niall	53	Retired	Primary School Teacher	BSc IT
Aongus	62	Unemployed	Accountant	BBs Business Studies

Séamus

Séamus who was fifty-one, was living at home with his wife. His two children who had their own homes lived close to their parents.

Séamus' construction of masculinity meant that he went to work after he left school. When he left school he became a fire fighter, a particularly trying job that required a lot of physical stamina and resolve. As the physically demanding job was getting harder he decided to retire after 'thirty years full time service, which in the public service means that forty years is full time, for pension purposes.' Séamus did not identify retirement with sitting at home with his 'pipe and slippers.' For him retirement meant the chance to try new things. He was determined to use retirement as a chance stretch himself and to follow a fresh direction and meet new challenges.

His parents came from poor rural backgrounds and as secondary education was not free, they only received a primary education. Both parents had been married before and had children. When they married they had several more children including Séamus who was the youngest of their fifteen children. While his mother

cared for her husband and the children, his father worked for the council. It was not 'a rich man's job [but] a good steady job' that allowed him to provide for his family but only to a certain extent.   Education was important to the family but it was 'a fair hurdle for [him as] ... Ireland back in the sixties ... was very, very poor.' Séamus was very aware of how hard it was for his father who could only afford to educate his two elder sons up to the age of fifteen, which was Junior Certificate level:

> In those days ... my dad had to pay £9.00 a term. The wages at the time in [the] council was £9.00 a week. So effectively speaking two weeks wages every term was dedicated to educating his two eldest sons.

While Séamus talked about his siblings he only talked of one brother who became a builder. By the time Séamus and two of his sisters went to secondary school fees had been abolished. After school one sister became a nurse and the other a 'qualified radiographer ... out of the rest of them, they just have first level education.'

Séamus got on well with both his classmates and teachers in school. He said:

> I was never bullied or harassed. I was always a confident kid. I could always speak for myself ... I was always lucky. I was a very bright kid going to school, which again came back to the theory things, languages.

Séamus constructed a very confident masculinity at school because of this and because of the support of his family. His academic and social confidence left him with fond memories of his school days yet even though he passed his Leaving Certificate examinations he had no desire to go to HE. The Leaving Certificate examinations were 'quite hard [and he was] effectively burnt out [with] no mental discipline' or aptitude or patience for HE. All he wanted to do was to leave his studies behind him and do what many other men of his generation was doing, getting a job and earning money so that he 'could have alcohol and … bring girls out.' It was a decision that he came to regret:

> It would have been nice to have a professional qualification at the age of twenty-three or twenty-four and off I very well go, like ... It would have been nice.

Séamus' career was difficult and demanding but also gave him the opportunity to continue his learning. Interspersed with his periods of active service he attended many courses related to the Trades Union representative side of his career. He enjoyed this side of his job and knew when he retired that he wanted to continue working and that learning would give him that opportunity. There was, after all, 'no point in … vegetating, bringing the dog for a walk and all that.' Knowing this he explained that he had eased himself into retirement as he had:

> prepared for two to three years before I actually left the fire
> service. So there was a planned, systematic evolutionary move.

He realised, despite the work related courses and his school successes he needed to ease back into education. As he did not really identify himself as an academic at that point, he chose to do this in stages and opted for a one year Foundation Course that would allow him to update his learning skills and prepare him for HE. He was very determined to do the course even though it began in September and he did not retire until the following February. By juggling his shifts he managed both his job and the course. He worked from a:

> quarter past nine to quarter past one every day, five days a
> week, but I only attended [college] on the Friday morning. So, I
> had to make all sorts of arrangements, swaps and take holidays
> and had to come after being on night shift all night, but that was
> a commitment I made.

He thoroughly enjoyed his course and when he completed it he applied to HE to become a full-time student.   During the interview, he was asked about his commitment 'and everything like that [and] within forty minutes I had convinced them that I was capable of going through the four-year process out here.' Séamus' wife supported his decision to go to HE as did his two children. While his children were proud of him they had no interest in HE when they left school and were a little bewildered by his decision to go to HE. Unlike their father who believed that education was a way to avoid retirement [and to continue working], they believed that once he retired he should be:

> cutting the grass and walking the dog, and driving a taxi for a
> nice cosy living. Going to the pub in the night and awaiting the
> grim reaper and all that.

This though did not fit in with his ideal of what it meant to be a man. The Foundation Course had challenged and inspired Séamus. He was 'always interested in third level education (HE)' and so was determined to continue his studies and through them open up new opportunities. When he started his honours degree in business he had 'been retired a few months, and as they say the rest is history.'

Niall

At fifty-three Niall, who had never married, lived on his own close to the IoT. While he was glad to have retired after thirty years of teaching he found himself with too much time on his hands and a dwindling pension. As a result he started to question his decision and began to ask 'What am I going to do with myself? I've got to do something else' especially as he was dipping into his capital and there would come a time when he would not be able to adequately provide for himself.

Niall's mother died when he was eight and his father, who was a house painter, found it difficult to cope with four children. His elder brother was in HE and while the second eldest son stayed at home with their father, Niall and his younger sister went to live with their aunt and uncle.   While his aunt looked after the children and the household, his uncle ran his own carpentry business. Niall's elder brother was being trained by the Christian Brothers (an educational religious order) to become a Brother and a teacher, his second eldest brother went to the local Technical school rather than to the Christian Brothers as people who attended the 'tech … would have more skills with [their] hands' as their father expected his son to become a painter like himself. Niall believed that 'my second brother … didn't have the opportunities we had and ended up being a painter like his father [before] eventually joining the army.' Niall's only sister did not receive any formal education and stayed at home as she had a condition 'similar to Down's Syndrome but not quite.' Niall persuaded his uncle and aunt to pay the fees to send him to the Christian Brothers school at 'eleven or twelve … in order to get me in the Christian Brothers' college at eighteen as he too wanted to become a Brother and a teacher.

Secondary school had 'its ups and downs' yet Niall soon learnt 'you toed the line and you learnt … "the way" .' For Niall masculinity in school was constructed

around academia.   Mastering the "the way" or becoming a good student was important to Niall as corporal punishment was still permissible in schools in the 1960s and being a good student was one way to avoid such punishment.   Niall remembered that while the teachers 'were fine ... most of the teachers administered [corporal punishment] judiciously.'   Despite this Niall settled down and made friends and found school 'quite enjoyable' by the time he was studying for his Leaving Certificate examinations.

His identity was tied up in education and when he left school he went to HE.   He 'did one-year teacher training, then ... went down for a number of years and taught in a Christian Brothers school, and ... came back and finished ... training.'   All the way through school Niall had constructed his masculinity around academia but he also constructed it around religion.   He always believed that when he graduated he would become a Christian Brother.   The self-belief and identity that was so strong during his school years changed.   During the five years that Niall took to qualify he changed his mind about becoming a 'fully fledged' Brother choosing instead to remain as a lay teacher.   Niall moved further away from the masculine identity of a Christian Brother when he chose to become a primary school teacher, a branch of the profession that is predominantly filled by female teachers.   When he got his first job in a primary school Niall moved away from home.   Four years later he moved to his second primary school which was about two hours' drive from the family home.   Niall explained:

> At the time I was thinking I might work here for a while and then
> go someplace else. [I] was only going to be [there] for four or
> five years.

After eight years in the same school he realised that while he 'didn't hate teaching ... [he] just hated the discipline problems ... [and] hated [his] job.' He 'chanced [his] arm' and opted for a career break. He spent three years in the Arab States teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) before returning to Ireland. Niall had hoped to extend his career break but it was a fixed term contract and he had no option but to return to home. He returned to the same school and managed to stick 'it for about ten years' but, in his mind, primary teaching and the school itself had changed. He

hated the 'disruptive environment [and] couldn't cope' with the fact that the respect that teachers used to have was no longer there. Although not a physical job in the sense that Séamus' job was physical, it was still a demanding job and so at the age of fifty he had 'had enough of the job' and chose early retirement.

While he was relieved to get away from the stresses of teaching Niall had not given retirement a lot of thought. He had been so used to being active and working that his inactivity meant that after some months he did not know what to do with himself. He came to the realisation that at fifty-two he was not an old man and as he did not see himself as 'retired [he] had to do something.' Although Niall was happy that he had graduated from HE with a degree in education, he believed his skills were limited. He did not see himself as a 'real man' as he believed that he did not have the skills and knowhow that real men have. He was not an 'ordinary bloke':

> I do regret that the only thing that I can do in my house is to change a light bulb and you know, what do you call it? Fix a plug. I can't do anything else with my house. I cut the grass but I don't know how to put in a pane of glass or anything, any of these things that ordinary blokes would know.

While he believed that he was not old and that, despite working he did not have real men's skills, he knew that he had to go back to work so that he could do what real men do and provide for himself. With this in mind he investigated a number of FÁS courses including one using 'machines, and you know … [making] things out of raw materials.' Niall's masculine construction though did not include practical skills. Even though he wished that he was more practical Niall decided against a FÁS course in a practical subject in favour of something more academic. After talking with a Career Guidance Counsellor he decided to choose to build on his previous academic skills and so opted to do computing. The 'opportunity [to apply to HE] came through the CAO on a course here' at Declan IoT and he took it. Although he spoke with the Career Guidance Counsellor about his options he did not talk to anyone else about his decision to return to HE. As Niall had been away from home since he was fifteen 'either in college or in teaching jobs' he was not in

close contact with his family. He had been in control of his life and actions since leaving school and considering himself to be independent he explained:

> I lived for the last ten years on my own so I make my own decisions. I don't know that I needed ... support to do it. I just did it, and whether I did it or not wouldn't have mattered to them [his family].

His decision to return to HE was due to financial necessity and the fact that retirement was not fulfilling, either practically or financially. While he needed to find something to do, something new that would enable him to work and thus provide for his future he also wanted something to challenge him as he was 'not an old man.'

Aongus

Aongus who lived at home with his wife was sixty-two when interviewed. He had four grown up children all of whom had moved away from home. When his boss downsized the firm Aongus was made redundant. Although he was close to retirement age, his masculine identity meant that men worked and so he did not want to retire nor did he like being unemployed. He wanted to get back into employment as this was what men of his generation and previous generations were used to doing. He decided that applying to HE was the way to achieve this aim.

Aongus' father graduated from HE while his mother only completed her education up to primary level. Once married, his mother became the homemaker staying at home to raise the family while his father who 'would have been an engineer, qualified' went to work to provide for them all.

When Aongus was growing up secondary education was not free but his father's good job earning a high wage meant that he could afford to educate his nine children. Before they married, Aongus' three sisters 'worked in commercial offices' when they left school. When Aongus and his brothers were growing up, many catholic households hoped to have one son who would become a priest. Aongus' mother harboured this hope and so Aongus and his five brothers went to the seminary to train to become priests after they left school. Of his five brothers only

two became priests. The other three chose not to complete their training but went to HE and became engineers.

Aongus' memories of school were mainly negative. He remembered it as a regime that doled out punishment which 'wasn't a very pleasant experience.' He believed that he was 'educated in the ... regime where might was right, corporal punishment was a part of ... the regime.' Although some of his teachers were 'quite good ... a good proportion of them were not great educators.'

When he left school he did what many young men of his time did and bowed to his mother's wishes that he become a priest. He dryly observed that when he entered the seminary he only 'went to see if my mother's vocation would work for me or not.' His HE experiences were not positive and left him 'slightly disillusioned.' Regularly the staff referred to him as 'a blot, a berk', which he sardonically referred to as 'great encouragement.' Eventually Aongus realised that he did not have a 'true vocation [and that] the church ministry was not for me.' He left the seminary after four years and he could have taken time out to decide what he wanted to do but men worked and so he immediately got a job in an accountants' office. He had been so 'discouraged by college' that Aongus's academic self-confidence had been affected. He chose to identify himself as a worker so much so that even though he:

> had the opportunity of doing [courses whilst at work ... it]
> would have meant the necessity of having to do exams. I
> wasn't very much in favour of doing exams at that time.

Aongus' work ethic saw him work in several accountancy offices throughout his working life. While working in his last job in 1996 his boss decided to downsize the business and some of the staff were made redundant. Aongus was kept on and offered the chance to retrain in a work related course. While he did not see himself as a student Aongus signed up for an accountancy course and graduated with a diploma. Although not directly said, Aongus inferred that he did the course because he knew he needed to update his qualifications in order to remain in his job. Despite this retraining and upskilling and after forty years of being employed Aongus lost his job.   Unemployment did not sit well with Aongus, it went against the grain of what men did:

> I was getting really pee'd off being unemployed, like. Over
> fifties, unqualified, difficult to get a job.

During this time he read a newspaper advertisement detailing a Foundation Course. The course was designed to help prospective mature students return to education and HE in particular. Aongus thought that he could use such a course as a means of securing future employment thus confirming his masculinity.   After talking it over with his wife, Aongus applied for this one-year further education course. He was wary of committing himself to HE and a longer course as he had been away from education for some time and so he wanted to construct his identity as a learner in small manageable stages. As he explained:

> I certainly wouldn't, at my age, jump in and do four years,
> without dipping my toe in and see whether you could do it or
> not, or whether it was for you or not.

Aongus graduated with a Further Education Training and Awards Council (FETAC) award and then applied to HE. Despite his success he was conscious of being able to create a viable masculinity as a worker once he left HE. To do this he needed to be able to get a job and so sought the advice of the local mature students' organisation as to which course would be the best one for him and for finding a job once he graduated. He looked at science courses and engineering courses before choosing an honours business degree course.   This course was related to his previous profession thus enabling him to utilise the skills that he had amassed during his long working career.

Aongus' four children had attended HE and three graduated with degrees and Master's qualifications. One of his sons dropped out of HE after two years choosing instead to become a garda. His wife and children supported his decision to return to HE and once he became a mature student his children delighted in teasing their father - the student! He laughingly explained that they enjoyed:

> slagging me, because I mean, they say when they were in college
> I would be slagging them, "Have you got your work done? Have
> you got your projects done? Are you studying?"... It's good fun.'

Despite his children's teasing, he acknowledged that student life meant that he was no longer totally independent or the provider of the family. He also said that life as

a student would not have been possible without the support of his wife and his children.

Section 2 – Choosing and Studying in an IoT

Section one of this chapter traced each participant's learning career and considered how and why they decided to 'return' to HE. While each of the men had different learning careers prior to HE, there were similarities in their experiences of HE. Part Two of this chapter looks at these experiences and focuses specifically on the reasons why the participants chose Declan IoT, their reasons for choosing the courses that they did and their experiences of studying in the HEI.   These experiences centred on their own perceptions of HE, the course they opted for, the course content as well as their relationships with their lecturers and the younger students in their classes. Their perceptions of HE and the way that they interacted once there were predicated on their previous learning careers and levels of self-confidence. Some viewed HE with 'trepidation and uncertainty' (Osborne et al., 2004) while others felt that the ability to put the 'tricks of the trade' (Murphy and Fleming, 1998, p. 1) into practice would help them to 'fit in' (Reay, 1998) and so adjust to life as mature students.

Deciding to Study at Declan IoT

The fourteen men in the research study opted for Declan IoT for a combination of reasons predicated on their individual or familial desires and commitments and finances.

Eight of the men chose the IoT because of their familial commitments and its proximity to home. Five of the students chose Declan IoT specifically because it offered the course they wanted and one was there because he did not get into his first choice course.

Figure 2 shows where the participants lived in relation to the IoT and while seven of the participants lived in and around the IoT the others lived between twenty-five and sixty-four miles away, the latter necessitating a daily round trip of four hours.

Figure 2 - Distance Between Home and Declan IoT for the Participants in the Study

Donal

41 miles   Aongus

Lorcan   and
Gearóid

28 miles

29 miles

Cormac

26 miles

Séamus,
Niall,
Fionn,
Colm,
Ronan,
Conn,
Pierce**

Eamon
25 miles
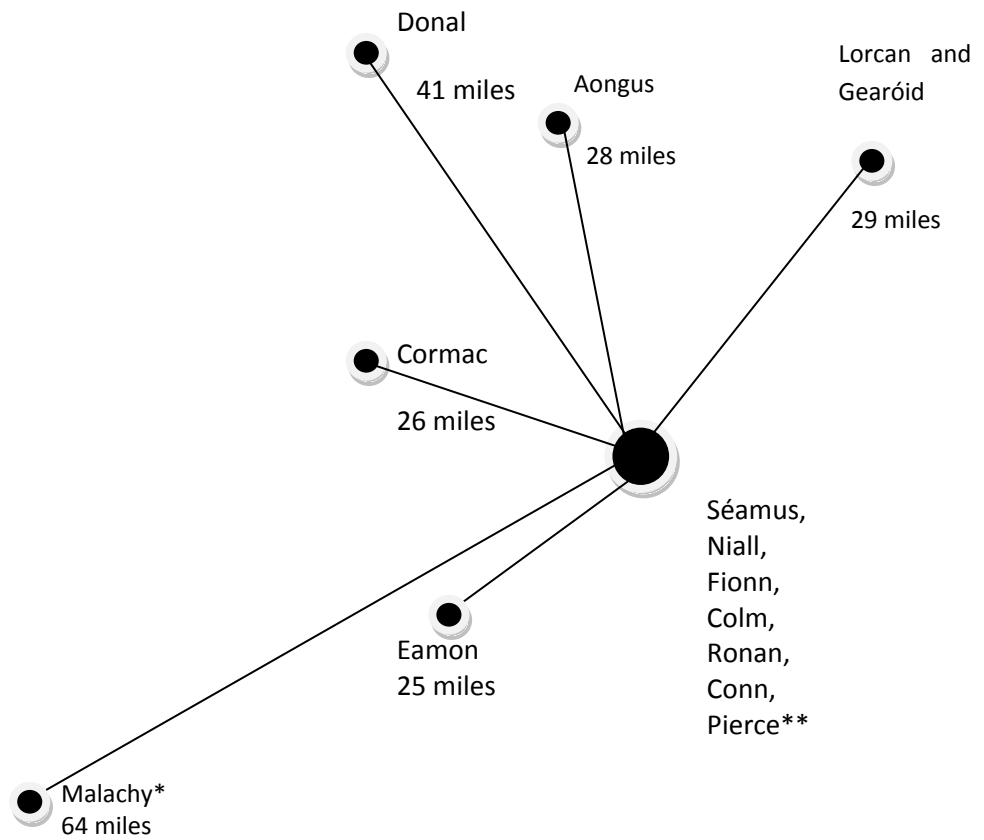
Malachy*
64 miles

Malachy* - out of all of the participants, Malachy had the longest daily journey to the IoT. Although there was an IoT in his home town he chose to attend Declan IoT.
Pierce** - of the fourteen interviewees, Pierce's family home was the furthest away from the IoT. The journey was too long to make on a daily basis and he was the only one who rented a flat close to Declan IoT.

While Figure 2 shows where the participants lived in relation to the IoT, Table 20 details where they lived and with whom.

Table 20 - Where and With Whom the Participants Lived

Lived in Parental Home	Lived Alone in Own Home	Lived with Spouse/Family/Partner in Rented or Own Accommodation	Lived Alone in Rented Accommodation
Eamon	Niall	Séamus	Pierce
Gearóid	Lorcan	Fionn	
Colm	Donal	Ronan	
Cormac	Conn	Aongus	
		Malachy	

Ronan, Fionn and Séamus were bound by family commitments which meant they had to choose Declan IoT because it was near home and family. Despite the familial constraints, there were compensations. They lived in their hometown and knew the area and the IoT itself making the transition to HE easier.

Ronan who lived with his partner and did not want to 'move away from home' had grown up close to Declan IoT and so did not have to 'settle in' to a new area when he started HE. Fionn and his family lived with his sister and Declan was 'close to home and [was] convenient' to his sister's house. Living with his sister meant that he did not have major financial worries as he did not have a mortgage to pay. An added bonus to living there was that he had 'some connections' to the town which made it easier for him to settle in as he still had some friends in the town. Séamus' wife was unwell so he had to stay close to home. He was happy with this decision as he 'didn't want the hassle of travelling' and having spent all of his working life in and around the town and having completed his Foundation Course in Declan he too knew the area and the IoT very well. He knew the layout and workings of the IoT as well as some of the staff, making the transition from the Foundation Course to his fulltime course easier. Although Conn did not have familial constraints he too was a local and 'was living local [and I] know everywhere in the land [area]. [I] know the town. [I] know a lot of people here.' This was important to him as he did not have to find his way around a strange town while trying to settle into student life.

Although Colm had not come from the town he chose to live with his parents not just because it was comfortable but because the IoT was not far from their home making it 'convenient and ideal you know.' The proximity of the IoT as well as the

support and companionship he got from living with his parents was important to Colm. Cormac lived twenty-six miles away from the IoT and his daily journey took an hour each way. Despite the distance he claimed that he chose Declan IoT for 'it's location really, geographic location' and the daily journey helped 'help wake me up [as] I'm a bit more alert - rather than get out of bed and straight into college.' He had thought about getting a flat in town but explained:

> I am just a bit too comfortable at home ... it's just myself and my
> mother so maybe that's why it's so comfortable for the two of
> us.

For Niall the fact that the IoT was 'next door [meant he] didn't have to travel [as it was] only twenty-five minutes away.' The closeness of the IoT had added benefits in that he did not have 'travel expenses or accommodation expenses [as he would] in someplace.' Gearóid's choice was also predicated on the fact that he lived with his parents and their home was close to the IoT. His choice, he believed, had been foisted on him. Initially Gearóid wanted to move away from home but chose to stay with his parents as it would prove to be too expensive to move out of the area. Going north to study 'was way too far away and I would have had to pay for residence, for seven days a week, it would have been a lot more money [it was] closer ... easier to get back to and from home [and] cheaper.'

Donal, Lorcan, Aongus, Eamon and Pierce all chose the IoT not because of its location but because of the courses it offered. For Donal and Lorcan the fact that the IoT offered them the courses that they wanted to do meant that they were prepared to make the long round trip to and from HE each day. Lorcan wanted to extend his computer knowledge and the 'forensic computing part of the course' appealed to him. He had seen his ideal course advertised in the local paper and argued that 'had [the course] been advertised anywhere else [and] I could have made it to school [if it was] somewhere close to home' he would have applied. He 'certainly wouldn't [though] have travelled to like [up north] or somewhere to do the course [as he had] bought a house [thirty miles away].' Lorcan insisted though that it was the course itself and not the location that was the main draw for him.

While support was an important factor in Eamon's decision process, and in particular his father's support, course choice was ultimately the deciding factor. Despite being offered a place at another IoT, it 'was the Declan where I wanted to go' because the computing and physics course that Eamon wanted to study was only offered there.   Aongus also had the support of his wife and the chance to study in an IoT that was closer to home. He chose Declan IoT though because he had completed his Foundation Course there and, more importantly, it offered him the course he wanted to follow. Pierce wanted to do construction but believed he 'didn't have the points … 500, 490 or something like that' for the IoT that was close to home and so had look further afield. Initially he looked at 'a lovely college' but its attrition rate was very high and as 'it was quite small ... I didn't go there.' Declan IoT was quite distant from his home but his girlfriend's recommendation and the fact that she had graduated from the IoT, along with the fact that he 'had the points for here now' for the construction course he wanted saw him apply to Declan IoT. Due to its distance from his home he rented a flat in town as his family home was too far away to do a daily commute.

Malachy was the only participant who did not get into the HEI of his first choice. He rationalised his disappointment by saying 'I prefer here. [My first choice] wouldn't have the name that Declan has' but unlike Pierce he preferred to travel home each night. He lived the furthest from the IoT but was prepared to make the two hour drive each way because he wanted to return home to his girlfriend each evening.

Deciding What to Study

The fourteen participants had either been employed continuously or episodically since leaving school and their jobs had influenced the HE courses for which they had opted. Seven of the participants wanted to go back and work in the same area as their previous employment. They, therefore, chose to upskill by following courses that were in the same field as their previous employment. The remaining seven participants wanted to change direction altogether and work in totally new areas. They chose courses that allowed them to reskill. Table 21 lists the interviewees and the jobs that they did before coming to HE. While six of the participants were in fulltime employment and gave up their jobs to return to

education, six were unemployed and two were retired. The participants can be divided into two groups according to their reasons for choosing a particular course: they either wanted to upskill and so improve their skills in order to get a job in same area as their previous employment or to reskill in order to change careers.

Table 21 - Relationships Between Previous Employment and Employment Status and Chosen Course

	Name	Age	Employment Status	Previous Employment	Course	Reasons for Choosing the Course
1	Aongus	62	Unemployed	Accountant	Bachelor of Business Studies (Hons)	To upskill in order to get a job in same area as previous employment.
2	Eamon	34	Unemployed	Programmer; Care Assistant	BSc (Hons)in Computing and Physics	To upskill in order to get a job in same area as previous employment.
3	Cormac	31	Unemployed	Purchasing Officer/Manager for Electrical Computer Contractor	BSc in Commercial Computing	To upskill in order to get a job in same area as previous employment.
4	Lorcan	40	Employed	Art Installer; Mechanic; Computer Repairer	BSc (Hons) in Forensics	To upskill in order to get a job in same area as previous employment.
5	Fionn	40	Employed	Construction; Cabbie; Plasterer	BSc (Hons) in Construction Management	To upskill in order to get a job in same area as previous employment.
6	Colm	38	Unemployed	Mining Assistant; Carpenter	BSc (Hons) Construction Economics	To upskill in order to get a job in same area as previous employment.
7	Malachy	26	Unemployed	Security Guard; Chef; Steel Fabricator	BEng in Building Services	To upskill in order to get a job in same area as previous employment.
8	Niall	53	Retired	Primary School Teacher	BSc in Information Technology	To reskill and change career.
9	Séamus	51	Retired	Fire Fighter	Bachelor of Business Studies (Hons)	To reskill and change career.
10	Donal	37	Employed	Motor Mechanic; Maintenance Worker	BA (Hons) Sports Studies	To reskill and change career.
11	Gearóid	35	Unemployed	Doctor's Receptionist	BSc (Hons) in Applied Computing	To reskill and change career.
12	Ronan	30	Employed	Labourer; Factory Operative; Leaflet Distributor	BSc in Multimedia Applications Development	To reskill and change career.
13	Pierce	25	Employed	Corporate Broker	BSc (Hons) Construction Economics	To reskill and change career.
14	Conn	25	Employed	Bar Manager; Call Centre Manager	BEng in Building Services	To reskill and change career.

Upskilling and Reskilling

Lorcan reasoned that his computer repair business would not last as computers were cheaper to buy than repair. As he liked 'learning things' the forensics course had sparked his interest and would allow him to build on his existing computer skills. It also offered modules in areas that he had not covered before and as he 'like[d] exercising the brain' he believed the course suited him well.

The course Eamon chose allowed him to utilise his computing skills while pursuing his interest in physics. As 'a programmer ... I want something a bit more, to challenge me ... I hadn't done physics as a Leaving Cert student but thought I'll chance it anyway.' The added bonus for Eamon was that the IoT was close to home and he was able to live there thus getting the familial support he needed. Like Eamon, Aongus, was unemployed when he applied to HE. He was very pragmatic about his choice and while he had been offered a place in a HEI closer to home he realised that although it:

> would have been more convenient ... they didn't have a Foundation Year. So I certainly wouldn't, at my age, jump in and do four years, without seeing whether dipping me toe in and seeing whether you could do it or not.

The Foundation Course 'offered [Aongus] three choices: art, accounting or science ... I wasn't an artist, my wife is. I certainly had no interest in science so I took the one in the middle.' Choosing accountancy meant that he would be able to use the skills and knowledge that he had built up during his working life. Cormac shared the same view. His previous career had been in computing and while he chose to go back to computing he wanted something to push him a little further. The course he chose allowed him to use his previous knowledge of computer architecture whilst gaining skills in software development.

Fionn had reached the top of his profession whilst living in New Zealand and had acquired a great number of skills in the construction area. He wanted to be able to build on these skills but in a area of construction that would not be as strenuous as plastering. He chose Construction Management because:

> that's where I've got my experience. Because if it was anything
> else I'd be turning my back on twenty years of experience in a
> job that I'd be hoping to do.

He reasoned that he was of an age where he needed and wanted to do something to improve his career prospects and having spent time:

> looking enviously at the guys working in the office [whilst] out in
> the rain and the frost and all that made me realise there's
> probably better things in life than climbing scaffolding at 7.30 in
> the morning.

Colm had spent twenty years in the construction industry and 'felt that I was a good manager, you know with the experience I have in the [area]. I have a lot of experience with large ... projects and I have some management experience.' Despite his skills he did not have the self-confidence to enrol on the honours degree course as he 'felt four years might be a bit long.'   The course he applied for was a two year certificate in construction which he 'felt ... would be achievable.' During the interview for the course, he discovered that the course was no longer running but was offered the three-year diploma instead. Even though he 'was still unsure of whether [he] had the academic wherewithal to get there', Colm took 'a gamble' and enrolled on the course in Construction Management thus ensuring he could use the skills that he had acquired during the 'twenty years of experience in a job.'

Niall, Séamus, Donal, Gearóid, Ronan, Malachy, Pierce and Conn all wanted to change their careers. Pierce and Niall had been in good jobs. Niall's job was particularly secure and offered a good pension. The others were in what they considered dead-end jobs, jobs without prospects.

Niall had disliked his former career so had taken early retirement because he no longer found teaching satisfying. His interest in computing and the prospect of a new and different career were the reasons for his course choice:

> I already had a computer for about five, six years, and I knew a
> little bit about computers. So I said I would do a course in
> computing because, as well, I'm thinking that it's the future.
> They are the new place to find work.

As a fire fighter, Séamus' job involved not only the emergency services duties but trade union duties. During his career, Séamus attended a number of courses and

had 'a feel for third level' so when he opted for an honours degree in Business with a human resources slant it not only allowed him to develop a new career but also to utilise the skills that he had picked up whilst working in the union. Donal's belief that his job as a Maintenance Worker was not going to lead anywhere had brought him back to education. He was 'passionate' about history and while he wanted to do that when he completed his Adult Education course, a discussion with his tutor persuaded him to opt for a sports course instead. His tutor believed that as he already had a sports qualification, one he had studied for during his free time when not working, he would 'have more of a liking for sport' as he had many sporting skills and so was more of a sportsman than an historian.

Gearóid's previous job was unrelated to his business qualification. He was fed up being unemployed and decided that he had to go back to HE and it was the fact that he 'was kind of wanting to do the science' that indirectly took him into computing. He had 'applied for just about every different type of science course even Archaeology [but] got nothing back' so when he was offered his second choice at Declan IoT he accepted. Unlike Gearóid, Ronan was employed. He had been a labourer but moved away from this hard life in favour of a 'dead-end job' distributing leaflets. He had always harboured an interest in education and particularly in computing. After talking to a friend he decided to apply for a computing course in the hope that he would be able to reskill and be able to use these skills in education:

> I don't want to be in a big [computing] competitive field. I think I
> would probably end up in education at some point ... I could see
> myself later in life teaching or in education at some point.

Malachy had had a number of jobs before starting an apprenticeship in the construction industry. After his serious work accident and prolonged stay in hospital Malachy knew that he could not go back to his old job. He spent a number of months completing his rehabilitative training course before doing the PLC course in construction technology. His tutors advised him that he was 'still a bit young' to go to work and that he should continue with his education. As he liked the course he decided to apply to HE to get a degree.

Pierce had come to dislike his previous job and wanted something more challenging. Although he had worked in the financial industry and opted for a course in Construction Economics the emphasis of the course was on Quantity Surveying. He explained that although it was quite different from his previous career, there were some similarities:

> As a part of the job, you deal with a lot of businesses and a lot of companies and a lot of industries. So I dealt with the construction industry quite a bit - dealing with large contractors ... I thought Quantity Surveying would be good because it's not only a job where you're dealing with construction - it's a bit of buying and selling. It's a bit of talking - so I was pretty good at it so that's why I chose it.

Conn had dropped out of a HE engineering course at eighteen but had retained his interest in the subject. When he decided to go back to HE Conn chose engineering because of his interest in the subject but also because he had some knowledge of it. His jobs as a bar manager and in a call centre had not stretched him. It was while working in a call centre that he realised that he needed to get out of his 'dead-end' job. Despite being promoted to manager he knew he would never have the opportunities that engineering offered. He chose engineering as that was 'his first love' and he had some experience in the field having started an engineering course when he left school.

Expectations and Realities of Studying

Of the fourteen interviewees only four had experience of HE or 'College Knowledge'[14], that is an understanding of how HE worked and the academic demands faced by students. Despite this each one had expectations of HE but their expectations did not always match the reality of being a male mature student. Their experiences of studying and interactions with staff and students did not always work out as expected.

To help students to acclimatise to life in HE most HEIs organise open days. Such events allow the students to meet lecturers, ask questions about life in HE and to walk around the HEI thus getting their bearings for when they start their courses.

---

[14] Title taken from: Murphy, M. and Fleming, T. (1998). *College Knowledge: power, policy and the mature student experience at university*. Maynooth, MACE.

However only Cormac attended this session. He explained that the open day had allowed him:

> to break down some of those small boundaries, just to familiarise yourself with the place or just to have a look around the place to a degree on your own.

When he started HE Cormac was more comfortable and at ease than he would otherwise have been. He also soon realised that the impression that:

> everybody knows everybody and you're the one person who stands out [was not true. It was] just a matter of getting familiarised with it.

Although he 'didn't really have any huge expectations' about starting HE Cormac wanted the chance to improve his skills and make friends. He was surprised and disappointed therefore when there were only fifteen students in the class:

> I would have liked to have been in a bigger class because it would have maybe given you a bigger scope for social life outside of it.

Malachy, Lorcan and Pierce's opinions of HE were based on assumptions rather than actual knowledge as they had not attended the open day or had attended HE before. Although Malachy hoped that HE was going to 'be different', he still believed that it 'was going to be like school.' Lorcan 'certainly wasn't expecting it to be like school' as his school experiences had left him with a 'chip' on his shoulder. He was disappointed, therefore, when he started HE because he felt that he was being treated in the same way as when he was at school. He believed the attitude shown to the students was not appropriate, especially when a large number of the students were mature students. It was demeaning to be spoken to as though he was a schoolboy:

> Certainly when we first came we were being talked to as if we were ... or I felt I was being talked to as if I was a seventeen or eighteen year old again.

Pierce had not really known what to expect but was pleasantly surprised especially with the timetabled hours. He had expected quite a heavy workload but 'only' ended up with 'seventeen hours in the first year.' This came as a relief and it 'was great like, so much free time.' Aongus knew a little about HE through listening to

his four children 'bitching about having to do this, that and the other' when they were at HE but it 'had no relevance' to his life and consequently it was only 'when I arrived that it made sense then alright.' Aongus had completed his Foundation Course at Declan IoT and so had an advantage as he knew:

> how the ... card works, not like a greenhorn walking around here. You know where the canteen is; you know how the library works; you know where the lecturers' offices are.

This too was true for Séamus. Knowing how the IoT operated made:

> it a lot easier for me ... I know an awful lot of the general staff ... I know a lot of the lecturers ... I'd know people from clubs, societies, business, politics, sport and things like that. So I would be a face that would be well known. A lot of people would know me.

Although Conn had dropped out when he had attended Declan IoT before he too knew how the IoT operated. Even though he had an advantage as he 'knew the layout of the college ... knew the class structures, lectures – how they work', he readily admitted that he still had a lot to learn. He was unprepared for 'the stress of college' especially as he had not mastered the art of time management.   This was his 'own fault for not tackling tasks or things that we were given on time.' He left assignments until the last possible moment thus increasing his workload and stress levels.

While not having attended Declan IoT before, Gearóid had an understanding of what was involved in being a HE student. This knowledge was reassuring and helpful and while he:

> had some ideas in my head from when I was younger ... I had a few romantic ideas about it, but generally I didn't have too many misconceptions [this time].

Niall's first experience of HE at eighteen had left him with misgivings so much so that he asked himself:

> Am I doing the right thing by going back into the same kind of academic education? Should I have gone through some other ... ...?

He hoped that his second experience of HE:

> wouldn't be a repeat of the way we were teacher trained, which
> we weren't! We were educated, then you were dumped into a
> classroom to figure it out for yourself.

Niall hoped the IoT approach would:

> be on training people rather than the academic approach to
> educating people but that's [not] what's happening. I find it's
> mostly academic here again, and a lot of training that I'm looking
> for is up to myself. Maybe that's the nature of this kind of
> education.

His expectations were not being met leaving Niall unsure of HE and of his abilities.

He had completed a two-year certificate course and was starting the diploma when

he was interviewed. Niall admitted that the third year was a 'culture shock [and]

woken him up' as it was more demanding and required him to do more for himself:

> There's a major gap here and it's got to be filled. It's dragging
> me towards it by showing me that there are things I've got to do
> that the college can't do for me, you know … There's a lot of
> work that you have to do yourself.

Being comfortable and at ease in the IoT was important to the interviewees and

affected how they interacted with the HEI. It had a part to play in how they coped

with their class subjects and in their daily encounters with their lecturers and the

other students in their classes.

College Knowledge: Learning the Game

Séamus believed that there was an art to getting through HE, an art he called the

'game.' In order to do well in HE mature students had to learn how to play the

game and once they knew the rules of the game, especially concerning

examinations, it would be possible to get through HE:

> I learned how to give them the answer that suited. I learnt how
> to play the marking system, so if there's a question with twenty-
> five marks and twenty of them are going for this, I don't give a
> toss about the last five … I just want to learn how to get fifteen
> out of twenty.

Séamus admitted that it took a year and a half to learn how to play the game and

'be comfortable' in Declan IoT. Both Ronan and Donal admitted that it was hard to

adjust to being in HE and the process that enabled them to be 'comfortable' was

hard on a number of fronts. Ronan's fear of 'not being good enough' was due to his lack of self-confidence and resulted in him questioning the decision to return to study in HE. Donal also questioned his abilities and feared he would not be able to pass his examinations as he thought he would not be able to 'remember all this for the exams.' He had found it difficult to establish a routine for learning as there were 'so many notes and information' and speculated that perhaps 'techniques in learning, note taking [and] study methods would have helped.' The IoT offered study skills courses aimed specifically at mature students. The aim of these courses was to help mature students improve their examination techniques, note taking skills and essay writing skills. Only Eamon and Aongus attended these courses. Both had joined the courses through the belief that they needed to improve these skills and both believed the courses had helped them to adjust to life in higher education. Anogus especially believed that without the help of the study groups he would not have been able to do the work and meet his deadlines.

All of the participants accepted that they had to attend classes and meet their deadlines but they all expected a lot from their lectures. The lecturers were ultimately responsible for the participants learning as they had the power to structure the lectures in a way that enabled them to learn. The participants' opinion was that if they did not get through the courses then the primary responsibility lay not with them but with their lecturers and their approach to the classes. As a result the participants had a number of views and expectations of their lecturers. Gearóid believed that 'the lecturers [who] are very good ... make it easier. Some of them are [who are] not so good - they make it harder.' Lorcan had:

> a couple of really excellent teachers and couple of really boring teachers as well, there's kind of a mixture. There's one particular teacher that nobody in the class seems to be able to learn from and then there's another one who has huge enthusiasm for everything and is just a buzz to be around.

The participants not only wanted their lecturers to be enthusiastic but also expected them to be on top of their subjects and be fully prepared for their classes. Lorcan was annoyed that:

> A lot of the people who are instructing us here don't seem to put
> in any preparation beforehand. They sort of turn up and waffle
> through for a half an hour or whatever.

Colm believed that while preparation was important, the lecturer should not only be 'giving you something of value [that was] easy to understand'   but that the students should be 'busy in every lecture.' Pierce too wanted lectures that had 'more than enough in them to cover you.'   The participants wanted the class material to be set out in a structured and logical way as this, they believed, would help to ensure positive results. For Donal a structured approach was the difference between a positive and negative class:

> Once I could get a structure - lay it out and in whatever format - I
> could understand it ... but if it's just thrown out there, which
> some did, some people just fire it out in any format, I found it
> very hard to put it together. Their message just wasn't getting
> through to me.

Colm was firm in his belief that 'from a lecturing point of view' if a lecturer did not give the lead and the lecture was not structured and s/he was not prepared then 'you can't expect a student to be.' This was Pierce's opinion also. He wanted his lecturers to be well prepared and to deliver lectures that were 'structured [and] laid out properly.' While Lorcan also wanted 'Somebody who goes through stuff in a logical order' he also wanted someone who would put him first and give him 'time to take notes and ask questions and answers your questions to the best of their ability.' Fionn also wanted someone who could communicate the material to the students in a way that was effective. One lecturer:

> just tells us stories about how it's applied ... that's the one I
> enjoy - makes it sound real, the theoretical stuff ... you're
> enthralled in the class everything is happening so fast ... We
> have one lecturer in particular - he's very, very interesting. He's
> a kind of all-round song and dance man, a joker and yea, he
> makes the stuff interesting.

Initially he said that this was an ideal approach but then noted that the downside was that while listening 'you can't take notes, so you have to try and memorise it.' Conn too, found that 'It's either get the notes down and look over it myself or get some of the notes down listen to the explanation so it might stick that bit better.'

This lack of time did not allow the students to ask questions and resulted in a lack of understanding that in turn led to anxiety. Conn felt:

> very rushed to get it down on paper before that slide is moved...
> We do have a lot to cover. The lecturer would move from
> subject to subject, within maths, very quickly, without everybody
> in the class fully understanding him, or him making sure that
> everyone in the class understands.

Lorcan appreciated the dictates of the curriculum and was quite sympathetic to the teaching staff:

> It's not the fault of the bloke who's teaching us because he has a
> syllabus to cover and a small amount of time to do it in ... It isn't
> his fault he has to cover the stuff.

He believed that the fault lay with timetabling and that it should 'be modified slightly to give more time to the poor bloke who's trying to hammer maths into us maybe.' Lorcan believed that while it was 'hugely hard for anybody' the pace of the lessons was also dictated by the other students in the class. As most of them had just finished their Leaving Certificate examinations and had 'done a lot of the stuff previously' he assumed that they found the subject easier 'although in chatting to them they don't seem to.' In class, Lorcan wanted 'slow and simplistic' classes where the lecturer covered 'little stuff in a lot of time' rather than classes where the lecturer had to 'lash[15] through it at such a rate' in order to cover it all.   He did not 'mind not understanding something at the time once I would have the tools to be able to understand it if I want to study it later.' Eamon found lectures hard because 'He does everything on the board which is grand because you can see him doing it, but then when you come away from it, it's hard to remember what he did.' He found it hard to compile a full set of notes as the lecturer 'is very intelligent, he jumps from one thing to another.' For Eamon it was a simple matter. The lecturer 'just has to give out some more hand outs.' Both participants believed that a full set of transcribed notes was the tool that would enable them to get the most out of their lectures. Fionn shared the same view:

---

[15] In Ireland, to lash through something means to go very quickly.

> The notes are good in that you can review them, revise them at
> your pace, and you can kind of make sense of them in your own
> way.

Aongus and Séamus were in favour of having the notes but ones they could access before class not just during them. For Aongus, having the notes before class meant that he would be able to concentrate on the lecture instead of doing 'all this writing.' For Séamus having the notes in class would reduce the amount of work that he had to do. His writing was 'atrocious ... absolutely chronic' and he spent a lot of time rewriting notes outside of class which took up valuable time:

> I had to go into the class write down this in my terrible writing,
> go over [to the library] and spend a good three quarters of an
> hour typing up the notes ... working from memory - not being
> able to read the words sometimes, and remember what was said
> in class ... I had to do that at the end of every class for the whole
> year. So there was a lot of time that went into that.

He approached the lecturers and while some were very willing to help him out and either 'gave me the hand outs beforehand or gave me notes through email' others were not so forthcoming:

> There was one particular lecturer ... who shall remain nameless,
> and I went to her and said 'Is there any chance you can give me
> notes?' "No", she said "that's not my style of operation and if I
> did that other people would be saying that I have given you a
> privilege."

Séamus acknowledged this would give him an advantage but felt that as his writing was so bad *and* the fact that he was a mature student qualified him for that privilege but 'She wasn't prepared to extend any consideration to me on the grounds of privilege and other people might look at that as wrong or unfair.'

Perceptions of Course Content

The interviewees had strong opinions about the modules on their courses and were not always prepared for what they were expected to learn or how they were taught. At times the interviewees found the approach taken in class not only baffling and disconcerting but confusing which in turn affected their self-confidence.

While for Eamon life in HE was what he expected and he got a 'nice buzz [from being] in the thick of things' he had not expected that 'the work would be this hard.' Séamus too had 'expected it to be tough but I didn't realise that it was going to be as tough' a sentiment expressed by Malachy. He explained that he 'probably thought that it would be easier. It hasn't been easy.' For Niall the mainly student directed approach to one subject caused him great concern:

> In Project ... there are no lecturers, no practical, no tutorials ...
> You create the project yourself and you develop it, and this was
> so baffling. We have a whole course for which there are no
> lectures, no tutorials, no practicals and we have to do it
> ourselves and for the last two months, since September, we are
> in the dark.

Gearóid found the course content 'heavy ... very heavy' and neither Ronan nor Pierce understood the relevance of all of the modules being taught. In Pierce's opinion, two of his subjects were so straightforward that it was 'pointless stuff, very, very mundane.' For him, Strategic Management, which dealt with how to work as part of a team, did not need to be on the curriculum as it came either naturally or not at all:

> You will learn in the workplace and it's something I don't think
> you can be trained for. You're either a good team worker or
> you're not a good team worker; it's all about your personality.
> Some of it is useless.

Although he did concede that 'maybe the guys who are nineteen odd use it' he was not convinced. He was equally scathing about the communications module:

> Communications is absolutely ridiculous. How to write a letter,
> you know? I don't see it has any relevance to anyone.

Séamus was a little more measured in his criticism of the course. While he admitted that 'some subjects bored the pants off me' his previous experience and maturity enabled him to see the necessity and interrelation of the course modules. He was able to acknowledge that 'any degree has to be ... relatively broad' and include various modules, some more interesting than others. Séamus particularly disliked the practical element of the course as he was 'not a very practical person [more] a theoretical kind of person.' Lorcan, though, believed that with theoretical

subjects 'You tend to learn an awful lot of stuff that you can't really apply to anything.' Aongus felt that the theoretical classes were often a waste of time:

> Do I see ... any rationale and any benefit in ... doing the theory as
> to why this is how this formula is put together when I have been
> using it for the last twenty-five years? ... I have difficulty with
> that.

While Aongus was used to 'Putting the formula in, hitting a button on the computer and having the answer come out!' he admitted that the difficulty he had with the theoretical subjects was 'simply because the mind is slightly closed.' While Pierce had 'no time for that stuff; I'm just black and white - life you know what I mean? ... Simple as that', Fionn believed the 'theoretical stuff [was] a mine field. It's difficult to get your head around.' For Fionn the practical classes reminded him of work he had done before and so were more relevant and enjoyable because 'it's more of kind of personal stuff' and he could see the connection unlike some of the theory classes, which were more obscure.

Donal believed that a practical 'hands on approach' to learning was the best approach and four of the participants who had problems with mathematics felt the same. The problems ranged from the simple problematic to being 'over their heads' thus causing severe worry and anxiety. Fionn felt 'Maths is like a different language to me, it's a subject I kind of struggled with in school.' The fact that the mathematical difficulties he had experienced in school resurfaced in HE were irritating but not daunting. He was quite philosophical about the problem noting that 'I think most people who haven't been to third level education struggle with maths.'   He would not allow these problems to dominate his HE experience and was confident enough to ask his classmates for help.

Malachy's level of confidence had been badly affected by his maths classes at school. He was initially very discouraged in HE because the maths was hard. He explained:

> First when I came here I wanted to leave it, I hated it so much,
> because I was doing maths and ... I just had it in my head that I
> couldn't do maths ... I just couldn't get my head around it.

He did, though, have the fortitude to keep going and found that the answer to his problem was to stick with it and keep practising:

> The subjects … after the first month or two they just click with it like. Things just start making sense to you and you just want more and more, it's great like.

Conn's approach involved doing 'a sum a few times [until] you get into a sort of rhythm' while Colm found that the only way to deal with this difficult subject was to 'work very hard at it' and that involved putting 'extra time into it.' The participants' experiences and maturity helped them to develop a more proactive way of dealing with their mathematical problems as their motivation was to pass the module and eventually graduate from HE.

Academic Relationships

Mature Students and Lecturers

The relationships that the male mature students built up with the lecturers were an important part of being in HE as they were the conduit through which the male mature students could learn. The participants felt that this relationship was an important aspect of life in HE and that lecturers should act in certain ways. This attitude of the mature students to their lecturers and the way they interacted in class as well as their academic performances were predicated on whether the lecturers differentiated between the mature students and the younger members of the class.

Seven participants did not want to be seen as different. They were happy that mature students were not seen as being different from the rest of the class and were treated the same as the rest. Lorcan believed that he was 'treated very much the same as all the other people' as did Eamon, Malachy and Pierce. Aongus said that he was not treated differently 'in relation to being marked and the expectation of the lecturer.' Gearóid did not believe that he was being treated differently whilst in class either, but he did believe that he was 'just a number.' Students are considered to be mature students at twenty-three and the younger mature students were at times indistinguishable from the younger students, something

Conn discovered by chance. One of his lecturers did now know he was a mature student and 'only found out ... when he pulled [a friend] aside to speak about a matter relating to mature students.' The lecturer had not realised that Conn was the mature student and Conn was happy with this as no distinction had been made.

Colm believed that there were advantages and disadvantages to being a mature student vis-à-vis the lecturers. The advantage lay in the fact that he was able to talk, to communicate with them on a more even level:

> I'd shoot the breeze with them ... and stop and have a smoke,
> talk about life matters or whatever ... The communication there
> might be a bit easier than a younger student.

The disadvantages arose when the lecturers used his status against him and singled him out from the rest of the class, making him different:

> It can be quite difficult as a mature student because you can be
> held up as an example and your work used as an example of how
> to do things ... and that can be uncomfortable.

Colm wanted to have things both ways. He wanted to be able to talk with the lecturers in a way that the younger students could not but equally he did not want his maturity to be held against him. By holding him up as exemplary, he was marked as being different by the students and lecturers. He wanted to fit in and not be seen as different, i.e. as a swot. Both Fionn and Malachy were happy to be treated differently as they believed that the lecturers were more courteous to them because they were mature students. This consideration boosted their self-esteem as they felt their contributions to the class were worthwhile.   Fionn noted that the lecturers 'tend to be more respectful of what you've got to say' whilst Malachy felt that lecturers 'probably took what I said a little more seriously than some of the kids, especially if things got a bit heated, which occasionally they did.' Malachy qualified his viewpoint by saying that this was because lecturers felt that mature students were there to learn. They liked having mature students in their classes as they made class discussions more dynamic. Malachy certainly felt that they were closer to the lecturers who were adults rather than to the other students who were 'the kids.'

Although Malachy felt lecturers were happy to welcome mature students to class not all of the interviewees agreed. Niall believed that lecturers could view mature students as something of a problem and so preferred the younger students. The problem stemmed from the fact that mature students were not so malleable and were more likely to voice their opinions by 'making intelligent challenges, asking why something isn't this or something isn't that [whereas] younger quieter students are not going to do that.' By using the word 'challenges' Niall was happy to create a 'them and us' scenario thus putting a distance between himself as a mature student and the lecturers. For Donal his age was an advantage and one that he was happy to use.   He challenged one lecturer when he took him to task over comments he made about student life being easy. One of the younger students disagreed with the lecturer but her opinion was dismissed because of her age:

> I remember one lecturer passed a remark, which I found
> derogatory: students have plenty of time to study. I spoke my
> mind … I think he took me more seriously than one of the other
> [younger] girls who said it to him.

Séamus also believed that mature student verbal challenges were not welcomed by the lecturers who had a set way of doing things and did not like to be confronted:

> the senior people out here, if they are discommoded in any
> shape or form, it's a major, massive blow to their way of doing
> business.

The way that the mature students interacted in class rested not only on their levels of self-confidence but also on their personalities and attitudes.   Unlike Donal, Séamus believed that the best course of action in such situations was to remain quiet. When discussing a topic in class he found that 'If I said "black" she would say "white" ... she doesn't relish my input.' He felt that although the lecturer was approaching the topic 'from a very management oriented background ... she didn't want my input. I knew instinctively that on that occasion I should have kept my mouth shut.' He resolved to refrain from commenting in the future partly because she was in a position of authority and he wanted to 'show her respect and dignity' but also because he was worried that any confrontation would be detrimental to his grades. He only had a few months to go before 'she'll be marking my paper in

May. What's the point?' For him the best course of action was to say nothing.

Gearóid had strong views about his lecturers and was quite angry that there was a

disparity between their approaches. This disparity affected his classroom

experience and his examination performance:

> One lecturer … is excellent and if you go to him with problems,
> he'll sit down, he'll talk to you until you understand it … but
> there are other lecturers and I think the fact that they come into
> class - they think that's unique and special, we should be blessed
> to see them, and they don't do very much. Their teaching is not
> great, if you get it – good; if you don't get it - tough sh**.

Like Séamus and Gearóid, Malachy also believed in the power of the lecturers. He

believed that the results he achieved in his examinations were directly related to

the quality of the teaching and not to his subject input or revision techniques:

> If I had a good lecturer it was demonstrated in my exam results,
> whereas if I struggled with the lecturer and they just didn't
> stimulate me the exam results were definitely poor.

The lecturers were not the only ones who affected the participants' HE experiences.

The way they interacted with the other students in their classes had a bearing too.

Mature Students and Younger Students

The participants had mixed relationships with the younger students. How well they

interacted depended on whether they were on or off campus. Off campus

interaction depended upon where the mature students lived in relation to the IoT,

their familial circumstances and their ages.

While there was a big age gap between Eamon and Anogus they both found

socialising difficult because of where they lived. Eamon noted that with 'the last

bus leaving at 9 pm [it] means I couldn't attend social gatherings.' Aongus dryly

explained that as he did not live near the IoT he was happy to:

> go to class parties provided that somebody drives me home at
> three or four o'clock - waits while I change and shower. Drives
> me back down to the class party and then drives me home at
> two am in the morning. Nobody has volunteered to do that yet!

Ronan's reasons for not going out with his classmates were twofold. He had

neither the money to fund the evening nor wanted to give up his time with his

partner to go partying. He was concerned about this as he thought that the other students could interpret this reluctance as snobbish. At thirty-one, Cormac saw himself as 'a bit older than some of them' and believed the younger students preferred to socialise with friends of their own age outside of class. They tended to do 'their own thing and they have their own groups … outside of college' a belief also held by Niall. Like Cormac, he believed the younger students had their own 'cliques [and went] their own separate ways' outside of class.

Although it took a number of weeks, the classroom relationship between the mature students and the younger students did develop. When Gearóid had problems with some of his subjects he received help from the other students, which was invaluable. He was mature enough to be able to ask for help and freely admitted that he 'wouldn't be able to do it only for the classmates.' Lorcan also found that the students helped each other. While Lorcan's 'brilliant classmates' tended to divide amongst age groupings as 'Us mature students more or less hang out together and the kiddies all hang out together' the groups were not exclusive. 'We do chat to each other and help each other out as well.' Lorcan attributed this good relationship to the fact that he 'never matured or grew up so I get on with the kiddies brilliantly.' Donal's preconceived ideas that building relationships with his classmates would be difficult meant that he was determined not to be concerned with the younger students. He resolved to stay on his own, as he was sure that he was not going to get on with them. The plan did not work though. He found that he 'had a ball with all the students in the class, really I did' and that he made some very firm friends.

The happy relationships built up by Gearóid, Lorcan and Fionn were not true of all of the other interviewees. Some of the participants believed that there was a distance between them and the younger members of the class, a distance brought about because each group was unsure of the other. Fionn noted that the other students were 'intimidated by the older mature students' because they were 'basically the age of most of the other guys' dads.' Fionn explained that he did not object to this mental distance which also resulted in a physical one. He noted that

the other students 'tend to leave a little space around me' but he didn't mind as 'I can put my bag down and my coat.'

While Fionn reasoned that it was a natural reaction as they 'were greatly younger' than him he did admit that one or two might ask him for his help but there were 'none that would greatly offer it.' Colm described his classmates as 'a nice bunch, friendly' but generally it was the female students who tended to ensure that he was 'alright [and] wasn't alienated.' He believed the younger male students viewed him 'more as an authority figure [and tended to] behave themselves when they're with me or around me.' Séamus saw himself as 'very young at heart' yet he too was conscious of the mental distance between him and the other students. He believed that while he was approachable and helped them when they needed something he was not their friend. He was 'just the chap who sits at the top of the class with the bad eyesight who has to be close to the board.' To him their attitude represented all that was bad about higher education yet it was an attitude that was not only directed at mature students:

> They won't share notes with each the other, they won't give each other any assistance, because in the very, very near future they're going to be in competition with each other for jobs, so nobody's going to have an edge. This is their mind; this is the way they think. Now maybe they're right. Maybe the world has changed a lot since I was twenty or twenty-one years of age.

Summary

The first part of the chapter followed the participants' learning careers as they evolved through their childhood up until they became mature students in Declan IoT. The second part of the chapter focused on the participants' experiences of being mature students in HE; the course they chose to study, the expectations and the realities of being a mature students including the academic aspect of HE and their relationships with their lecturers and classmates. Since leaving school the fourteen participants had followed different pathways all of which provided them with different experiences. These experiences influenced the decisions they took which in turn affected their different routes back to education. Whilst they

followed their own paths through HE there were, however, commonalities of experience.

The participants in the study wanted to work and they saw HE as a way to achieve this. HE would give them a second chance (McFadden and Strut, 1995; Kasworm, 2005). Availing of HE, as mature students, allowed them access to the educational opportunities that they did not take up when they left school at eighteen (AONTAS, 2013a). It would allow them to improve their career prospects through providing access to greater opportunities and rewards of new working lives (Tett, 2000; Reay, 2003).

The participants in this study had all constructed their own individual form of masculinity. For them HE would allow them to provide for themselves and their families (Christiansen & Palkovitz, 2001) through the opportunity to find employment and getting proper jobs (Ball et al., 2000) thus being real men. Being in employment is very important to men (McGivney, 1999) and for all of the men who took part in this study work was the driving force that brought them back to education. They saw HE as a chance to rejuvenate their working careers through re-engaging with their learning careers in HE. This positive step (Archer and Leathwood, 2003) for those of working age would enable them to achieve their aims finding better jobs (Tett, 2000; Reay, 2003) and escaping the drudgery of unrewarding employment or unemployment (Maynard and Pearsall, 1994; Archer, 2003). The retired participants also saw HE in a positive light and welcomed the opportunity to be men and so therefore adhering to what it means to be masculine. They would be able to provide for their families and themselves but also be able to be part of a community and avail of the intellectual stimulation that HE gave them (Maynard and Pearsall, 1994).

Overall a number of themes come out of this data analysis. The data shows that the decision to return to HE was influenced by various factors including family attitudes and commitments and previous experiences of education. While previous work experiences, familial support, family pressure, unemployment and retirement had directly or indirectly brought them back to education, course choice was predicated

either on their previous jobs allowing them to upskill or their desire to try something new and so reskill while the location of the IoT and the courses being offered by the institute were significant factors in the decision making process.

Fragile educational identities as a result of school failure (McFadden and Strut, 1995; Reay, 2002) or of what they perceived to be their own academic failures had limited the horizons for action of a number of the participants. Most of the participants did not see HE as being a realistic option when they left school at eighteen because in the main they were not academic achievers (Mac an Ghaill, 1994).

The data highlights the fact that these mature students used HE as a means to an end, as a way to upskill or reskill, depending on their levels of self-confidence. Family support was important outside of HE but being able to rely on their peers inside HE was enormously beneficial whilst lecturer interaction was fundamental to their successes and instrumental in their failures.

The data shows that the men adhered to social constructions of gender (UTD, 2011). This is a determinant of the way in which men behave (Maynard and Pearsall, 1994; Mac an Ghaill, 1994) which in turn affects the paths that they follow in life.   They wanted to continue to be the providers, to be doing something meaningful and useful with their lives and came to realise the value, to them, of a higher education in achieving this.

Through life experiences the participants came to see education and HE as a way of finding better jobs and so live comfortable lives (Burke, 2007b, 2009). The horizons for action that had been affected by school and by employment had changed and they wanted a second chance either as 'returners' (McFadden and Strut, 1995) or as 'second chance students' (Kasworm, 2005) to go to HE and take up the educational opportunities that HE offered them (AONTAS, 2013a) and reap the rewards that such an education would give them.

Chapter 8 – Discussion: Returning to and Experiencing Higher Education

Introduction

The narratives of the fourteen men who took part in the research study were presented in Chapter 6. The participants' learning careers were grouped to reflect four key themes related to their experiences: A: Academic Achievers: constructing masculinity and identity through engagement with education, Group B: Construction of Masculinities Through Conflict with Education, Group C: Discouraged Learners and Group D: Maintaining a Masculine Identity in the Face of Retirement. Their learning careers did not always go in the direction that they had expected as life events caused them to reconsider and change direction. These different life events also acted as the triggers for returning to education in a HEI and often coloured the experiences they underwent when they became male mature students. The second half of the chapter looked at the participants' experiences once they became mature students in HE. The participants' narratives explained what it was like to be a mature student, how they saw and experienced life in HE and the various factors that made up these experiences.

This chapter uses Bloomer and Hodkinson's (1997, 2000a) concept of learning careers to discuss the research data. The first section of the chapter uses learning careers to frame the discussion of why the participants became mature students in HE. It looks at the factors that made up their learning careers before studying in the IoT including the structured and unstructured support mechanisms of school and family and friends. In the second half of the chapter learning careers is used to discuss the experiences the participants encountered in the IoT.

The Learning Careers of Male Mature Students

A learning career mixes constantly changing events and interests and can stop and start or go backwards. These events and activities (Kerka, 2003) ultimately affect a 'person's dispositions to learning' (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2000a, p. 74). These dispositions are built up through various experiences and determine the course of a

person's learning career and the decisions that they make about the degree of involvement that they undertake with education. The events and activities that affect the trajectory of a learning career include those encountered at school and the type and depth of support that an individual receives from family and friends (Connell, 1989; Archer et al., 2001a).

Looking at the learning careers of the participants it is possible to understand that a learning career is not linear (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2002; Ecclestone and Pryor, 2003; Crossan et al., 2003) and that dispositions to learning, as a result of the events in people's lives, influence the trajectories of learning careers. An individual's learning career is a 'mixture of events and activities that are constantly in a state of flux - being shaped and reshaped [affecting] a person's dispositions to learning' (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2000a, p. 74). Dispositions to learning are shaped by school experiences and the school's 'socio-emotional climate' (Lynch and Feeley, 2009, p. 42) affects these dispositions. Harsh, inflexible rules produce difficult school experiences which can result in 'damaged lives' (Smyth and Hattam, 2002, p. 376) and compromised learning careers. A sense of empowerment and emotional confidence (McMahon, 1997) that can be achieved through a happy relationship with school is 'undermined within a discriminatory school system' (McMahon, 1997, p. 28) and can have lasting effects on the way pupils see themselves and their constructions of masculinity as borne out by the participants' narratives. The informal support mechanisms that are supplied by family and friends are important as they help to dissipate these experiences but they do not expunge them. This support gives mature students a sense of empowerment when re-engaging with their learning careers through raising their levels of self-belief and self-confidence.

Whilst self-belief and self-confidence play an important part in the construction of a viable learner identity, the way in which one sees oneself is also based on one's gender. The way in which a person behaves and the paths that they follow through life are 'ruled' by their gender. Being a carer and being a provider for example are very clearly defined traditional roles associated with women and men. Whilst the boundaries between these roles are not as clearly defined as they once were

people still often feel the need to conform to them. Gender roles define how people behave and to some extent determine the pathways they follow. Gender is an important basis upon which people construct their identities. This was true of the participants in this study.

The identities and masculinities that they constructed were formed along traditional lines. When they chose to re-engage with their learning careers, they all chose HE courses that could be clearly identified as traditionally male oriented courses and which had a link to their previous jobs or interests.

Research has shown that men from lower socio-economic groups participate in HE in lesser numbers than those from higher socio-economic groups due to financial and familial backgrounds (Britton and Baxter, 1999; White, 2001; Coolahan, 2007). Although not directly asked, the socio-economic backgrounds of the participants can be inferred from the employment status of their fathers' and from the schools that they attended. Only six of the participants had fathers that can be classified as being in the middle to higher socio-economic groups. Of those only three sent their sons to private schools or paid their secondary school fees. Of the fourteen fathers, eight had only gone to primary school while four had attended HE. Ten of the participants had little experience or example of higher education and as such, followed a traditionally masculine pathway and did what their father's did, and sought work after leaving secondary school. Of the four participants who did go to HE, two went to please their parents while the other two followed their brothers' examples. The other participants who did not go to HE at eighteen did not do so because they saw HE as bookish (Archer et al., 2001) but because the identities and masculinities that they had constructed for themselves were not very positive and so did not see HE as an option; they either had negative opinions of their academic abilities or were 'burnt out' after completing their Leaving Certificate examinations. Both of these self-imposed and constructed beliefs barred them from HE participation.

It has been suggested that men from lower socio-economic groups find work in the same field as their fathers (Britton and Baxter, 1999) or look for secure jobs (Parr,

2001). Of the fourteen participants, only Ronan became a labourer like his father when he left school. All the other participants either got very secure or relatively secure jobs including fire-fighting, computing, accounting and teaching or bar work. Although the latter was not as secure as the other jobs, when Conn first got his bar job there was plenty of (casual) work and little worry about being unemployed. This was true of Fionn, Colm and Malachy all of whom entered different branches of a flourishing construction industry that had a continuous supply of work.

Constructions of Masculinity

As discussed in Chapter 3, masculinity is a social construction (MacInnes, 1998) and it is shaped by factors that include family background, friendships, schooling and labour markets. The masculinities that the fourteen participants in this study constructed were based on a combination of these factors. These constructions were not static but fluid as the participants constructed different masculinities at different times due to different circumstances. As their school lives and family circumstances changed so too did the way the participants saw themselves and the way they constructed their masculinities.

The masculinities that the participants constructed in school were mixed. Some chose to engage with school and some not. While 'the majority of boys learn to negotiate school discipline with only a little friction' (Connell, p. 162) the identities that Lorcan, Colm and Ronan developed brought them into conflict with their schools. Their 'protest masculinity' (Connell, 2000, p. 162) meant that they railed against school and its rules. For these participants, and Lorcan in particular, 'rule breaking becomes central to the making of masculinity [especially] when boys lack the resources to acquire or defend prestige' (Connell, p. 163). For Lorcan, the rule breaking was a response to the fact that the prestige he had had in school due to his identity as a successful rugby player was stripped away when he turned away from the sports field. The only way he and the other two participants could redeem themselves as they were not academic or allowed to shine through sports was to rebel.

Conn and Pierce constructed their identities through academic success. For them being successful in school and being academic achievers was an important part of their identities. They chose to construct their masculinities around their academic achievements and this included working hard and choosing subjects that were tough and not perceived as feminine.

The retired participants, Aongus, Séamus and Niall, also did well in school and built their identities, like Conn and Pierce, as conformers. They did well in school but the way in which they oriented themselves to education differed mainly because of family background. Aongus and Niall followed family directives and moved into HE whilst Séamus wanted to be free from the confines of education and opted to go to work.

The others participants were rather different. They were not high academic achievers but neither were they overtly rebellious and they struggled to form and construct identities and masculinities in relation to school. They did not overtly construct a 'protest masculinity' but were rather surreptitious in their protests against school which manifested themselves in not trying hard. As a result they distanced themselves from school and looked elsewhere to construct identities. For them school was not a hugely successful experiences and they did not leave school with great feelings of achievement.

All of the participants left school facing different futures. These futures were very much dictated by school successes and failures which impacted on the way in which they saw themselves. The way in which they saw themselves at school and how they fared when there had a direct bearing on the direction that the participant's learning careers took post school. The sense of self and self-belief along with their view of masculinity that they had constructed in school directed them towards or away from participation in further studies.

By going to HE as mature students the participants were changing their learner identities and moving from what they considered to be unrewarding lifestyles to successful ones, with the ultimate goal being a degree that would open up the world and give them better opportunities. When they applied to HE their levels of

self-confidence varied. Although worried that HE would be like school, Malachy had increased his self-confidence from the level it was at when he left school through the course he was in prior to becoming a mature student. Aongus and Seamus had ensured that they had put 'their toes in the water' by completing Access courses before signing up. Gearóid and Conn called upon their previous experiences of HE whilst the others relied upon their life and job experiences to help them through. Despite this they all had quite fragile identities at first and for the duration of their courses, the participants continually reconstructed learner identities, identities that were 'exaggerated or ameliorated by relationships with family, friends and partners' (Brine and Waller, 2004, p. 103) as well as with their lecturers and the other students on their courses. They wanted to be successful, to be achievers and move beyond the masculinities that they had established whilst in school and at work.

Being 'masculine' is often associated with being strong and tough and independent (Mosse, 1996; Gough and Peace, 2000) but it also means being successful.   When the participants applied for HE, they had come from situations where they wanted more. They had been in dead end jobs, unfulfilling jobs, were unemployed or facing retirement. Wanting more meant they wanted to reconstruct their lives and their masculinities through achieving better and more fulfilling lives and this they believed could be achieved through going to HE. This 'reconstruction [w]as a route towards a middle-class profession and lifestyle' (Brine and Waller, 2004, p. 104). It was an act of 'becoming', becoming better men and 'invoking an ideal and respectable masculinity' (Burke, 2007a, p. 422) by being able to engage in 'intellectual rather than manual labour, [being] comfortable (but not too wealthy) and financially able to support a family' (Ibid.).

Returning to Higher Education

Formations of Gender and Masculinity

Whilst their futures and the way they interacted with their learning careers were dependent to a large extent on school it was also based on other factors. For example family background and support has been found to constrain the choices

that young people make (Brooks, 2002) at eighteen and equally support is important to them as mature students engaging with their learning careers. The literature notes that a supportive family or partner 'significantly assists the motivation and persistence of adults engaged in programmes of study that demand a considerable amount of time' (p. 42 McGivney 2004b) and was true of the majority of the participants.

Some parents were delighted that their sons had chosen to return to education and offered as much help as their sons permitted them to give. This ranged from offering them shelter though to the 'odd thousand euro' and simply just asking if they needed anything. Others like Cormac and Fionn were saddened that their parents 'had their own lives' and did not offer much support. In such cases the participants turned to other family members, Cormac to his aunt and Fionn to his siblings and his wife. This support, as Aongus noted, was invaluable and sustained them through their studies. For those in relationships returning to HE can have a disrupting effect upon the routine of the family so it was important that they had the support of their wife or partner. This was very true for Malachy. His partner's support was very important to him and it was her encouragement that saw him become a mature student. He was aware though that such support is finite. He knew that he had to pass his exams and graduate in the allocated time as his girlfriend was already becoming a little anxious about his student status.

The participants 'Supportive relationships encouraged [them in] the (re)construction of [their] learner identities' (Brine and Waller, 2004, p. 103). All of the participants, except Niall, depended on the support of others to re-engage with their learning careers in HE and so change their identities. Although Niall did not have external family support he did depend upon the support of the friends he made in HE and to a lesser extent on his tutors in order to be able to see himself as an achieving student. This support was important to all of the participants. For many, school teachers were equated with a lack of achievement and the participants wanted a different relationship with their lecturers. Their new identities were bound up with their lecturers' efforts. Conn, Lorcan and Colm all believed that if they failed then it was primarily the lecturers' fault. Séamus did not

have this opinion but his identity and masculinity of the confident, in charge male, was challenged when he discovered that his lecturer did not welcome his input in class. He changed his identity from the outgoing interactive person that he had been all of his working life to the 'head down' student who accepted the lecturer's opinions in order to pass the course.

School and Dispositions to Learning

The fourteen participants attended three different types of secondary school. Eight attended local Christian Brothers schools, two attended vocational schools, two attended community colleges and two were privately educated (See Chapter 2). The type of school they attended meant they followed either a mainly academic (Christian Brothers) or academic and technical pathway (Vocational and Comprehensive). However, the data reveals that across the schools there were similarities in policies and practices and in teachers' attitudes and behaviours which impacted on the participants' learning careers and their dispositions to learning. All of the participants constructed their masculinities in or out of school. The positive masculinities and identities were constructed as a result of positive and successful school experiences. Those who constructed anti-establishment masculinities or looked beyond school for their identities found that school was not conducive to learning and left school with a negative sense of self.

Orientation to School

School affected not only the masculinities and identities that the participants fashioned for themselves but also their subsequent learning careers. Gearóid, Aongus, Lorcan, Colm and Ronan thoroughly disliked school and after all the year since leaving school their recollections of school evoked uncomfortable memories. School had not been successful for them and they all saw themselves and their academic skills in a less than positive light. Research by Smyth and Hattam (2002) states that when students find school socially difficult it is because they feel 'trapped within inhospitable and antagonistic school structures, practices and ideologies' (p. 376) that can result in antagonistic behaviour which can be passive or belligerent. This was particularly true of Lorcan. His 'protest masculinity' was the response to what he saw as a discipline oriented 'aggressive school culture'

(Smyth and Hattam, 2002, p. 380), which brought him into confrontation with his teachers when they tried to impose a disciplined approach to sport. The school Lorcan attended was a sports oriented school and as Lorcan was a gifted sportsman he was greatly supported and encouraged by his teachers. When his construction of masculinity changed as a result of personal reflection he chose to give up sport and it was at that time that he believed his teachers' attitudes changed. Their attitudes became more distant and hostile as he was no longer supporting the school and this affected his dispositions to school. His rebellion saw him separate himself from the sporting activities of the school but not the academic ones. Ronan and Colm's rebelliousness and distancing from school were based on the form of masculinity that they had constructed for themselves. They wanted to be more sports oriented rather than academically minded and so saw themselves as sportsmen and rebelled when they were not given full reign to indulge their masculinities. For them academic work leant toward the feminine side of schooling. Gearóid's response to what he perceived as a lack of encouragement from his teachers was to 'sleep through all of school.' Aongus' construction of masculinity was to be strong and he achieved this through his passive response to corporal punishment. Rather than reacting aggressively he saw himself as a victim of corporal punishment, an attitude that saw him 'endure the beatings.' Although they had negative attitudes to school Gearóid, Aongus, Lorcan, Colm and Ronan all left school with their Leaving Certificates. This indicated that they understood the importance of certification once they left school but also that they did not want to be identified as total failures and passing the Leaving Certificate meant that they had some control over their futures. Their learning identities and the masculinities that they constructed were quite fragile though and their memories of their time in formal education impacted so deeply that only two of these five participants went onto HE at eighteen (and that was due to familial influences rather than an appreciation of education). As they did not readily identify themselves as academics they both experienced difficulties once there. Aongus had gone to HE because of maternal pressure but because it was not in keeping with how he saw himself and his future he dropped out before completing the course. Whilst not directly bowing to family pressure Gearóid too followed his brother's example.

While he failed his first year he very much wanted to be a success and so re-took his first year. His self-confidence had been affected by this failure as it had in school but his determination saw him graduate with a diploma two years later but it fell short of the degree that he wanted.

The remaining participants had varying views of their school days and their experiences which impacted on their learning careers. All of the participant's dispositions to learning, which were shaped by positive and negative experiences (Bloomer, 2001), had changed over time as had the direction of their learning careers. The participants had created negative and positive masculinities and while negative school experiences often result in a break in one's learning career, positive school experiences do not always mean that students choose to continue their learning careers in HE after they leave school at eighteen. Séamus, Conn and Pierce were very confident and did well in school but none wanted to go to HE at eighteen as they felt 'burnt out' after the Leaving Certificate examinations. Niall built his masculinity around compliance. He learnt to play the game in school. He kept his head down to avoid 'judicious corporal punishment' and while he did well at school he only went onto HE because he wanted to follow in his brother's footsteps. The other participants had varying levels of achievement at school.   Their masculinities did not fit in with the sporty or academic achieving masculinities and they felt distanced from school. They believed that school did little to help them academically as they did not get the level of support and encouragement necessary to boost their levels of self-confidence enabling them to apply to HE. Four of the participants failed their Leaving Certificate examinations but only Eamon and Fionn re-sat them and passed. Donal and Malachy had constructed very negative views of themselves and were too dispirited to re-sit. Their self-confidence in their academic abilities was very low and the lack of school guidance or encouragement caused them to leave school rather than re-sit their examinations. In fact Donal did not identify with education on any level as his self-belief had reached rock bottom. He was a failure and as such considered himself to be stupid. For him stupid people did not get a higher education so why would he bother trying? He, like the others,

sought other paths and chose to go to work and build his masculinity through the traditional male avenue of employment.

Teachers

A common thread running through their accounts was the attitudes of their teachers. Darmody (2008) has found that for Irish students the attitudes of the teachers play a significant role in the students' attitudes to education and as such teachers are 'major players in the formation of educational identities' (Lynch and Feeley, 2009 p. 70). This was true of all participants in the study. Most of the participants had hostile or ambivalent attitudes towards their school days based on the attitudes of their teachers. For eleven of the participants in this study the teachers in their schools did little to shape positive identities and masculinities. According to the participants what appeared to matter to the teachers as a significant masculinity was one that was academic or sporty. Those who did not fit into either category were either unsupported or disciplined. In the main, the participants believed that the teachers were only concerned with bright students, those who had a chance of successfully completing their Leaving Certificate examinations and then going to HE. Cormac and Colm believed the teachers operated a two-tier system where attention was primarily focused on the academically able pupils, leaving the others to one side. This sense of neglect and inhospitality affected their identities and coloured twelve of the participants' memories of their days in school. For five of them it produced what Crossan et al. (2003) term as an active dislike for school.   Knowing they did not command the same level of attention as the academically capable students sapped their self-confidence and, for eight of the participants, affected the trajectories of their learning careers. This active dislike of school and low self-belief meant that they no longer saw themselves as able students but rather as lacking the wherewithal to achieve in HE. They chose not go to HE after secondary school because they believed that their negative identities left them little other choice. They believed that they were either not intelligent enough for HE or that they would be unable to cope once there. For the majority of the participants in this study the teachers in their schools did not engage with them on a level that would allow them to achieve.

The school system had discriminatory attitudes or inflexible rules and had let them down or had been disappointing as a result. They believed that the schools had been discriminatory and exhibited inflexibility towards them with regards to their subject preferences by steering those, like Donal and Gearóid, away from the opportunity to do more academic subjects. For them their positive dispositions to learning had not always been encouraged and change was frowned upon as was evident when Lorcan dropped sport.

Some participants believed the important and necessary structured mechanism of school support was missing. Cormac was not totally against going to HE when he left school.   He saw himself as a HE student and had even applied for the application form but he did not apply in the end. His reason for not going was a lack of direction from his teachers. He firmly believed that if he had had help and direction then he would have 'put a bit more focus on going to college', a view also held by Colm. Although he distanced himself from school he believed that the teachers 'weren't as involved with the students as they could have been.' This lack of guidance could be attributed to the fact that career guidance existed in a very limited form or not at all.   While a variety of factors clearly affect decisions regarding HE participation, the data suggests that if these participants had been able to construct positive identities and masculinities that saw HE as an option, because they had received direction when it was time to apply to HE at eighteen, they may have continued with their learning careers in the formal setting of HE rather than seeking employment. The men's horizons for action, either through positive role models or teacher involvement, had not been lifted and it is important to note that an 'active and learner-responsive ... school culture' (Smyth and Hattam, 2002, p. 380) impacts students' identities by raising horizons for actions resulting in more academically proactive students.   In contrast low school expectations (Bourgeois et al., 1999; Merrill, 2004) negatively impact the students' horizons for action and the trajectory of their learning careers. For most of the participants this distancing and inflexibility on behalf of the teachers was a form of neglect (Crossan et al., 2003). This resulted in negative school experiences and a lack of confidence in their academic abilities which impacted on the decisions they

made about the directions of their learning careers (Pollard, 1985). The negative identities and masculinities that they had constructed had a lasting impact. The ways that they positioned themselves in relation to secondary school and the masculinities they constructed would have 'a great deal to do with [not only] where they end up fifteen years later' (Weiss, 2003, p. 126) but also on how they viewed themselves and their abilities to succeed.

The Influence of Family, Partners and Friends

Returning to education was a long held and considered desire. It was dependent on their levels of self-confidence and their self-belief that they could achieve. This level of self-confidence and the ability to be able to identify themselves as mature students was in part dependent on the levels of support that they could expect to receive form various groups with whom they interacted on a daily basis. The key groups who provided support to the participants in this study were their families, partners and friends. Each group offered different levels and in some cases types of support to the participants. Whilst the structure and direction of formal education provides students with formal support mechanisms, family, partners and friends provide informal support mechanisms. Although both types of support mechanisms have their place in influencing and directing the trajectory of one's learning career, the informal mechanism of family, partner and friends can have a long term and powerful influence not only on the initial decision to go to but also on the long term one of remaining in HE. Often these support structures form the basis of the students' coping mechanism enabling them to manage their HE experiences more positively (Bamber and Tett, 2000).

The five participants who were in relationships, Seamus, Aongus, Fionn, Malachy and Ronan all said that they could not have identified themselves as mature students or made the move back to education without the active support of their partners. Although Séamus' wife's illness precluded her from being completely supportive she was happy for him to go to HE and he would not have made the move without her agreement. Aongus' wife's opinion and support were paramount in his decision to apply to HE and he would not have gone if she had not completely backed his decision. Ronan's partner showed him the way back to education

through her decision to return to education and she fully supported what he wanted to do. While their partners all made concession that allowed these five participants to fulfil their wishes, Fionn's wife made the biggest concession. She understood her husband's long held desire to see himself as a mature student and so she fully supported his decision to leave a well-paid job and move from their own home, in her native New Zealand, to live with her in-laws in Ireland. The others agreed that their decisions were predicated not only on the moral support that they got but in Malachy and Ronan's cases on the financial support their partners provided. For the participants this was in one way a difficult move as they were abrogating their responsibilities as the family provider but returning to education 'for career advancement or to learn new career skills is an activity less disruptive and even compatible with traditional role distinctions' (Huston-Hoburg and Strange, 1986, p. 393) - returning to HE was seen as a good thing for these participants to do as they were working towards being better providers, thus continuing in their traditional role.

Apart from Niall, the other six participants turned directly to their families for support. The levels of support that they wanted and when they wanted it were in some instances directed by their ages. When it came to making the decision to return to education research suggests that young men are often keen to stress that they alone make the decision to return to HE (Maynard and Pearsall, 1994). For the men who were not in relationships the data supports this view. It was mainly the younger men in this study who chose to make independent decisions about continuing with their learning careers in HE. Pierce, Donal, Gearóid, Colm, Conn and Lorcan, all aged forty or under, said that the decision to reengage with their learning careers in HE was theirs and theirs alone.   Niall was the only mature student over forty who did not look to his family for guidance and support. He was keen to point out that he had lived alone for a number of years and was used to making his own decisions and so would not be consulting them about his decision. One of the characteristics that defines what it means to be male is independence (Gough and Peace, 2000).   All of these participants wanted to be seen as independent men who were confident about making the decision to return to

education in HE. For them a sign of their independence was to make the decision without reference to family or friends. It was important to the participants' sense of self to make these independent decisions.   They had left school feeling somewhat diminished and had reconstructed themselves through work and life experiences and they did not want to lose that when deciding to go to HE. *Once the decision was made*, Pierce, Donal, Gearóid, Colm, Conn and Lorcan all said that their families offered moral as well as practical support. They were happy when their parents or siblings expressed approval at their decisions and were, as Donal explained, 'always there' or when their families offered support in other more practical ways. Practical support ranged from helping with the completion of application forms or providing them with money or a roof over their heads. While the single men keenly professed their independence all of them, bar Niall, accepted support from their families. Cormac, Eamon, Colm and Gearóid were single and lived at home with their parents. Three of the participants, Cormac, Eamon and Colm, were happy and grateful that they could return to what Cormac and Colm described as comfortable homes and receive their families all-encompassing support (Bamber and Tett, 2000) which helped them cope with and get through HE. Only Gearóid resented the fact that he had to rely on his parents' support.   He could not afford to live away from home and knew that if he wanted to go to HE there was no other option but to accept their continued support.

Their families were keen to offer support as going to HE fitted in with their ideals of what it meant to be a man. Education was an important aspect of family identity and led to better jobs – jobs that allowed 'the pursuit of achievement and status' (Levant and Kopecky, 1995, p. 75). For this reason Cormac's aunt, Eamon's family and Fionn's sisters kept up a constant stream of encouragement and pressure to persuade them to apply to HE. Their hope was that by going to HE the participants would be able change their status from men who were unemployed or in jobs with little future to men who had good and better jobs.

Researchers (Penglase, 1993; Steele et al., 2005) have pointed out that, in relation to HE participation, mature students often value and place importance on their friendships outside of the HEI. Only three of the fourteen participants, Séamus,

Eamon and Gearóid, talked about their friendships outside the IoT and their significance in relation to their learning careers. Gearóid and Eamon were pleased that they had very supportive friends and relied on them to discuss problems and get advice and help when needed. Séamus' friends were less understanding. He believed his friends were very set in their ways and not open to new experiences and therefore could not understand why he would consider returning to HE when he was retired. Such negativity could have upset Séamus' plans for going to HE but his motivation was strong enough to enable him to ignore their comments and continue with his learning career. The remaining participants did speak of their friendships but these were friendships formed in HE and discussed later under academic relationships.

In the main family support, which helps to reduce stress levels (Norton et al., 1998), enabled the participants to apply to or stay in HE thus continuing with their learning careers. The lack of this informal support mechanism would make the experience a lot more difficult if not impossible. As McGivney (2004) points out it needs to continue for the duration of the participants' time in HE for it to be totally effective. This is what happened to the participants. The participant's families were happy to continue to offer the necessary supports so that the participants could move away from their dependent status and become self-reliant achievers. The participants ranged across the four years in the IoT and while it is not possible to speak conclusively for the four first year students who had only been in HE for a few months when interviewed, nine of the other ten mature students were continuing to rely on help from home during their second, third and fourth years in the IoT.

Critical Incidents, Triggers and Turning Points

Male mature students see a return to education as a way to improve their lives (McFadden and Sturt, 1995) but often the decision to return is the result of a some form of 'critical incident' (Crossan et al. 2003).   Critical incidents can derail a person's life and learning career but can also act as a 'trigger' (Aslanian and Bricknell, 1980) or 'turning point' (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 1997) signalling a change in a person's life.   The literature shows that these triggers or critical incidents which include divorce, bereavement, unemployment, retirement or the

birth of a child or an illness (Blaire et al., 1995; Walters, 2000) can be quite dramatic.   Equally important but less dramatic incidents and triggers include personal interests or the desire for personal and financial self-improvement and the resulting improvement in life circumstances (Blair et al., 1995; Archer and Leathwood, 2003).   All of these incidents, which affect men, cause them to take stock of where they are in their lives and the trajectories their lives will follow in the future.   While these incidents can be dramatic when they happen, the response to them is not always instantaneous.   Applying to and participating in HE is initially a tentative step for most mature students (Crossan et al., 2003) and returning to education takes planning.   The incidents that brought about the return of the participants were the sparks that started the participants thinking about their futures and making plans about where they wanted their lives to go in the future.

Séamus, for example, began planning his move three years before he was due to retire and Donal spent a year mulling over his decision. He only applied to HE once he had completed his two year course which culminated in his passing his Leaving Certificate examinations.   Aongus also planned his return to education.   He began by taking a one year Foundation Course thus effectively 'dipping his toe in the water' to ensure that education was right for him.

Malachy and Eamon had experienced debilitating illnesses which caused them to rethink the direction of their lives.   Colm's devastating divorce saw him unable to get a job when he returned from Australia. The realisation that he was caught up in a self-destructive lifestyle as a result of his divorce was the trigger that eventually enabled him to get his life back on track through education. The trigger that caused Séamus, Aongus and Niall to return to HE was retirement. Although he professed a love of learning (Bhatti, 2003) Séamus did not want to stay at home and 'cut the grass or drive a taxi' as his children suggested normal retirees do. Niall too wanted to do something more with his time and that along with the need to get a job to supplement his pension brought him back to HE.   Aongus wanted to widen his prospects by going to HE as he refused to contemplate retirement. Their sense of identity did not see them in passive, inactive roles. They wanted to be active, to be workers, which is what they had been during their working lives and it was how

they had fashioned their identities – workers who provided well for themselves and their families.

The instrumental 'issues surrounding emotional and intellectual dissatisfaction' (Dawson and Boulton, 2000, p. 173) which can trigger a return to education are often centred on employment status or the type of job that a person is in. Unemployment can be a motivational trigger to return to education but it is one that does not necessarily occur at one specific point in time. This trigger which often has a long time scale and as such can be seen as gradual (Bloomer, 2001) was the motivational trigger that caused Gearóid, Colm, and Cormac to apply to education. The participants had all been unemployed for a few years and knew that 'the longer unemployment continues, the lower the likelihood of finding a job' (McGivney, 1999, p. 31). Facing this harsh reality (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2000a) was the instrumental trigger that started them thinking about the need for better academic qualifications (Bean Ui Chasaide, 1997) as the route to achieving their aims. Unemployment did not sit well with these participants, like the others, they saw themselves as workers who should be in control of their lives. To an extent unemployment rendered them stateless and helpless and they came to believe that re-engaging with their learning careers would be the key to unlocking this state and allowing them to become self-reliant and to once more have power over their own life styles.

Conn, Donal and Ronan were all employed when they made their decision to continue with their learning careers. The trigger that brought them back to education was instrumental; their dissatisfaction with their jobs and their realisation that these dead-end jobs had no futures and offered little or no financial or promotional prospects (Webb et al., 1994). This too was the spur that saw Fionn return from New Zealand. Fionn saw himself as the provider for his family and although he was in a very good job and was able to provide well for them he knew that there were 'few old plasterers' meaning that there was no long-term future in his job. Although Lorcan cited the joy of learning as the reason he returned to education, reading between the lines of his narrative reveals that his business was failing and there were no-long term prospects for him either. He needed to update

his skills so that he could continue in the job market. Unlike the others, Pierce had a very good job with prospects but for him it was not stimulating enough. He wanted something 'more' and believed he could find it through reskilling in HE. All of these participants wanted to distance themselves from failing or unchallenging situations which were draining their self-confidence and esteem. They wanted to have status and be seen as strong and successful (Craib, 1987) achievers and for them returning to education was the way to accomplish this.

All of the participants either wanted the chance to work or to do something more fulfilling through finding better jobs. The participants wanted graduate jobs. For them 'the value of HE *was* ... a means of getting "more money and better jobs"' (Archer, 2003, p. 124, emphasis added). The participants saw HE as the road to a better life, a conclusion that they all reached after they had taken stock of their lives (McFadden and Sturt, 1995; Meijers, 1998; Dawson and Boulton, 2000; Archer, 2003). The trigger for all of the participants was that they wanted jobs that were either better paid and had better working conditions or offered them the opportunity for promotion and so would be more fulfilling. While they believed that graduate jobs would be 'better paid … with more pleasant working conditions … [and] physically easier to do' (Archer, 2003, p. 124) more importantly they believed that such jobs would be 'better jobs' allowing them to achieve the status they wanted – that of being 'better men.' Fionn's sentiments encapsulate the participants' feelings when he said that he was fed up working outside in the snow and the rain. He felt that the time was right for him to 'work inside rather than outside' and HE would afford him that chance to achieve the white collar status that was important to him.

The Experience of Higher Education

While the previous section looked at the various factors that influenced the participants' learning careers prior to attending HE, this section uses the concept to examine their engagement with education in an Irish IoT. This section looks at the key issues that affected the participants' interaction in HE as male mature students. These key issues include the financial aspect of being a male mature student, the

course they chose and how masculinity played a part in their choices and their relationships with their lecturers and fellow students, both other mature students and younger students. These HE relationships were impacted by their values, expectations and the dispositions to learning which they had acquired though previous experiences (Rogers, 2000) and which they brought with them to HE.

Learning Careers and Choice

The concept of learning careers focuses on 'the development of dispositions to learning over time' (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2000b, p. 590). These dispositions and the trajectory of a learning career are constantly being remade through the life events that people encounter (Ibid.). How people's learning careers develop depends on the choices they make and these choices strongly influence and are influenced by the HEI a person chooses to attend and the courses they choose to study. These choices are also influenced by economic factors, previous learning and work experiences and the purpose of HE. In this study the purpose for all of the participants was to develop the necessary skills to make the transition to interesting work possible.

Choosing a HEI

Traditionally men in Ireland were seen as hard workers and as such good providers for their families who have gone to great lengths to be able to fulfil this role through finding work (Ferguson, 2001). The lines between the traditional role of the men as the breadwinners and women as the carers have become blurred as more women have entered the job market and so are sharing the breadwinner role (Ferguson, 2001, citing McKeown et al., 1998). Despite this researchers have found that men rank the role of provider very highly in their lives (Christiansen and Palkovitz, 2001).

Finances played an important part in the participants' decisions to re-engage with their learning careers. Their financial circumstances and the amount of money the participants had access to via their private finances, the grant they received or the amount of familial financial support affected not only the decision to return to

education but dictated their choice of HEI (McGivney, 2004) and subsequently the direction of their learning careers.

Five of the participants were married or living with their partners. Throughout their married lives Aongus and Séamus had adopted the independent and traditional role of the breadwinner and provider and had supported their wives and their families. As a mature students they were able to continue this role but in a limited form. Séamus was able to continue this role as he received his pension whilst in HE but Aongus did not have a pension to fall back on. His only option was to get a loan from the local Credit Union to enable him to support his wife and himself whilst in HE. Aongus thanked 'God for the Credit Union' as a loan from this financial institution assured his independence and also meant that he could afford to do what he wanted to do. While Aongus and Séamus only had to support themselves and their wives, Fionn faced bigger challenges. He had always supported his wife, who worked in the home, and his two young children through his work. Returning to education would mean that he would no longer be able to do that. He would move from the independent state of being a provider to that of depending not only on the grant that he received but on his sister's good will. This position reduced his self-confidence as although Fionn constantly praised his sister for her generosity he was always worried that the grant would be late which meant he had little ready money for himself and his family, thus compromising his role as the provider. Ronan also moved from an independent position where he was able to contribute to the family finances through his job to being dependent upon his partner. This role reversal in their partnership meant she effectively took over the breadwinner role and her wages were the main source of income coming into their household. Although conscious of this Ronan was happy that he was able to follow his dream and go HE. This was also true of Malachy. The male breadwinner role was reversed for him too as he was dependent on his girlfriend for financial support. This financial support gave him some freedom to choose the HEI and allowed him to go home each night. Without his girlfriend's support his learning career would have come to a halt: he would have struggled financially to attend HE as he did not receive any support from his own family and only had his grant to help him

through. He was, though, conscious that his girlfriend's largess had limits and he knew that he needed to complete the course and return to being a financial contributor. These participants were aware that within the family they had conceded their 'provider' position and their sense of power but they were willing to put up with this role reversal as the ultimate goal of a 'good' job justified the means.

While the data shows that two men followed the truly traditional role of the breadwinner and three fitted the more modern view of a shared breadwinner role, the rest of the participants, apart from Niall who relied on his pension, were prepared to look to and accept support from their families to fulfil their dreams. Gearóid, Fionn, Cormac, Colm and Niall all chose Declan IoT because of its proximity to home which meant that they did not have to lay out extra money in travelling long distances to HE or paying for rented accommodation. Apart from Gearóid these participants were happy to revert to the parent child scenario where the parents were the providers. They did not question the situation as they believed that they derived greater benefits from it that there were negatives. Since Colm lived at home his parents paid all of the bills and his grant allowed him to run his motor bike and get to HE each day. Equally important for him and for Cormac was the fact that they did not live alone. Being back at home offered them an extra degree of support. When Lorcan applied to HE he believed that his grant would cover the cost of his mortgage. This did not happen and the amount of money he received in his grant fluctuated. To continue his learning career, Lorcan relied on his parents' financial support as not to do so would threaten his continued presence in HE. Gearóid had wanted to apply for a different course in another HEI that was situated far from the family home. He was angered by the fact that his choices were restricted because he could neither get a grant nor a loan. As he could not afford to support himself he had no other choice but to choose a HEI that was close to home. Gearóid was the only one who was angry about having to rely on his parents. He wanted to be independent but lack of finances returned him to the parent child relationship that he did not relish and which he had tried to break when he first left school.

Mature students have to balance the positive and negative factors that continuing with their learning careers raises. Often there is a trade-off between continuing with their learning careers and their choice of HEI. Changes in personal circumstances could result in mature students withdrawing from higher education and the abandonment of their learning careers and higher educational dreams (Osborne et al., 2004). The data indicates that, for the participants, the trades offs were based on dependency and independence. The younger mature students were more willing to accept the reversal of the breadwinner role or revert to a parent-child relationship where their parents financially supported them. For the older participants, this was not an option as they did not have parents or working partners to fall back on and could only manage to go to HE if they made other arrangements – such as pensions or bank loans. The fourteen participants in the research study, whether they were working, retired or unemployed believed higher education would offer them opportunities that they had not had before. For them education equalled work and money (Archer et al.'s, 2001) and this was a great incentive to return to HE. To achieve this though, they needed their partners and families to be the providers and to be the 'stepping stones' that would return the male participants to their provider roles. The pull of HE and the rewards that would come with graduation, therefore, were sufficiently strong to allow the men to move from their adult masculine independent identities to that of dependents – a state that they had last been in when they were children living at home and going to school.

Choosing a Course

Masculinity is equated with having a secure and skilled job and that unemployment 'represents a serious loss in terms of male identity' (Archer et al., 2001, p. 437). The job market in Ireland has contracted over the last five years and the employment opportunities that existed when most of the participants left school no longer exist. The Irish government believes that a skilled and flexible workforce will be the means of lifting Ireland out of recession. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many men who have been made redundant as a result of the recession or who are in jobs that are less secure see education as an important step in the job market.

This certainly was the case for the participants in this study. They believed higher education would enable them to acquire the skills they needed to get good and better jobs.

The courses that the participants chose to follow were greatly influenced by the successes that they had in education outside of school when they were working as well as by the type of jobs themselves. They chose their courses along traditional male lines – they all wanted to get jobs that were masculine jobs. They chose courses that were related to their previous fields of employment or to their interests. This meant that the participants chose courses that either allowed them to upskill or to reskill. Upskilling meant that they could utilize previous knowledge and skills acquired in their earlier learning careers and employment in their courses. While reskilling allowed the participants to use some of their previous knowledge, their courses were in fields that were new to them and so some had a steeper learning curve as a result. Despite this none of the men took courses that could be deemed to feminine such as counselling or teaching. They wanted to follow masculine courses so that they could get masculine jobs.

Of the fourteen participants seven chose to upskill and seven chose to reskill (See Table 21). Aongus, Eamon, Cormac, Lorcan, Fionn, Colm and Malachy all chose courses that would allow then to use the skills that they had acquired pre HE. Niall, Séamus, Donal, Gearóid, Ronan, Pierce and Conn chose instead to reskill and signed up for courses that were outside of their previous skill sets and not related to their previous careers.

By going to HE the participants were pursuing achievement which they equated with being successful but success had to be planned and seven of the participants hoped to ensure their success through the completion of pre-HE courses.   Both Séamus and Aongus had completed Foundation courses and the HE courses they chose were a direct result of the year-long Foundation Course that they had completed before applying to HE. Donal and Malachy also applied to HE after having completed full-time courses that gave them the skills that they needed to be able to achieve in HE. Colm took a computer aided design FÁS course but dropped

out of the course because it was all new to him and he lacked the self-confidence to complete it. He was determined though to be prepared for HE and he eventually finished a course in a field closely related to his previous job. He used the new experience to apply for a HE course in an area that bridged both the course that he had completed and his previous employment. Niall had looked at completing a practical woodwork course before returning to HE but he decided against that as it did not fit in with his view of himself. He was not, in his mind, an 'ordinary bloke' who was practically minded and so he chose a course in computing as he was interested in that area. Although Niall was the only one of these participants who chose a pre-He course in an area unrelated to his previous employment, the course was linked to his personal interest and he had a modicum of computing knowledge. Before he became sick Eamon completed an advanced programming course and while he chose to extend his knowledge through opting for Physics it was essentially a computer course that he signed up for. These participants played it safe and went for courses in which they had some knowledge. This gave them a small step up when it came to going to HE. They knew that they would not be going into class totally unprepared. This was important to them as it signified that they had some power in the classroom. This power was the knowledge that they had derived from their previous courses and jobs and it enhanced their sense of self and their levels of self-confidence.

The remaining participants did not take any courses *immediately* before going to HE relying instead on their previous learning careers and employment experience. Although this previous knowledge helped the participants, it did not adequately prepare them for the level of study they encountered when in HE (McGivney, 2004). Although all of the participants realised, once in HE, that they had not fully been prepared for what it meant to be a mature student doing a full time course, those who had not completed pre-HE courses found it very hard to adjust to learning. Having been away from learning for some time they were not prepared for the level of work and difficulty that are entailed on HE courses. While the IoT did offer study skills courses and other extra curricula assistance for those who had had a break in their learning careers only three participants, Niall, Fionn and

Gearóid, availed of these opportunities.   Eleven of the participants were not prepared to ask for help. Their main excuse was that they did not know about the courses or preferred to ask people they knew for help. It could be said that those who had completed pre-HE courses had already acquired the study skills that they needed. Reading between the lines indicates that their levels of self-confidence would not allow them to seek help from new people in such a new environment. So, as Ronan intimated, there was a fear of not being good enough to complete HE thus alluding to fragile academic identities.   This fear would have been compounded by having to admit that they needed help with their classes.   They had to be seen as being in control and independent. They were not sure enough of themselves to risk exposure as adults in need of help. HEIs accept that if mature students are to succeed they need to learn how to study and acquire the learning skills to do so (Murphy and Fleming, 2000). The data suggests that there needs to be a closer fit between understanding that male mature students find it hard to ask for help and incentives that enable them to get the help they need to continue with their learning careers, whilst retaining their masculine identities and a positive sense of self.

While the desire to participate in HE as a means of getting jobs that were challenging rather than boring (Tett, 2000; Reay, 2003; Archer, 2003) all of the participants chose fields of study that were closely associated with masculine jobs. Before entering HE only Gearóid was in a job that would primarily be associated with women. This contributed to his decision not to return to work after his illness as essentially he was not in a job that real men did. The other participants chose courses that were in the mainly hegemonic areas of engineering, computing and construction. This would eventually allow them to get male jobs because they would be working with other men (Ball et al., 2000).

Learning Careers and Other People

A person's learning career can be strongly influenced by other people, both those who teach them and those who learn with them. The participants in the study were influenced to an extent by the attitudes and interactions they had with their

lecturers and with the other students in their class and in the college, both younger and mature.

Lecturers: Attitudes, Relationships and Interactions

Memories of school days affect dispositions to learning and the memories that the participants had of school be they positive or negative, all helped to colour their expectations of life as a mature student in HE. The participants in this study wanted their learning careers in HE to be a positive experience to counter the often unpleasant ones encountered when at school.

These expectations meant that the participants wanted their adult status respected. They wanted to be seen as men who were able to deal with HE and not treated in a 'childlike way' (Smyth and Hattam, 2002, p. 391) by their lecturers. They had all left school behind a number of years before and were used, as adults, to having control over their lives. As a result they did not want to go back to one-sided and often negative power relationship that exists between pupil and teacher. They did not want to be treated in the same way they were treated in school; they did not want that lack of power or control and they did not want to fail. All of the participants wanted to establish good working relationships with their lecturers and did not want to be spoken to 'like a seventeen year old' as that undermined their status as adult men.

While they wanted to be seen as adults they did not want to be seen as different. Conn, Eamon, Aongus, Malachy and Pierce all believed the lecturers did not differentiate between the students and treated them all the same. On the other hand Fionn, Colm, Ronan, Gearóid, Séamus, Niall, Donal, Cormac and Lorcan believed that they were treated differently and this belief coloured their experiences and their interactions in the classroom. Fionn, Colm and Ronan got on well with their lecturers. This was due to what Colm observed as being 'taken more seriously and not seen as killing time.' This was important to them and they translated this into respect. They believed that this differentiation was actually the recognition that they were adults and therefore merited respect. They in turn respected their lecturers. Their respect for their lecturers was based on the

lecturers' respect for them – a catch twenty-two situation. Once the students lost respect, they then would not give it. Gearóid complained that lecturers saw all their students, mature and younger, as 'just numbers' confirming the negative attitudes that his teachers displayed in secondary school. Séamus believed that lecturers were 'set in their ways' and were incapable of seeing students as adults which was confirmed by the fact that his lecturers were unwilling to recognise the fact that he brought a lot of experience to the classroom. He dryly noted that they would not 'entertain an adult of my age and experience.' This affected his dispositions to learning as he decided to keep his head down and not interact in class. He believed his comments were unwelcome, unlike in his school days where he had a good relationship with his teachers and got on well in school. When recounting his narrative Séamus spoke of intimidation in the classroom. He felt that the lecturer who did not want his input felt intimidated by mature students and the only way to deal with mature students was to put them down. Rather than enter into any debate with his lecturer, Séamus chose to keep quiet as he did not want to exacerbate the situation. This was mainly because he was afraid that any conflict might affect his examination marks and he was not prepared to take any chances with his learning career. Séamus had learnt the tricks (Murphy and Fleming, 1998) of being in HE which meant that he had learnt how to adapt to 'the academic's way of looking at things' (Usher and Bryant, 1989, p. 108). Despite the fact that he had come across confrontation in his position as a union representative in work, Séamus was surprised that lecturers would be confrontational when dealing with adults. The treatment he had met from some of his lecturers somewhat disrupted his expectations of what, in his mind, lecturer-student relationships should be like and disturbed his self-confidence.

Séamus' relationships in school had been open and friendly but those in HE were reversed. This role reversal, where the dispositions exhibited in school were reversed in HE, was something that was also apparent in the behaviour of both Niall and Donal. In school Niall had toed the lined. He did what he was told and kept his head down whilst doing it. As an adult he was no longer wanted to adopt that position. He had spent many years 'on the other side of the table' and expected

that position as well as his experiences to be respected. He was more than willing to face his lecturers and 'ask intelligent questions' and when they did not respect his adult status was very happy to confront them and give them 'a run for their money.' As an adult Niall believed in being forthright and expressing his opinions. By asserting his position as an adult he showed that he had a voice and this greatly enhanced his self-confidence. In standing up for himself he was doing something that he had not done when at school. He acknowledged, though, that this could lead to tension in the classroom and that some of his lecturers would have been happier with quieter students.

Donal's educational formal experiences had left him feeling despondent and unsure of his academic abilities. He was not prepared for that type of relationship to permeate his time in HE. This attitude was reflected in the fact that as an adult he was very prepared to speak up for all of the students. He was happy to challenge the lecturers when he perceived an injustice was being done to his fellow students. Cormac who had missed out on going to HE at eighteen because of what he perceived as a two tier school system was also unwilling to 'wait to be noticed.' Rather than waiting for lecturer direction as he had done in school he became 'a bit demanding at times' expecting the lecturers to help him on a one-to-one adult basis when *he* needed it. The dispositions of Niall, Donal and Cormac to the learning environment and to learning had changed. They were no longer willing to accept the totalitarian approach imposed in the classrooms of their school days preferring instead to shape their own learning careers through making challenges. Lorcan's dispositions had also changed as he felt he had a good relationship with his lecturers. He inferred that the class dynamic, the fact that there were a lot of mature students in the class, produced a more tolerant lecturer attitude as the lecturer had little choice but to respect the adult status of the men in their classrooms.

The data indicates that the mature students believed that lecturers' attitudes were affected by having mature students in their classes and not always to the benefit of the students. Although it does not concur with Field's (1989) belief that mature students add to the class and enrich the higher education experience it does concur

with Murphy and Fleming (2000) who believe this is not always the case.   Woodley and Wilson also (2002) 'suggest that many lecturers actually preferred not to have mature students in their class because they contributed too much and often took up contrary positions' (p. 324). The participants in this study were very self-aware. They were aware of their effect of being mature students on the class and as such had a sense of power in their position as mature students in the classroom. While they had developed 'a questioning and critical approach to lectures' (Beard and Hartley, 1984, p. 103) which was a sign of increased confidence due to the adult status, it can also be seen, as in Niall and Donal's case, as a rebellion against school experiences and their refusal to accept an 'academic way' of doing things that was restrictive and prevented them from getting the most out of the higher education.

The participants' learning careers and dispositions to learning were affected by the way the lecturers attitudes towards their mature students but also by the way they delivered their lectures. Waller (2005) believes 'a student's self-esteem and self-confidence often improve in tandem with their academic abilities' (p. 63). For Pierce, Eamon, Aongus, Séamus, Lorcan and Fionn this rested on their lecturers' abilities and the quality of the lectures (Merrill, 2001) as they believed examination results depended on them. Both Lorcan and Fionn's involvement in their classes was hugely increased because their lecturers delivered the material in a way that involved them, the students. This approach was different from that of secondary school and as such affected their dispositions in positive ways. All six of these participants wanted a specific and structured approach to their classes that took account of the way in which *they* wanted to learn. This involved the lecturers listening to what it was that helped adults learn. The constructive practices that enabled the participants to learn included being well prepared, handing out notes before the classes and being available to discuss problems when they, *the participants, wanted.* Their demanding attitude was reflective of their adult status and their levels of self-confidence which were linked to the current and past episodes of their learning careers.

Whilst they were happy not to be seen as different they did want to be treated on an equal footing with their lecturers – they wanted to be respected and treated like

adult men. They were not willing to buy into the philosophy that the teachers or in this case the lecturers were always right and so were quick to stand up for their adult rights. For some like Séamus and Aongus this meant preferential treatment – getting the notes before class for example, or like Eamon and Gearóid - the lecturers being available at any time when they had a problem that needed to be solved. Effectively the male mature students wanted to be treated as adults but at times this meant getting their own way.

Students: Attitudes, Relationships and Interactions

While the support mature students receive from their lecturers is important to the continuance of their learning careers so too, to a degree, is that of their friends and other students in the HEI. Class friendships are important as they help mature students face the difficulties they experience in their learning careers (Bowl, 2001) but achieving such friendships requires the mature students to make an effort to fit in and belong to the class (Reay, 1998, 2002). As adults they have some control over their lives but entering HE brings with it a sense of disempowerment as it 'often requires a complete re-orientation of lifestyle' (Osborne et al., 2004, p. 295). While it is understandable that the adult students want to maintain a credible identity as men whilst being a student fitting into HE may involve an attitude readjustment.

Adults are generally seen as self-reliant and the distances of age can make it difficult to create friendships with the younger students in the class. The younger students are often closer in age to the mature students' children while for the younger students the mature students are closer in age to their parents. This can create a difficult relationship and can inhibit class participation and interaction.

Of the fourteen participants, the younger mature students, those under forty tended to make friends easily both inside and outside of the classroom as they had more in common with the other younger students than the older mature students did. The older mature students reasoned that their lack of interaction was because the younger students preferred to socialise with students their own age. This, though, was also true of the older mature students. They tended to meet up in the

canteen for lunch or for coffee to discuss the various events of the day. Séamus and Anogus tended to meet up on a regular basis to discuss problems and have what Aongus described as a 'general bitch' about life in HE. Not only did this allow them let off steam but also to discuss problems and get advice on how to cope with learning in HE. This facility was very important to Séamus and Aongus as they did not want to be seen in a bad light by the younger students. They knew that older mature students faced such difficulties and while it was reasonable for other mature students to know they struggled they were unwilling to admit to the younger students that they found HE hard believing they would be seen as 'stupid.' Asking for help would mean that they were vulnerable and would tarnish the positive identities that they had constructed within the classroom. When there was no other option they would ask a classmate for help, but that was a last resort and usually occurred on a one-to-one basis away from the classroom and the student body as a whole. Seamus had once approached the younger students for help and he believed that he did not get it because they had very closed attitudes. He felt that they believed that as an adult *he* should have been able to source the answers to his problems himself. When they needed help Séamus and Aongus preferred to approach their lecturers and get help from them.

While Lorcan described the younger students in his class as 'the kiddies' he along with Niall, Cormac, Donal and Gearoid all acknowledged that the successes of their learning careers were due in part to the support they received from the younger students. As Lorcan explained they would not have 'been able to do it only for the classmates.' Donal and Cormac had developed happy and in some cases lasting friendships with their younger classmates which survived the duration of their courses. In fact Cormac relied solely on his class friends. This in part was due to his school experiences. Unlike Séamus and Anogus, he did not want to approach his lecturers for help in case they thought him incapable of completing the course. Like the other participants, school days still loomed large, and his dispositions to learning were tied to his level of self-confidence and the way in which he wanted to be seen by his friends and the staff.

Being able to get help from one's peers impacts the participants experiences of HE as this 'mutual support [plays] a central part' (Wakeford, 1994, p, 251) in a successful learning career. The type and depth of the support depended on the closeness of the relationship between the mature students and the younger students. In turn this depended upon the amount of effort the participants put into their friendships and the way they allowed themselves to be perceived. The participants such as Cormac, Donal and Lorcan who saw themselves as 'students' rather than as mature students often made a greater effort to integrate into the class and they received more help from their classmates than those who did not. Although personality may be a factor, it is interesting to note that those participants with partners or spouses were the ones who distanced themselves from the younger student and did not have a closes relationship with them. They were more aware of maintaining an independent adult status as they already had available sources of support, outside of the classroom, from their families and partners. The mature students tend to live in two different worlds – that of HE and home. The younger students tended to socialise outside of HE but the mature students had their own commitments and so kept their two worlds separate.

Is This What Real Men Do?

Constructing a viable masculine identity means different things to different people but traditional constructions of masculinity remain strong, where being male means being active, being a worker and thus being a breadwinner and a provider. It means being independent (Alloway and Gilbert, 2004). It means being strong and successful (Craib, 1987).

While families are the first site in which masculinities are fashioned (Reay, 2002) masculinities can change over time. Men can construct more than one masculinity during their lifetime (Torres, 2007) and the masculinities that the men in this study constructed were shaped by family, school, their jobs and HE. How they constructed their identities in school, due to the type of interaction they had there, positively or negatively affected their learning careers. While two were able to construct positive identities and masculinities through positive interaction with school the rest struggled with their masculinities especially those who were not

academic or sporty.   These participants looked outside of school as a site to construct their masculinities.

The participants in this study all had their particular reasons for wanting a higher education and triggers that brought them back to education. Whilst their decisions to go to HE were predicated on a number of factor a major factor was what HE would ultimately benefit them. All of the participants in this study wanted, through re-engaging with their learning careers, to be successful achievers who were able to get 'good' jobs and as a result were able to care for themselves and for their families.   By going to HE they were investing in a form of masculinity that was different from the one they had created in school. They wanted to build alternative and stronger identities and masculinities through a higher education. Attending HE though can be 'an emotionally and challenging experience (Bamber and Tett, 2000, p. 74) and so support was important.   Mature students are 'more likely to fear academic failure [which is] partly due to a … poor learner identity' (Brine and Waller, 2004, p. 106) than the younger students and so a support mechanism is very important to them and their success.   The support of family, partners and friends can be the network that enables them to achieve their goals of graduating with a degree that would enable them to get better jobs.

Before that though they had to negotiate HE and define their relationships to education through their relationships with their lecturers and the younger students in the class. The participants wanted their identities as adult mature male students respected. They did not want to be treated like children. Equally their relationships with the younger students were based on respect but they often found that interacting with them was difficult. The older mature students especially had more in common with other mature students and this combined with the support networks off campus meant that they preferred to keep their distance from their younger peers.

Work is a status symbol for men (McGivney, 2004) and it was work and the desire to create positive masculinities where they could be seen to achieve and be successful that drove the participants to HE. They saw HE as the way forward and

the pathway to a new and better future that allowed them to make new friends and expand their skill sets before getting a well-paid job (Maynard and Pearsall, 1994). For the participants who had been retired, for those who had been in 'crap jobs' (Archer, 2003, p. 123) as well as the unemployed, HE was the conduit through which they were going to improve their living standards, get financial security and emotional fulfilment. They wanted to have power over their own lives and the decisions that they made. The hegemonic script of masculinity is 'strong' and this script had been weakened through poor school relationships, working in jobs that were ending or that were not challenging or had few prospects. The men in this study wanted to regain or retain their power and thus their identities and the way forward for them was through returning to education and applying to HE. The move gave them back their control over the directions that their lives would follow. It was no longer left to chance and to circumstances.

So ultimately continuing with their learning careers and participating in HE appears to be compatible with being a 'real man' for the participants in this study. They were using the opportunity to advance their learning careers through participation in HE, as this would provide them with a route back to employment and an opportunity to secure better paid jobs. Such a route would ensure that they could take care of their families and themselves. While this is not definitively what makes a 'real man' today, it is how the participants perceived and understood what 'real men' ultimately do. HE would allow them to become 'better men.'

HE represented a process of becoming. The state of becoming is a fluid state and does not result in fixed entities (Whitrow, 1980). The process of becoming is unique to each person and is a result of individual choice (Nuehring and Fein, 1978), social influences and imposed biography, such as one's family life and schooling. Much of the process of becoming occurs through the choices that one makes and the circumstances that one is in. These are important as they 'may provide opportunity for redirection or continuance' (Ibid., p. 166). All of the participants faced circumstances that caused them to consider the directions their lives were taking and they each did it at a critical point in their lives where their chief interest was to master the situation (Schutz, 1964, p. 78, cited by Nuehring and Fein, 1978).

For them mastering the situation meant returning to education in order to acquire knowledge and skills, which would contribute to the process of becoming. This fluid state changes as life circumstances change. The participants in this study were changing and reconstructing their identities as men through education and as the acquisition of new skills was ongoing it mean that they too were changing, meaning that their identities were never complete.

Being a Real Man

The 'Educating Rita' Effect

Returning to education and to HE for women can be a life changing moment. Maher (2001) and Baxter and Britton (2001) note that women have to juggle various hats, which include being a partner, a mother and then a student. Getting the support that they need to maintain all of these relationships is often difficult. They may suffer relationship breakups as a result or find that they cannot sustain so many different identities and drop out of HE. It can also cause a rift between themselves and their families as they may find that they see themselves in a different class and so have little in common with their old lives. When women return to education they often want to 'give something back' to their communities or families meaning that they want to be able to share the benefits of their education (Reay, 2002).

Men tend to want to go back to HE for strategic reasons (Marks, 2003). For them the financial rewards – better living conditions, more money, better prospects are attractive incentives. For men the move to HE is often viewed more positively because they are advancing their careers which would allow them to become better providers (Houston-Hoburg and Strange, 1986).

The men in this study all wanted to become better providers. They wanted greater job and life prospects and returning to HE was, as far as they were concerned, the way to achieve that aim. For them returning to HE was a relatively easy move once they had made the decision to apply. It was not a life changing move in that they did not experience a rift between themselves or their partners and families. Their families, either immediate or extended, encouraged and applauded the men's

move back to education. They constantly encouraged them to return and they offered them great support not only during the decision making process but also once they became mature students. Those like Niall, Malachy and Ronan, who did not have familial support, got it from their partners and friends or relied upon their own motivation to see them through. Returning to education in HE is a hard choice for women but for men and these men in particular is was an easier choice as they were being supported along the way. Even the breadwinners had the burden of providing for their families lifted through family support.

Masculine Jobs

Taking part in HE, for the men in this study, had to equate to a viable male job. All of the participants in this study wanted jobs that were traditionally masculine. They wanted jobs that allowed them to see themselves as holding an acceptable masculine position. Therefore the courses that they opted for mirrored this desire and they were all courses traditionally associated with men. At this stage in their lives they also wanted white collar jobs. This is especially true of those who hailed from very physical jobs - Fionn, Ronan, Donal and Colm for example. They had spent their working lives in often very difficult conditions where a lot of physical exertion was required in order to do their jobs. As mature, older adults they no longer wanted such working conditions. They wanted better conditions – the working inside philosophy that Fionn expounded, and higher pay and promotion. However, their aims may have been rather an idealistic expectation rather than a realistic one. All of the participants would have been thirty and over by the time they graduated so 'good' jobs may have been limited, especially for the older participants. It was more likely that they would have found rather more intermediate work and so their aims of good jobs with good pay may not have been fully realised.

Conclusion

While the family is a key site in the construction of identity and masculinity so too is school. Masculinities therefore are made and remade and this making and remaking can determine the trajectory of one's learning career.

The way in which the participants saw themselves at school and how they fared when there had a direct bearing on the direction that their learning careers took. Their sense of self and self-belief and their constructed masculinities directed them towards or away from participation in HE when they first left school.

Support is an important factor when it comes to the engagement with one's learning careers. The results of this study show how the directions of the participants learning careers were affected by the levels of support that they received from their family, partners and friends. They also needed support from friends and lecturers within HE in order to succeed. None of the participants was able to go it alone although some like Donal and Fionn believed they could. They quickly found that internal help as well as that from their families, sustained their passage through HE.

The literature states that whilst the traditional lines between the roles of male breadwinner and female carer are blurring (Christiansen and Palkovitz, 2001) being male is equated with not only having a job but a having a viable and traditional male job. When they decided to re-engage with their learning careers, they had either been in dead-end or unfulfilling jobs; were unemployment or facing retirement. For the participants HE was a means of empowerment that would enable them to create viable masculinities and positive identities. While they hoped that such identities would allow them to succeed and to improve their lives and those of their families through finding better and fulfilling jobs they wanted these jobs to be masculine jobs with the viable masculine identities that was important to them.

Chapter 9 – Returning to HE: Is This What Real Men Do?

Introduction

This study centred on men who participated in HE in Ireland as male mature students. The aim of the study was to provide insights into the reasons why men chose to return to education, the trajectories of their learning careers, the reasons that brought them back to education and their experiences of being male mature students in HE in an Institute of Technology (IoT). The research addressed the following key question: What does it mean to be a male mature student in Irish higher education? This chapter sets out the main findings of the study using the research questions as a basis for the discussion and suggests how the findings may inform future policy and practice regarding male mature students in HE. The chapter also considers the study's limitations and areas for further work.

As a result of changes in the Irish education system, which date back to the 1950s, the number of students accessing HE has increased.   Traditionally men outnumbered women in HE but this changed in the mid-1990s when the numbers of men entering HE began to fall behind the numbers of women participating in HE. This became a cause for concern amongst policymakers and researchers. While there has been some related research worldwide (McGivney, 1999, 2004; Archer et al., 2001; Burke, 2006), in Ireland little research has been conducted into men as mature students and their experiences in HE. This research aimed to fill that gap and used the concept of learning careers to provide a lens through which to understand the decisions of fourteen men to participate in HE as mature students and identify how past experiences formed their dispositions to education in HE.

Masculinities are fashioned initially within the family (Reay, 2002) but then also though school and certain types of masculinities, such as protest masculinities, may hinder academic achievements. The data shows that the masculinities that twelve of the participants constructed resulted in an insecure or negative level of self-belief in their academic abilities and ultimately about what they could attain when they left school. Despite the fact that the other two left school with relatively

positive academic identities the desire to make money saw them choose work over HE when they graduated from school.

Learning careers comprise various events and activities. Due to this the meanings ascribed to them are constantly being remade (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2000b). While they can be smooth and linear, equally they can be and are often fragile and fragmented and allied with uncertainty (Bathmaker, 2005), uncertainty that emanates from previous educational experiences and which creates a barrier to enrolling in HE. While learning careers are 'rooted in what went before [they are] marked by both continuity and change' (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2000b, p. 590-591). Life events and experiences bring about this change and can be the trigger that causes this constant remaking, resulting in uncertainty about the trajectory of a learning career (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2002, p. 139).   The events which cause a learning career to deviate from a linear pathway for mature students may be critical incidents or turning points of illness, bereavement or divorce. Such incidents could also be more mundane such as the gradual realisation that a job is not a job for life. Rather than lead to self-improvement through better prospects, the job could result in a self-perpetuating cycle of stagnation and dis-improvement rather than self-improvement.

How men see themselves and how they construct their masculinities colour the events in their lives and often shape their dispositions to learning. As a tool, the concept of learning careers made it possible to identify the sometimes unpredicted events that brought about change and affected the trajectories of the participants' learning careers and their relationships with education. Events included previous education particularly their secondary school experiences, financial considerations, familial obligations and interactions and employment concerns. They also included the relationships and interactions with their lecturers and their peers once in HE. Learning careers, therefore, provided a lens to gain insights into why some of the participants avoided HE at eighteen and why their learning careers were not continuous but were broken up with periods of (un)employment. As a tool the concept also shone light on the relationships between the participants and their lecturers and the other students with whom they came into contact in the IoT and

the importance of these relationships to their academic performance and progress. Learning careers enabled the exploration of 'people's relation to learning' (Goodlad, 2007, p. 111), a relationship that was individual to each of the participants.

The study used a narrative approach which allowed the participants to tell their stories and explain the various events that affected their individual learning careers. Using narrative as the methodological framework supplied the scaffolding for collecting and analysing the fourteen participants' stories as 'narrative research [is] best for capturing the detailed stories or life experiences of … the lives of a small number of individuals' (Creswell, 2007, p. 55).

1. **What factors affect men's decisions to return to education and why do men choose to rekindle their learning careers by returning to education as mature students in a HEI?**

The trajectories of people's learning careers do not always follow to plan. Life events can cause these trajectories to change in what Bloomer and Hodkinson (2002) describe as 'sometimes … unforeseen and occasionally dramatic ways' (p. 139). These dramatic events, triggers or critical incidents can be, as mentioned above, bereavement or divorce but can also include retirement, unemployment and employment as well as illness. While learning careers can also be strongly influenced by family commitments and pressures, family orientation to learning also affects education interaction. For the participants who did not have any HE role models HE was a difficult or indifferent option at eighteen. They hoped that going to work would enable them to achieve their own aims and earn money to sustain them.

While the learning careers of the participants and their dispositions to learning did develop over time they were affected by various factors. All of the participants had a personal reason for returning to education and in line with previous research (Gallacher et al., 2002; Bloomer and Hodkinson, 1997, 2000) the reasons or triggers were dramatic or instrumental. While the effecting triggers were illness, divorce, employment status and the type of jobs they were in, they were also affected by

school experiences and family commitments. How they saw themselves, their identities, their constructions of masculinity and self-confidence were all important influencing factors. Their self-perception, as a result, coloured how they saw the world and their resulting interaction with education.

School experiences are often instrumental in the construction of identity and all the participants spoke about secondary school and the influence it had on their lives and their learning careers. For some the lack of direction from school still left them feeling emotional and sad. Although somewhat resigned to how their lives had turned out, they looked back with a mixture of regret and acceptance at a lost opportunity to go to HE at eighteen. Due to their actual and self-perceived failures in school their orientation to school and the masculinity identity that they had built whilst there often left them uncertain and fragile vis-à-vis their abilities. They did not want to be seen as failures and were careful to justify their decisions not to go to HE at eighteen. They insisted that going to work had been beneficial and had taught them life and employment skills and so they had not missed out by not going to HE when they left school. It was evident, though, that they wondered if their lives would have been different if they had followed the academic path at eighteen.

Nine of the participants returned to education because they were unemployed or were in what they described as dead-end jobs or jobs that offered little stimulation or future, and the two who had been seriously ill saw education as a way to reengage with their working lives once they recovered. The three participants who were facing retirement did not want to stay at home, preferring instead to have some meaning to their lives, as in their view, real men do something with their time; they are active, earning money. All of these participants were using education as the means by which to improve their life conditions. Education would allow them to reengage with their learning careers and would be the trajectory back to work; work that, in their minds, would offer them greater prospects. While the participants returned to education because they wanted improved job prospects (Thornhill, 1998; Bunyan and Jordan, 2005), personal fulfilment (IFWEA, 2001), social well-being (Carpenter, 2004) and in Lorcan and Séamus' cases a professed love of learning (Lynch, 1997), HE allowed them the chance to fulfil their

traditional 'real men' roles by offering them the opportunity to become (better) working men and family providers.

By reengaging with their learning careers the participants were all continuing the process of becoming. They were 'continually struggling' (Erikson, 2009, 400) throughout their working lives to develop or discover what their potentialities were. By making the choice to go to HE they were exploring another avenue, one which they hoped would lead to better jobs and better lives.   The men were seeking an identity that would allow them to be 'at one with oneself' (Ibid., p. 286). They wanted control over their fate whilst gaining a 'sense of who one is and what's one's purpose is' (Erikson, 2009, p. 286).

2. Why do men who choose to become mature HE students choose the particular HEIs they do?

The Irish HE system comprises seven universities and fourteen IoTs. All of the participants chose to study in Declan IoT due to various constraints (McGivney, 2004). The data shows that the participants differed in their reasons for choosing the IoT, and that their decisions were influenced by financial considerations, proximity to home, family commitments and support and course choice, the latter influenced by the prospect of getting a job.

Robichaud et al. (2003) found that financial factors affect men's HEI choices. In this study, being able to attend HE and the location of the HEI were predicated on the participants' financial resources. Being able to rely on the direct aid of a grant, or family support curtailed some participants' choices while allowing others greater freedom.   The data shows that while only two participants, Fionn and Gearóid, based their choice of HEI solely on financial reasons, eight others chose the IoT because of the various benefits, financial and otherwise, of it being close to home. Living at home lessened travel expenses, food and rental bills. While they chose the HEI because it was close to home the main benefits were the comfort and support that living at home gave the participants. The level of support that they received

from their immediate and extended families was often a highly influencing factor for their return to education and their choice of HEI.

Four of the participants chose the IoT because it offered the courses they wanted. While two of the participants could have gone to HEIs closer to home, the fact that the closer institutes did not offer them the courses they wanted ruled them out. For Malachy this choice was forced upon him as a place in his first preference HEI was refused to him. If he wanted to do the course of his choice he had no other choice but to travel to Declan IoT.

For all of the participants the motivation for going to HE or continuing in HE was linked directly to the support that they could depend on. Not having to find new accommodation, therefore reducing the financial burden, and being registered on courses they wanted to be on rather than second choices, acted as forms of support. These supports were an important aspect of studying in HE. They enabled the participants to successfully negotiate financial concerns and academic abilities and therefore continue with their learning careers in HE. Without them the attrition rate most probably would have been higher as they would not have had the financial support that would reduce financial worries or familial support that was important to their self-confidence.

While these factors were important their course choice was also influential. Apart from Gearóid and Niall, all of the participants had come from strongly male employment sectors such as the construction industry or business and computing related employment. Gender defines how people behave and all of the participants subscribed to a traditional male gender role and this was characterised by the courses they signed up to. All of the participants wanted male oriented and secure jobs and choosing the HEI and the courses that they did afforded them the opportunity to achieve these aims once they graduated.

3. What are male mature students' perceptions of study in an Irish IoT?

The participants, especially those with negative secondary school experiences, did not want HE to be like school. An important consideration for all of the participants

was their adult status. As adults they believed that HE would and should be different from school as they would be treated like adults rather than as children. These expectations were not always met. Lecturer and mature student interactions created tensions especially when they felt they were not respected. This tension meant they did not always see their lecturers in a good light. They objected when their lecturers were not fully prepared for class and when they did not receive the level of support they felt they deserved. The participants wanted a structured approach to their classes and a constant level of support both inside and outside of the classroom. The structured approach meant having class notes and lecturers being in control of the subjects they were delivering. This support, which was the difference between success and failure, had to be available when *they* wanted it and in the form that they wanted. So for instance, if the participants wanted the notes before class or one-to-one tuition after class then they felt that their status as adults warranted such consideration. Lecturers who went out of their way to help the participants were naturally highly regarded and it can be inferred that such lecturers made life in HE easier for the participants.

Some of the participants realised that they had power in the classroom as their mature student status impacted the lecturer-student dynamic. Their questioning approach to their lectures did not always make their lecturers comfortable but for the participants the resulting courtesy shown to them by their lecturers was important. For Séamus though, who did not get that reaction, the answer was to withdraw. This was purely an individual self-preservation approach in order to protect his examination results. The belief that they were not always catered for or had greater respect shown to them because they were mature students had resonances of school. The two-tier approach of their school days, which seemed to work positively for some students, was operating in HE and, like school, not always to their advantage. Participants who did not get the considerations that they believed they should get were left disappointed and in some cases despondent. This left them questioning the system and affected their self-confidence and coloured their HE interaction.

4. What factors affect men's success as mature students in higher education?

The participants' HE experiences and successes were based on a number of factors including family support and academic support.

Family Support

All of the participants' bar Niall looked for and received some form of family support. This support was direct or indirect, and ranged from advice about which HEI to attend and help with course work to providing a roof over their heads or money to pay the mortgage. This role-reversal is tied in with their levels of self-confidence and self-esteem which are important to male mature students. The participants' levels of self-confidence and self-esteem were increased through familial support. Familial support did have a gender dimension. The fact that the participants were willing to return to education and go to HE was welcomed because it was viewed as a manly thing to do. This support allowed them to create positive masculine identities as mature students and   without the support and the comfort that their families provided to them, HE would have been a more difficult experience.

Academic Relationships

External factors such as past school experiences affected the participants HE involvement. Returning to education in HE was a big step and so affording an environment that was conducive to learning was important to them. This was established through the relationships that the participants established with the younger students and with their lecturers. Worrying that HE was 'being like school' and the confrontational, 'them and us' attitudes affected some of the participants more than others. While it has been noted that mature students bring benefits to the classroom (Field, 1989) not all of the participants thought that their lecturers believed this. The participants wanted their adult status and life experiences to be accepted and when it was not they found HE difficult. They wanted to be listened to and take part in their classes rather than being lectured at. A willingness to participate and the ability to make friends and interact with their lecturers also

depended on the amount of effort that the participants were willing to expend. Their interaction with the other students in the class not only depended on their acceptance by the younger students but on how accepting they were of the younger students. These interactions were important to the younger mature students as they were willing to admit they they needed help but the older mature students did not want to lose face by admitting that they did not understand and needed help. While being male means being strong it also means being capable, being successful and being in control (Kimmel, 1994). The participants wanted to be seen as capable, of being able to achieve hence the difficulty they had in asking for help. Equally acceptance of their male, adult standing was an important concept and one that could affect fragile levels of self-confidence. Having an element of power and control was important and this included being seen as capable adults and treated in a manner that respected that position.

Implications for Policy, Practice and Research

The concept of learning careers helps in understanding that the educational pathways that individuals follow are not straightforward (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2002). The data have shown that the learning careers of the male mature students who took part in this study did not follow a linear path. They stopped and restarted and went backwards and were affected by various factors and as a result were fragile (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 1997, 2002; Gallacher at al., 2002; Bathmaker, 2005). As a concept, learning careers is an important tool for analysing and therefore illuminating and understanding adult reasoning concerning HE. It helps to shed light on individuals' choices and the factors which influence these choices and therefore the trajectories of their learning careers. Understanding why adults return to education and the influences which affect the choices is very important in twenty-first century Ireland. Successive governments have maintained the importance of an educated workforce as it has implications for the social and economic success of the country. This is important especially for those who have few job prospects or are unemployed as a result of the recession. For men in this situation education can help them to adjust to and cope with change and transition by allowing them to expand their horizons for action (McGivney, 2004). It is

important to note that men still see themselves as workers and this is an important aspect of their concept of self, their masculinity and their status. HE offers this group of people the opportunity to re-enter the job market by allowing them to reskill or upskill therefore leaving them with a viable set of transferrable employment skills. Although strides have been made in opening up HE to all sectors of the population, understanding the specific needs and requirements of the different groups who want to and do attend HE is necessary to ensure that participation continues to widen.

Various factors affect HE participation, one of which is financial sustainability. This study has found that the participants' learning careers were linked to their social and economic conditions, a position previously espoused by Gorard et al. (1998). Without financial security male mature students' choices will be constrained by their finances. While greater financial security would open up the HE arena, research has shown that men who receive such support have a lower attrition rate than those who do not (McGivney, 2004). Although all of the participants in this study were constrained by their financial situations, their HE interaction was dependant on financial support. Their families provided financial assistance meaning that they had a roof over their heads or money to pay bills.   As male mature students see themselves in the role of provider and often have many calls upon their financial resources, increasing financial assistance would allow more male mature students a wider choice of HEI and more independence concerning when and where they continue their learning careers. Although students do not have to pay tuition fees they do have to pay registration fees. The reduction in the grant payable to mature students (AONTAS, 2013b) and a general increase in registration fees have caused hardship. A review of the whole area surrounding HE and student finances is warranted in order to ensure that participation in HE is not hampered due to financial constraints.

School and its aftereffects are a major influence on an individual's learning career. Students who graduate from a school that fosters pupils' academic, sporting and extra-curricular interests would seem to have greater chances of progressing to HE at eighteen and continuing their learning careers later in life.   Currently the

number of males who leave school early exceeds those of females and that is due to a lack of an educational fit between the students and the school (NSSE, 2010). While early school leaving is a phenomenon that applies across the majority of EU countries (Lynch and Feeley, 2009) Ireland's belief in a fully educated workforce and a wider participation in HE cannot be sustained if this trend is not attended to. Tackling this issue has to start early with strategies such as the National Early Years Strategy (ECL, 2013). It is recognised internationally that such a strategy can yield future benefits both individually and nationally (Ibid.). Promoting a positive educational fit that ensures that individuals feel valued while in compulsory education might encourage students to move to HE at eighteen rather than giving up on their education at that stage or beforehand.

The participants in an educational programme are the best advertisement for the programme of study. It is important therefore that to bring more male mature students into HE those there can send out positive messages about their HE experiences. In order to ensure that more men go on to, and succeed in HE, policymakers need to be aware of this and what the HE experience is like for current mature students. Policies have changed over the years with the implementation of the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) strategy which has widened access to HE through the recognition of mature students' life and work experiences but this strategy is not always fully implemented by all IoTs. Making mature student quotas mandatory and increasing mature student quotas may be a way forward. Individual IoTs now have access officers who cater for mature students in HE but they still need other forms of support. Gaps in their abilities need to be filled and this may be achieved by offering them more tailored learning such as smaller classes or mature student groups which focus on specific subjects, such as mathematics for example, a subject that many of the participants struggled with. Many mature students fear the losing face especially amongst their male peers and 'exposure to humiliation' (Gallacher et al., 2002, p. 504) and small groups aimed at men within similar age brackets and which address particular needs may go some way to lessening this fear. One of the factors that would increase the numbers of mature students in HE and sustain them while there is lecturer support.

Lecturer support has been proven to be very important to the participants in this study but not all of the participants experienced the same level of support. Understanding that mature students have different expectations based on their past experiences is important to male mature students and can improve the HE experience. Staff development which focuses on mature students and their expectations can go some way to ensuring a more positive experience for male mature students in HE (McGivney, 1991).

As Weil (1986) has noted mature students often feel uncertainty and disconnection when they first enter HE and they need various types of support including emotional, financial, social and educational support. While outside support is vital, so is support inside the IoT. Understanding the male mature students' motivation to return to education, which is usually instrumental, and being able to offer the necessary supports and guidance may act as a skeletal structure upon which male mature students can hang their future hopes and aspirations as well as those of their families.

Education has lot to do with attitudes and dispositions to learning careers. To encourage more men into education more research is needed. As Burke (2006) proposes 'In order to make sense of differences in educational aspirations between boys and girls (and boys and boys), a close examination of gendered educational experiences is required' (p. 723). Deeper research into this area will provide data that will help to further structure policies that will help to broaden people's internal and external horizons for action (Hodkinson, 2004) so that they can see themselves as learners continuing their learning careers in HE.

Limitations of the Study

The fourteen participants provided in-depth and therefore rich detail of the events and influences that affected their learning careers. Their narratives gave detailed insights into the factors that dictated the decisions that affected the trajectories of their learning careers and their dispositions to learning before becoming mature students and when they were mature students. One of the criticisms levelled by Gallacher at al. (2002) is that Bloomer and Hodkinson (1997, 2002) did not extend

the period of research over a longer period and this could be levelled at the current study. By extending the time frame of this research it would have been possible to gather even more detail of the participants' learning careers and see if their dispositions to HE changed over time. A longitudinal study would also have allowed for follow-up once the participants left HE to see if their expectations of the benefits that a person accrues due to a higher education had been met.

The convenience sampling technique was an effective tool in facilitating the recruitment of the study's fourteen participants. Widening the sample so that there were representatives from the six schools in the IoT would have afforded even more insights into the HE experiences by providing a broader view of HE, and would have helped to verify the points the participants made. Equally the research study provides a snapshot of the factors that affected male mature students in one IoT leading up to participation in HE and of life in HE. Widening the study to include other IoTs would again provide richer data and a deeper understanding of real men's experiences of HE.

It would also have been interesting, as an avenue for further research, to widen the study to compare male and female mature students' experiences of HE.

In Conclusion

In 1989 Field saw mature students as 'a largely neglected pool of talent' (p. 16). The Irish Government has now recognised that the future of HE lies in encouraging mature students back to education as Ireland's development and recovery is predicated on the ability to 'maintain and develop a workforce with a high level of skills' (HEA, 2012b, p. 4). There is a growing demand for HE as is evidenced by the number of men who are beginning to turn to HE as a way out of the recession. This demand needs to be further encouraged if the Irish government's wish for a skilled workforce is to be achieved. Understanding male mature students and their experiences of education is an important aspect of this and this study provides some insights that should help to ensure that in the future their needs are met and their experiences are fulfilling.

The data shows that men often do not participate in HE at 18 because of unsatisfactory school experiences and their identity and construction of masculinity; one that often involves seeing themselves as working men. Their successful participating in HE is reliant on various factors and influences including those of family, economics, education and work relationships all of which have a huge influence on an individual's learning career. These factors and their levels of self-confidence sometimes cause an individual to step back from learning until a more opportune moment presents itself. The opportune moments and the driving forces for the participants in this study that caused them all to return to education were all related to their desire for some structure in their lives which was to be found through improved employment opportunities. Despite the decline in the belief in the role of men as sole breadwinners the participants had constructed male identities that meant that they still adopted the male as bread-winner role. In this study it was found that the participants were using the route of education to achieve the traditional goal of being the provider. By returning to education they were able to give meaning to their lives and provide for themselves and their families by continuing their learning career, which it was hoped would lead to them being better men through getting better jobs.

The participants were not prepared to take any job hoping instead for jobs that paid well and had good prospects. 'Learning can contribute to a sense of well-being and fulfilment' (Hodkinson et al., 2006, p. 31) and all of the participants were using HE as the way, to be fulfilled, to get jobs that had good prospects thus allowing them to become successful and thus construct viable masculine identities. To achieve this they were willing to put on hold their traditional masculine role of worker and provider in order to go to HE so that they could get the desired jobs which would give them the capacity of being better providers. They were willing to swallow their male pride and allow their family and friends to support them so that, in the longer term, they could be better providers for themselves and their families. That change in perspective is significant and those involved in dealing with such students need to know just how much they have put on the line in order to make sure that such students are dealt with properly. It is not just a financial or time investment, it is a

willingness to gamble with their identities as men, in the hope that in the end graduation will give them the potential to effectively assume the identity and perform the role that they believe is expected of them in order to be valued as 'real men.'

References

Action Group on Access to Third Level Education (2001) *Report of the Action Group on Access to Third Level Education.* Dublin, The Stationery Office.

Adams, T. E. (2008) A Review of Narrative Ethics. *Qualitative Inquiry*. 14(2), pp. 175-194.

Allan, B. and Lewis, D. (2006) The impact of membership of a virtual learning community on individual learning careers and professional identity. *British Journal of Educational Technology.* 37(6), pp. 841-852.

Alloway, N. and Gilbert, P. (2004) Shifting discourses about gender in higher education enrolments: retrieving marginalised voices. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education.* 17(1), pp. 99-112.

Altheide, D. L. and Johnson, J. M. (1994) Criteria for Assessing Interpretive Validity in Qualitative Research. In: Denzin, N. K. and Linclon, Y. S. (eds.) *Handbook of Qualitative Research.* Thousand Oaks, SAGE, pp. 485-499.

Alvermann, D.E. (2000, November). Narrative approaches. *Reading Online, 4*(5). [Online] http://www.readingonline.org/articles/art_index.asp?HREF=/articles/handbook/alvermann/index.htm Accessed 14 March 2006.

Angrosino, M. V. And Mays de Pérez, K. A. (2003) Rethinking Observation: From Method to Context. In: Denzin, N. K. and Lincoln, Y. S. (eds.) Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials. Thousand Oaks, SAGE, pp. 107-154.

AONTAS (2002) *Gender and Learning.* [Online] http://www.aontas.com/download/pdf/gender_learning_research.pdf Accessed 11 April 2007.

AONTAS (2009) BTEI: *Increasing Men's Participation in Adult Learning.* [Online] www.aontas.com/download/pdf/increasing_mens_participation.pdf Accessed 29 January 2013.

AONTAS (2013a) *Second Chance Education.* [Online] http://www.aontas.com/information/howtogetinvolved/second.html Accessed 26 May 2013.

AONTAS (2013b) Reduction in Financial Assistance. Personal Communication

Archer, L. and Hutchings, M. (2000) 'Bettering Yourself'? Discourses of risk, cost and benefit in ethnically diverse, young working-class non-participants' constructions of higher education. *British Journal of Sociology of Education.* 21(4), pp. 555-574.

Archer, L. (2003) The 'value' of higher education. In: Archer, L., Hutchings, M. and Ross, A. (eds.) *Higher Education and Social Class: Issues of Exclusion and Inclusion.* London, Routledge Falmer, pp. 119-136.

Archer, L. and Hutchins, M. (2001) 'Bettering yourself'? discourses of risk, cost and benefit in young working-class non-participants' constructions of HE. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*. 22(4), pp. 555-574.

Archer, L. and Leathwood, C. (2003) Identities, inequalities and higher education. In: Archer, L. Hutchings, M. and Ross, A. (eds.) *Higher Education and Social Class: Issues of Exclusion and Inclusion.* London, Routledge Falmer, pp. 175-192.

Archer, L., Leathwood, C. and Hutchings, M. (2002) Higher Education: A Risky Business. In:
Hayton, A. and Paczuska, A. (eds.) (2002) *Access, Participation and Higher Education:
Policy and Practice.* London, Kogan Page, pp. 107-122.

Archer, L., Pratt, S. D. and Phillips, D. (2001) Working-class Men's constructions of Masculinity and
Negotiations of (Non) Participation in Higher Education. *Gender and Education.* 13(4),
pp. 431-449.

Arendell, T. (1997) Reflections on the Researcher-Researched relationship: A Woman Interviewing
Men. *Qualitative Sociology*. 20(3), pp. 341-368.

Askham, P. (2008) Context and Identity: exploring adult learners' experiences of higher education.
Journal of Further and Higher Education. 32(1), pp. 85-97.

Aslanian, C. B. and Bricknell, H. M. (1980) *Americans in Transition: Life Changes as Reasons for
Adult Learning.* New York, College Board.

Bailey, K. D. (1994) *Methods of Social Research* (4th ed.) New York, The Free Press.

Ball, S., Maguire, M. and Macrea, S. (2000) *Choice, Pathways and Transitions Post-16: new youth,
new economies in the global city.* London, Routledge Falmer.

Ball, S. J., Reay, D. and David, M. (2002) 'Ethnic Choosing': minority ethnic students, social class
and higher education. *Race Ethnicity and Education.* 5(4), pp. 333-357.

Bamber, J. and Tett, L. (2000) Transforming the Learning Experiences of Non-traditional Students:
a perspective from higher education. *Studies in Continuing Education.* 22(1), pp. 57-75.

Barbour, R. S. and Schostak, J. (2005) Interviewing and Focus Groups. In: Somekh, B. and Lewin, C.
(eds.) *Research Methods in the Social Sciences.* London, SAGE, pp. 41-48.

Barone, T. (2007) A Return to the Gold Standard? Questioning the Future of Narrative Construction
as Educational Research. *Qualitative Inquiry.* 13(4), pp. 454-470.

Bathmaker, A. (2005) *Learners, Learning and Identity: the concepts of learning careers as a tool for
theorising learning.* Lecture Material. The University of Sheffield.

Baxter, A. and Britton, C. (2001) Risk, Identity and Change: becoming a mature student.
International Studies in Sociology of Education. 11(1), pp. 87-101.

Bean Ui Chasaide, C. (1997) Balancing Realities – The Act of Becoming An Adult Student. In:
Morris, R. (ed.) *Mature Students in Higher Education: proceedings of conference in Athlone
Regional Technical College: 29 March 1996 .* Dublin, Higher Education Equality Unit (HEEU),
pp. 35-47.

Beard, R. and Hartley, J. (1984) *Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*. (Fourth Edition).
London, Paul Chapman Publishing.

Bhatti, G. (2003) Social justice and non-traditional participants in higher education: a tale of border-
crossing, instrumentalism and drift. In: Vincent, C. (ed.) *Social Justice, Education and
Identity.* London, Routledge Falmer, pp. 65-82.

Blair, A., McPake, J. and Munn, P. (1995) A new conceptualisation of adult participation in
education. *British Educational Research Journal.* 21(5), pp. 629-644.

Blaxter, L., Dodd, K. and Tight, M. (1996) Mature Student Markets: An institutional case study. *Higher Education.* 31(2), pp. 187-203.

Bloomer, M. (1997) *Curriculum Making in Post-16 Education: The Social Conditions of Studentship.* Routledge, London.

Bloomer, M. (2001) Young Lives, Learning and Transformations: some theoretical considerations. *Oxford Review of Education.* 27(3), pp. 429-449.

Bloomer, M. and Hodkinson, P. (1997) *Moving into FE: the voice of the learner.*   Further Development Agency (FEDA), London.

Bloomer, M. and Hodkinson, P. (1999) *College Life: the voice of the learner.* London, Further Development Agency (FEDA).

Bloomer, M. and Hodkinson, P. (2000a). The complexity and unpredictability of young people's learning careers. *Education and Training.* 42(2), pp. 68-74.

Bloomer, M. and Hodkinson, P. (2000b) Learning Careers: continuity and change in young people's dispositions to learning. British Educational Research Journal. 26(5), pp. 583-597.

Bloomer, M. and Hodkinson, P. (2002) Learning Careers and Cultural Capital: Adding a Social and Longitudinal Dimension into Our Understanding of Learning. In: Nata, R. (ed.) *Progress in Education Volume 5. New York,* Nova Science Publishers, Inc., pp. 115-141.

Bloomer, M., Hodkinson, P. and Bilet, S. (2004) The Significance of Ontogeny and Habitus in Constructing Theories of Learning. *Studies in Continuing Education.* 26(1), pp. 19-43.

Bourdieu, P. (1976) The School as a Conservative Force: scholastic and cultural inequalities. In: Dale, R., Esland, G. and MacDonald, M. (eds.) *Schooling and Capitalism: a sociological reader.* London, Routledge and Kegan Paul with the Open University Press, pp. 110-117.

Bourdieu, P. (1997) The Forms of Capital. In: Halsey, A. H., Lauder, H., Brown, P. and Wells, A. S. (eds.) *Education: culture, economy and society.* Oxford University Press, Oxford. Reprint of Bourdieu, P. (1986) *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education.* London, Greenwood Press, pp. 46-58.

Bourdieu, P. (2003) Against Objectivism: the reality of the social fiction. In: Sikes, P., Nixon, J. and Carr, W. (eds.) *The Moral Foundations of Educational Research: Knowledge, Inquiry and Values.* OU Press, Buckingham, pp. 68-85.

Bourdieu, P. and Wacquant, L. (1992) *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology.* University of Chicago Press.

Bourgeois, E., Duke, C., Guyot, J. and Merrill, B. (1999) *The Adult University.* Buckingham, SHRE and OU Press.

Bourner, T., Reynolds, A., and Barnett, R. (1991) *Part-time Students and their Experience of Higher Education.* Buckingham, Open University Press/SRHE.

Bowl, M. (2001) Experiencing the Barriers: non-traditional students entering higher education. *Research Papers in Education*. 16(2), pp. 141-160.

Brady, B. (1997) "Shake the Dice to Start": Developing Equality if Access for Mature Students. In: Morris, R. (ed.) *Mature Students in Higher Education: proceedings of conference in Athlone Regional Technical College: 29 March 1996.* Dublin, Higher Education Equality Unit (HEEU), pp. 6-13.

Brady, B. (2009) *AONTAS Submission on National Strategy for Higher Education.* [Online] http://www.hea.ie/files/files/file/DoE/Aontas%20%204.pdf Accessed 14 February 2010.

Brandt, E. (2001) Lifelong Learning in Norwegian Universities. *European Journal of Education*. 36(3), pp. 265-276.

Brine, J. and Waller, R. (2004) Working-class Women on an Access Course: risk, opportunity and (re)constructing identities. *Gender and Education.* 16(1), pp.97-113.

Britton, C. and Baxter, A. (1994) Mature Students' Routes into Higher Education. *Journal of Access Studies.* 9, pp. 215-228.

Britton, C. and Baxter, A. (1999) Becoming a Mature Student: gendered narratives of self. *Gender and Education.* 11(2), pp. 179-193.

Bron, A. and Agélii, K. (2000) Sweden: Non-traditional students in higher education in Sweden: from recurrent education to lifelong learning. In: Schuetze, H. G. and Slowey, M. (eds.) *Higher Education and Lifelong Learners.* London*,* Routledge Falmer, pp. 83-100.

Brooks, R. (2002) Short Report: 'Edinburgh, Exeter, East London – or Employment?' A review of research on young people's higher education choices. *Educational Research*. 44(2), pp. 217-227.

Brown, P. (2009) *National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education –The Irish Experience.* National Access Office, Higher Education Authority, Dublin. [Online] http://www.okm.gov.hu/doc/upload/200901/peter_brown_bbs_wg3_090108.pdf Accessed 8 April 2009.

Bruner, J. (1987) Life as Narrative. *Social Research.* 54(1), pp. 11-32.

Bunyan, K. and Jordan, A. (2005) Too Late for the Learning: lessons from older learners. *Research in Post-Compulsory Education.* 10(2), pp. 267-281.

Burke, P. J. (2000) Intimidating/ory Education. *Research in Post Compulsory Education.* 5(3), pp. 271-287.

Burke, P. J. (2006) Men Accessing Education: gendered aspirations. *British Educational Research Journal.* 32(5), pp. 719-733.

Burke, P. J. (2007a) Men Accessing Education: masculinities, identifications and widening participation*. British Journal of Sociology of Education.* 28(4), pp. 411-424.

Burke, P. J. (2007b) RES-000-22-0832 – Masculinities and Education Participation: Men Returning to Study. [Online] http://www.esrcocietytoday.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/Plain_English_Summaries Accessed 29 March 2010.

Burke, P. J. (2009) Men Accessing Higher Education: Theorizing Continuity and Change in relation to Masculine Subjectivities. *Higher Education Policy.* 22, pp. 81-100.

Burke, P. J. (2012) *The Right to Higher Education.* London, Routledge.

Burke, P. J. (2013) Formations of Masculinity and Higher Education Pedagogies. *Culture, Society, and Masculinities.* 5(2), pp. 109-126.

Canning, M. (2007) *Vocational Education at Secondary Level in Ireland.* [Online]
http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTECAREGTOPEDUCATION/Resources/444607119263
6551820/Ireland_case_stud_4th_conf_September_26_2007.pdf Accessed 29 July 2008.

Carone, M. (2000) *Education in Ireland: Past Successes and Future Problems.* [Online]
http://www.lehigh.edu/~incntr/publications/perspectives/v19/Carone.PDF   Accessed   4
February 2012.

Carpenter, A. (2004) *Social Class, Inequality and Higher Education in Ireland.* [Online]
http://www.staffs.ac.uk/institutes/access/docs/28604Ireland.doc Accessed 14 February
2008.

Carrol, D. and Patterson, V. (2011) *A Profile of Undergraduate Mature New Entrants.*
[Online]http://www.hea.ie/files/files/file/statistics/AMture%20Student%20profile%20Auth
ority%20Nov2011%2028429.pdf Accessed 29 January 2012.

Central Statistics Office (CSO) (2011) *Principle Statistics*   [Online]
http://www.cso.ie/en/statistics/labourmarket/principalstatistics/ Accessed 3 March 2008

Christiansen, S. L. and Palkovitz, R. (2001) Why the "Good Provider" Role Still Matters: providing as
a Form of paternal Involvement. *Journal of Family Issues.* 22, pp. 84-106.

Christie, H., Munro, M. and Wager, F. (2005) 'Day Students' in Higher Education: widening access
students and successful transitions to university life. *International Studies in Sociology of
Education.* 15(1), pp. 3-29.

Citizens Information (2011) *Third-level College Applications Procedures and Entrance Requirements*.
[Online]
http://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/educationa/third_level_education/applying_to_colle
ge/application_procedures_and_entry_requirements.html Accessed 13 February 2012.

Citizens Information (2012) *Measures to Address Educational Disadvantage.* [Online]
http://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/education/the_irish_education_system/measures.
Accessed 6 February 2012.

Clancy, P. (1988) *Who Goes to College?* Dublin, HEA.

Clancy, P. (1995) Access to College: Patterns of Continuity and Change. Dublin, HEA.

Clancy, P. (1997) Higher Education in the Republic of Ireland: Participation and Performance.
Higher Education Quarterly. 51(1), pp. 86-106.

Clancy, P. (2001) *College Entry in Focus: a Fourth National Survey of Access to Higher Education.*
Dublin, HEA.

Clancy, P. and Wall, J. (2000) *Social Background of Higher Education Entrants.*   Dublin, HEA.

Cohen, L., Manion, L. and Morrison, K. (2007) *Research Methods in Education.*   (Sixth Edition)
New York, Routledge.

Collins, T. (2000) Adult Learners and Non-traditional Students in Irish Higher Education. In: Schuetze,
H. G. and Slowey, M. (eds.) *Higher Education and Lifelong Learners.* London, Routledge
Falmer, pp. 67-82.

Collinson, D. L. (2007) Class, Work and Masculinity In: Flood, M., Gardiner, J. K., Pease, B. and Pringle, K. *International Encyclopedia of Men and Masculinities*. London, Routledge, pp. 69-73.

Connell, R. W. (1987) *Gender and Power.* Cambridge, UK, Polity Press.

Connell, R. W. (1989) Cool Guys, Swots and Wimps: the interplay of masculinity and education. *Oxford Review of Education.* 15(3), pp. 291-303.

Connell, R. W. (1995) *Masculinities*. Cambridge, Polity Press.

Connell, R. W. (1996) Teaching the Boys: New Research on Masculinity, and Gender Strategies for Schools. *Teachers College Record. 98(2).* [Online] http://xyonline.net/sites/default/files/Connell,%20Teaching%20the%20Boys%2096.pdf Accessed 28 February 2014

Connell, R. W. (2000) *The Men and the Boys.* Cambridge, UK, Polity Press.

Connell, R. W. (2003) *The Role of Men and Boys in Achieving Gender Equality.* UN Expert Group Meeting, Brazil, October, 2003. [Online] http://www.ashanet.org/focusgroups/sanctuary/articles/Connell-bp.pdf Accessed 27 March 2007.

Connell, R. W. (2005) *Masculinities*. (2nd edition) Cambridge, Polity Press.

Connelly, F. M. and Clandinin, D. J. (1990) Stories of Experience and Narrative Inquiry. *Educational Researcher*. 19(5), pp. 2-14.

Coolahan, J. (2007) *Irish Education – history and structure.* Dublin, IPA.

Copeland, S. (2008) Mature Student Age. Personal Communication.

Council of Europe (1996) *Access to Higher Education for Under-Represented Groups.* Strasbourg, Council for Europe.

Courtney, S. (1992) *Why Adults Learn.* London, Routledge.

Craib, I. (2000) Narratives as Bad Faith. In: Andrews, M., Day Schlater, S., Squire, C. and Treacher, A. (eds.) *Lines of Narrative: Psychosocial Perspectives.* London, Routledge, pp. 86-104.

Cregan , C. (2003) The Impact of Higher Education on the Personal Lives of Mature Students. In: Batt, V., Ní Fhaoláin, S. and Pelan, R. (eds.) *Gender Matters in Higher Education: Proceedings of Conference. 8th-9th November 2002, NUI, Galway.* Galway, National University of Ireland, pp. 107-121.

Creswell, J. W. (2007) *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches.* (Second Edition) Thousand Oaks, SAGE.

Crossan, B., Field, J., Gallacher, J. and Merrill, B.   (2003) Understanding Participation in Learning for Non-traditional Adult Learners: learning careers and the construction of learning identities. *British Journal of Sociology of Education.* 24(1), pp. 55-67.

Cunningham, M. (2008) Changing Attitudes toward the Male Breadwinner, Female Homemaker Family Model: Influences of Women's Employment and Education over the Lifecourse. *Social Forces* 87(1), pp. 299-323.

Czarniawska, B. (2004)The Uses of Narrative in Social Science Research. In: Hardy, M. and
     Bryman, A. (eds.) *Handbook of Data Analysis*. London, SAGE, pp. 649-666.

Darmody, M. (2008) Mapping Barriers to Successful School Transitions in Comparative Perspective-
     Irish and Estonian Experiences. Trames: A Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences.
     17(2), pp. 51-72.

Davies, P. (1995) Themes and Trends. In: Davies, P. (ed.) *Adults in Higher Education: International
     Perspectives on Access and Participation.* London, Jessica Kingsley, pp. 279-289.

Davies, P. and Williams, J. (2001) For Me or Not For Me? Fragility and Risk in Mature Students'
     Decision- Making. *Higher Education Quarterly.* 55(2), pp. 185-203.

Dawson, E. and Boulton, P. (2000) Returning to Education? A Question of Balance? *Journal of
     Access and Credit Studies.* 2(2), pp. 164-177.

Deans, C. (2009) Mature Student Age. Personal Communication.

Dennet, D. C. (1991) *Consciousness Explained.* Boston, Little Brown.

Denscombe, M. (2003) *The Good Research Guide for small scale social research projects.* (Second
     Edition) Berkshire, Open University Press.

Denzin (1989) *Interpretive Biography.* Newbury Park, CA., SAGE*.*

Denzin, N. K. and Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, SAGE.

Denzin, N. K. and Lincoln, Y. S. (eds.) (2000) *Handbook of Qualitative Research.* (Second Edition)
     Thousand Oaks, SAGE

Department of Education and Science (DES) (1995) *Charting Our Educational Future: White Paper
     on Education.* The Stationery Office, Dublin.

Department of Education and Science (DES) (1998) Adult Education in an Era of Lifelong Learning:
     Green Paper on Adult Education. Dublin, The Stationery Office.

Department of Education and Science (DES) (1999) *Commission on the Points System Final Report
     and Recommendations.* [Online]
     http://odtl.dcu.ie/mirror/irlgov/educ/pointcommreport99.html
     Accessed 8 February 2009.

Department of Education and Science (DES) (2000) Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult
     Education. Dublin, DES.

Department of Education and Science (DES) (2007a) *Sé Sí: Gender in Irish Education.* Dublin,
     Government Publications.

Department of Education and Science (DES) (2007b) The New Gender Gap.
     Personal Communication.

Department of Education and Science (DES) (2009) *06 February, 2009 - Minister O'Keeffe
     announces plans for new national higher education strategy.* [Online]
     http://www.education.ie/robots/view.jsp?pcategory=10861andlanguage=ENandecategory=
     10876andlink=link001anddoc=43049 Accessed 15 May 2009.

Department of the Taoiseach (2000) *Programme For Prosperity and Fairness.* [Online]
    http://taoiseach.gov.ie/attached_files/Pdf%20files/ProgrammeForProsperityAndFairness.pdf
    Accessed 28 May 2006.

Department of the Taoiseach (2006) *Towards 2016: Ten-Year Framework Social Partnership
    Agreement 2006-2015.* Dublin, The Stationery Office

Dewey (1938) *Experience and Education.* New York, Touchstone Books, Schuster and Schuster.

Duke, C. (1992) *The Learning University: towards a new paradigm.* Buckingham, SRHE and Open
    University Press.

Ecclestone, K. and Pryor, J. (2003) 'Learning Careers' or 'Assessment Careers'? The Impact of
    Assessment Systems on Learning.   *British Educational Research Journal.*   29(4),
    pp. 471-488.

Early Childhood Learning (ECL) (2013) *National Early Year's Strategy (NEYS).* [Online]
    http://www.earlychildhoodireland.ie/policy-advocacy-and-research/national-early-years-
    strategy-neys/ Accessed 6 June 2013.

Edwards, R. (1993) *Mature Women Students: separating or connecting family and education.* Taylor and
    Francis, London.

Educational Policies that Address Social Inequality (EPASI) 2013 Exploring Masculinities
    http://www.epasi.eu/$-project-study.cfm?PID=023 Accessed 6 June 2013.

Eimhovich, C. (1995) Distancing Passion: narratives in social science. In: Hatch, J. A. and
    Wisniewski, R. (eds.) *Life History and Narrative.* London, The Falmer Press, pp. 37-49.

Elliot, J. (2005) *Using Narrative in Social Research: Qualitative inquiry and the enhancement of
    educational practice.* London, SAGE.

Ellis, C. and Bochner, P. (2000) Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity: researcher as
    subject. In: Denzin, N. K. and Lincoln, Y. S. (eds.) (2000) *Handbook of Qualitative Research.*
    (Second Edition) Thousand Oaks, SAGE, pp. 733-768.

Epstein, D., Elwood, J., Hey, V. and Maw, J. (1999) Schoolboy frictions: feminism & 'failing boys.' In:
    Epstein, D., Elwood, J., Hey, V. and Maw, J. (eds) *Failing Boys: Issues in Gender and
    Achievement.* OU Press, Buckingham, pp. 3-18.

Erikson, E. H. (2009) Psychoanalytic Ego Psychology: The Centrality of Identity. In: Sollod, R. N.,
    Wilson, J. P. and Monte,   C. F. *Beneath the Mask: An Introduction to Theories of
    Personality* (8th Ed) Wiley, Hoboken, USA.

European Access Network (EAN) (2009) *The 18th EAN Annual Conference Monday 22nd –
    Wednesday 24th June 2009, York, England.* [Online]
    http://www.eanedu.org/upload_data/York_conf_flyer_finalp1g.pdf Accessed 15 May
    2009.

European Commissions (EC) (1997) *Age becomes her: older women in the EU, Women in Europe.*
    Dossier 45. May-July. [Online] http://www.bookshop.europa.eu/ Accessed 28 February
    2013.

Evers, F., Livernois, J. and Mancuso, M. (2006) Where are the Boys? Gender Imbalance in Higher
    Education. *Higher Education Management and Policy.* 18(2), pp. 103-115.

Expert Group on Future Skills and Needs (EGFSN) (2010) *Statement of Activity 2009*. [Online] http://www.skillsireland.ie Accessed 29 January 2011.

FETAC (2005) *About FETAC.* [Online] http://www.fetac.ie/info/about_fetac.htm Accessed 9 February 2008.

FETAC (2008) *Applying for a course in further education and training.* [Online] http://www.fetac.ie/PDF/Fetac_Nov.pdf Accessed 8 February 2008.

Ferguson, H. (2001) Men and Masculinities in Late-modern Ireland. In: Pease, B. and Pringle, K. (ed.) *A Man's World? Changing Men's Practices in a Globalized World.* Zed Books, London, pp. 118-134.

Fleming, T. (1998) *The Role of Adult Education in Ireland.* [Online] http://adulteducation.nuim.ie/department_staff/documents/JournalofGuidanceCounsellors97.pdf Accessed 14 January 2008.

Fleming, T. (2009) Male Students in HE. Personal communication.

Field, J. (1989) Mature Students in the Undergraduate Community: what kind of special case? *Pastoral Care in Education.* 7(3), pp. 16-18.

Field, J. (2009) Learning Transitions in the Adult Life Course: Agency, Identity and Social Capital. In: Merrill, B. (ed) *Learning to Change? The Role of Identity and Learning Careers in Adult Education.* Frankfurt am Main, Peter Lang Publishing Group.

Field, J. and Lynch, H. (2009) *Learning and Work in the Life-Course. The Learning Lives Newsletter 3 June2007.* [Online] http://www.learninglives.org Accessed 19 February 2009.

Fontana, A. and Frey, H. (2000) The Interview: From Structured Questions to Negotiated Text. In: Denzin, N. K. and Lincoln, Y. S. (eds.) *Handbook of Qualitative Research.* (Second edition) Thousand Oaks, SAGE, pp. 645-672.

Franzosi, R. (1998) Narrative Analysis – Or Why (And How) Sociologists Should Be Interested In Narrative. *Annual Review of Sociology.* 24, pp. 517-514.

Frid, I. and Öhlén, J. (2000) On the Use of Narratives in Nursing Research. *Journal of Advanced Nursing.* 32(3), pp. 695-703.

Gailey, J. A. and Prohaska, A. (2011) Power and Gender negotiations during interviews with men about sex and sexually degrading practices. *Qualitative Research.* 11(4), pp. 365-380.

Gallacher, J., Crossan, B., Field, J. and Merrill, B. (2002) Learning Careers and the Social Space: exploring the fragile identities of adult returners in the new further education. *International Journal of Lifelong Education.* 21(6), pp. 493-509.

Gammon, M. (1997) What Makes a Successful Mature Student? *Adult Learning.* 8(4), pp. 30-31.

Gardner, P. and Pickering, J. (1991) 'Learning with Yuppies': or, On Counselling Mature Students. *Pastoral Care.* March, pp. 13-19.

Garson, D. (2005) *Narrative Analysis.* [Online] http://www.statisticalassociates.com/narrativeanalysis.pdf Accessed 28 October 2008

Gay, L. R., Mills, G. E. and Airasian, P. (2006) *Educational Research: Competencies for Analysis and Applications.* London, Pearson.

Gaydos, H. L. (2004) Understanding Personal Narratives: an approach to practice. *Journal of Advanced Nursing.* 49(3), pp. 254-259.

Gayle, Berridge, D. and Davies, R. (2002) Young People's Entry into Higher Education: qualifying influential factors. *Oxford Review of Education. 28*(1), pp. 5-20.

Geertz, C. *Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight, part 1 and part2. [*Online] http://webhome.idirect.com/~boweevil/BaliCockGeertz.html Accessed 24 June 2010.

George, J., Cowan, J., Hewitt, L. and Cannell, P. (2004) 'Failure Dances to the Tune of Insecurity': affective issues in the assessment and evaluation of access learning. *Journal of Access Policy and Practice.* 1(2), pp. 119-33.

Gergen, K. J. and Gergen, M. M. (1988) Narrative and the Self as Relationship. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology.* 21, pp. 17-55.

Gerson, K. (1987) What do Women Want from Men? Men's Influence on Women's Work and Family Choices. In: *Changing Men: New Directions in research on Men and Masculinity*. Newberry Park, SAGE, pp. 115-130.

Giddens, A. (1991) *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age.* Polity Press, Oxford.

Giddens, A. (2001) *Sociology* (Fourth Edition). Polity, Cambridge.

Gilchrist, R., Phillips, D. and Ross, A. (2003) Participation and Potential Participation in UK Higher Education. In: Archer, L., Hutchings, M. and Ross, A. *Higher Education and Social Class: Issues of Exclusion and Inclusion.* London, Routledge Falmer, pp. 75-96.

Giles, J. (1990) Second Chance, Second Self? *Gender and Education.* 2(3), pp. 357-361.

Gilmore. D. (1990) *Manhood in the Making: Cultural Concepts of Masculinity.* New Haven, Yale University Press.

Gleeson, J. (1999) *'Exploring Masculinities' Review: Executive Summary.* Dublin: Department of Education and Science.

Gleeson, J., Conboy, P. and Walsh, A. (2003) *The Piloting of 'Exploring Masculinities' (1997-1998): context, implementation and issues arising. Report of External Evaluation.* University of Limerick, Department of Education and Professional Studies.

Gilmore. D. (1990) *Manhood in the Making: Cultural Concepts of Masculinity.* New Haven, Yale University Press.

Goffman, E. (1968) *Asylums: essays on the social situation of mental patients and other inmates*. Harmondsworth, Pelican.

Goodlad, C. (2007) The Rise and Rise of Learning Careers: a Foucauldian genealogy. *Research in Post-Compulsory Education.* 12(1), pp. 107-120.

Goodley, D., Lawthom, R., Clough, P. and Moore, M. (2004) *Researching Life Stories: Method, theory and analyses in a biographical age.* London, Routledge Falmer.

Goodson, I.F. and Sikes, P. (2001). *Life History Research in Educational Settings. Learning from lives.* Buckingham, Open University Press.

Gorard, S., Rees, G., Fevre, R. And Furlong, J. (1998) The Two Components of a New Learning Society. *Journal of Vocational Education and Training.* 50, pp. 5-19.

Gorard, S. and Rees. G. (2002) *Creating a Learning Society?: learning careers and policies for lifelong learning.* London, The Policy Press.

Gorard, S., Rees, G., Fevre, R. and Welland, T. (2001) Lifelong Learning Trajectories: some voices of those 'in transit.' *International Journal of Lifelong Education.* 20(3), pp. 169-187.

Gough, B. and Peace, P. (2000) Reconstructing Gender at University: men as victims. *Gender and Education.* 12(3), pp. 385-398.

Graziano, A. M. and Raulin, M. L. (2010) *Research Methods: A Process of Inquiry.* (Seventh Edition) Boston, Allyn and Bacon.

Grebennikov, L. and Skaines, I. (2009) Gender and Higher Education Experience: a case study. *Higher Education Research and Development.* 28(1), pp. 71-84.

Gubrium, J. F. and Holstein, J. A. (1998) Narrative Practice and the Coherence of Personal Stories *The Sociological Quarterly.* 39(1), pp. 163-187.

Gurney, J. N. (1985) Not One of the Guys: The Female Researcher in a Male-Dominated Setting. *Qualitative Sociology*. 8(1), pp. 42-62.

Halverson, J. R. (2011) *Why Story is Not Narrative.* [Online] http://csc.asu.edu/2011/12/08/why-story-is-not-narrative Accessed 8 May 2012

Hamiliton, M. and Davies, P. (1993) Literacy and Long-term Unemployment: options for adult guidance, support and training. *British Journal of Education and Work.* 6(2), pp. 5-19.

Hammersley, M. (1992) *What's Wrong With Ethnography? Methodological Explorations*. London, Routledge.

Hammersley, M. (2001) Obvious, all too obvious? Methodological issues in using sex/gender as a variable in educational research. In: Francis, B. and Skelton, C. (ed) *Investigating Gender: Contemporary perspectives in education.* Berkshire, UK, OU Press .

Hannan, D. F. , Breen, R., Murphy, B., Watson, D., Hardiman, N. and O'Higgins, K. (1983) *Schooling and Sex Roles: Sex Differences in Subject Provision and Student Choice in Irish Post-Primary Schools.* Dublin, ESRI General Research Series, Paper No. 113.

Hardy, B. (1977) Narrative as a Primary Act of Mind. In: Meek, M., Warlow, A. and Barton, G. (eds.)*The Cool Web.* Bodley Head, London, pp. 12-33.

Haselgrove, S. (1994) (ed.) *The Student Experience.* Milton Keynes, Open University/SRHE.

Hatch, J. A. and Wisniewski, R. (1995) Life History and Narrative: questions, issues, and exemplary work. In: Hatch, J. A. and Wisniewski, (eds.) *Life History and Narrative.* London, The Falmer Press, pp. 113-136.

Hayes, D. (1999) When Numbers Count: The Erasure of Females' Equality Status in Higher Education? *Australian Educational Researcher.* 26(2), pp. 87-98.

Heenan, D. (2002) Women, Access and Progression: an examination of women's reasons for not continuing in higher education following the completion of Certificate in Women's Studies. *Studies in Continuing Education.* 24(1), pp. 39-55.

Hendry, P. M. (2007) The Future of Narrative. *Qualitative Inquiry.* 13(4), pp. 487-498.

Herod, A. (1993) Gender Issues in the Use of Interviewing as a Research Method. *Professional Geographer*. 45(3), pp.305-317.

Hertz, R. (1997) Introduction: Reflexivity and Voice. In: Hertz, R. (ed) *Reflexivity and voice.* Thousand Oaks, SAGE.

Higher Education Authority (HEA) (1995) *Report of the Steering Committee on the Future Development of Higher Education.* Dublin, HEA.

Higher Education Authority (HEA) (2004) *Achieving Equity of Access to HE in Ireland: Action Plan 2005-2007.* Dublin, HEA.

Higher Education Authority (HEA) (2006) *04/05 Key Facts and Figures.* [Online] http://www.hea.ie/en/statistics Accessed 29 January 2010.

Higher Education Authority (HEA) (2007) *05/06 Key Facts and Figures.* [Online] http://www.hea.ie/en/statistics Accessed 29 January 2013.

Higher Education Authority (HEA) (2008a) *HEA CEO Warns on Challenge for Boys' education.* [Online] http://www.hea.ie/en/node/1112 Accessed 18 February 2009.

Higher Education Authority (HEA) (2008b) National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education: 2008-2013. Dublin, HEA.

Higher Education Authority (HEA) (2009a) *Age is No Barrier to Participation in Higher Education*. [Online] www.hea.ie/en/node/1229 Accessed 12 November 2011.

Higher Education Authority (HEA) (2009b) *Media Release: HEA Sets Ambitious Targets for Mature Students in Higher Education.* [Online] http://www.hea.ie/en/node/1229 Accessed 28 May 2009.

Higher Education Authority (HEA) (2010) 09/10 *Higher Education: Key Facts and Figures.* [Online] http://www.hea.ie Accessed 12 November 2011.

Higher Education Authority (HEA) (2012a) *10/11 Key Facts and Figures.* [Online] http://www.hea.ie/en/statistics Accessed 29 January 2013.

Higher Education Authority (HEA) (2012b) *Towards a Future Higher Education Landscape.* [Online] http://www.hea.ie/files/TowardsaFutureHigherEducationLandscape.pdf Accessed 19 October 2012.

Higher Education Authority (HEA) (2012c) *HEA Strategic Plan.* [Online] www.hea.ie/files/HEA-STRATEGIC-PLAN.pdf Accessed 20 January 2013.

Higher Education Authority (HEA) (2013a) *Mature Students.* [Online] www.hea.ie/older-mature-students Accessed 11 February 2013.

Higher Education Authority (HEA) (2013b) *Increasing Participation and Lifelong Learning.* [Online] http://www.hea.ie/en/node/247 Accessed 11 February 2013.

Higher Education Access Route (HEAR) (2012) *Government Strategy - Achieving a Fair Higher Education System.* [Online] http://www.accesscollege.ie/hear/government-strategy.php Accessed 29 March 2012.

Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HEATAC) (2011) *Institutional review of Institute of Technology Blanchardstown – 21-23 February 2011 – Report of the Expert Panel.* [Online] http://www.itb.ie/AboutITB/QualityAssuranceReports/Institutional%20Review%202011%20-%20HETAC%20Report.pdf Accessed 11 February 2013.

Hodkinson, P. (2003) Learning Careers and Career Progression*. Learning and Skills Research.* 6(3), pp. 24-26.

Hodkinson, P. (2004) *Career Decision-Making, Learning Careers and Career Progression*. Nuffield Review of 14-19 Education and Training Working Paper 12.

Hodkinson, P. (2007) *Learning Careers Revisited.* CRLL Conference. June 22-24, 2007. University of Stirling, Scotland. [Online] http://www.learninglives.org/papers/Learning%20Careers,%20dr2.doc Accessed 27 May 2008.

Hodkinson, P. and Bloomer, M. (2001) Dropping Out of Further Education: complex causes and simplistic policy assumptions. *Research Papers in Education.* 16(2), pp. 117-140.

Hodkinson, P., Ford, G., Hawthorn, R. and Hodkinson, H. (2006a) *The Place of Formal Education and Training in Learning As Becoming.* In: *Learning, identity and agency in the life course: Investigating participation in adult education and training using biographical and panel data.* Symposium to be presented at the 36th Annual Conference of the Standing Conference on University Teaching and research on the Education of Adults (SCUTREA) 4-7 July 2006, University of Leeds. [Online] http://www.learninglives.org/papers/LL_SCUTREA_Sym2_2006.pdf Accessed 26 February 2009.

Hodkinson, P., Ford, G., Hawthorne, R. and Hodkinson, H. (2006b) Working Paper 1 – The Significance of Formal Education and Training in Adults' Lives. [Online] http://www.learniglives.org/Working-papers.html#wp_1 Accessed 15 February 2014

Hodkinson, P., Hodkinson, H., Hawthorn, R. and Ford, G., (2008) *Learning Through Life.* [Online] http://www.learninglives.org/Working_papers.html Accessed 21 July 2008.

Hodkinson, P. and Sparkes, A. C. (1993) Young People's Career Choices and Careers Guidance Action Planning: A Case-Study of Training Credits in Action. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling.* 21(3), pp. 246-261.

Hodkinson, P., Sparkes, A. C. and Hodkinson, H. (1996) *Triumphs and Tears: Young People, Markets and the Transition from School to Work.* London, David Fulton.

Holliday, A. (2002) *Doing and Writing Qualitative Research.* London, SAGE.

Holloway, W. and Jefferson, T. (2000) *Doing Qualitative Research Differently: free association, narrative and the interview method.* London, SAGE.

Holoborn, M. and Langley, P. (2002) Sociology Themes and Perspectives – Student Handbook. London, Collins.

Hooks, B. (1989) *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*. Boston, MA., South End Press.

Hooks, B. (2000) *Where We Stand: Class Matters.* London, Routledge.

Huberman, M. (1995) Working with Life-History Narratives. In: McEwan, H. and Egan, K. (eds.) *Narrative in Teaching, Learning and Research.*   New York, Teachers College Press, pp. 127-165.

Hughes, E. C. (1937) Institutional Office and the Person. *The American Journal of Sociology*. 43, pp. 404-413.

Hughes, C., Blaxter, L., Brine, J. and Jackson, S. (2006) Gender, Class, 'Race' in Lifelong Learning: policy and practice in the UK and EU. *British Educational Research Journal.* 32(5), pp. 643-648.

Hunt, C. (2011) *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030*. [Online] http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/?pageNumber=3   Accessed   14 February 2012.

Huston-Hoburg, L. and Strange, C. (1986) Spouse Support Among Male and Female Returning Adult Students. *Journal of College Student Personnel.* 27, pp. 388-394.

Iannelli, C. (2004) School Variation in Youth Transitions in Ireland, Scotland and the Netherlands. *Comparative Education.* 40(3), pp. 401-425.

International Federation of Workers' Education Associations (IFWEA) (2001) *IFWEA is the international organisation responsible for the development of workers' education.* [Online] http://www.ifwea.org/about-ifwea Accessed 12 January 2013.

Institutes of Technology Ireland (IOTI) (2008) and Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) *Open Learning and Research. Projects Briefing Notes for Job Applicants.* [Online] http://www.ioti.ie/documents/470_InstitueofTechnologyBriefing080508.doc Accessed 26 September 2008.

Institutes of Technology Ireland (IOTI) (2013) *Why study in Ireland?* [Online] http://www.ioti.ie/locate-out-institutes Accessed 29 January 2013.

Izbicki, J. (2000) *No 'typical' mature students. The Independent. October 15th, 2000.* [Online] http://news.independent.co.uk/education/education_news/article166917.ece Accessed 12 November 2007.

Jacob, B. A. (2002) Where the Boys Aren't: Non-Cognitive Skills, Returns to School and the Gender Gap in Higher Education. *Economics of Education Review.* 22, pp. 589-598.

Jackson, C. (2003a) 'Motives for "Laddishness" at school: fear of failure and fear of the "Feminine".' *British Educational Research Journal.* 29(4), pp. 583-598.

Jackson, C. (2003b) Transitions into Higher Education: gendered implications for academic self-concept. *Oxford Review of Education.* 29(3), pp. 331-346.

Jackson, S. (2003) Lifelong Earnings: working-class women and lifelong learning. *Gender and Education.* 15(4), pp. 365-376.

Jackson, D. (1999) Breaking out of the binary trap. In: Epstein, D., Elwood, J., Hey, V. and Maw, J. (eds) *Failing Boys: Issues in Gender and Achievement.*   OU Press, Buckingham, pp. 96-108.

Jackson, D. (2007) Retirement. In: Flood, M., Gardiner, J. K., Pease, B. and Pringle, K. International Encyclopaedia of Men and Masculinities. London, Routledge, pp. 538.

Jackson, H. (2009) Mature Student Age Query. Personal Communication.

James, D. (1995) Mature Studentship in HE: beyond a 'species' approach. *British Journal of Sociology of Education.* 16(4), pp. 451-466.

Janssens, A. (1997) *The Rise and Decline of the Male Breadwinner Family? An Overview of the Debate*. Amsterdam, Cambridge University Press.

Johnson, C. G. and Watson, G. (2004) 'Oh Gawd, How am I Going to Fit Into This?': Producing (Mature) First-Year Student Identity. *Language and Education.* 18(6), pp. 474-487.

Johnston, R. and Merrill, B. (2009) Developing Learner Identities for Working Class Adult Students in Higher Education.   In: Merrill, B. (ed) *Learning to Change? The Role of Identity and Learning Careers in Adult Education.* Frankfurt am Main, Peter Lang Publishing Group.

Joppe, M. (2007). *Non-Probability Sampling Techniques.* [Online] http://www.ryerson.ca/~mjoppe/ResearchProcess/NonprobabilitySampling.htm   Accessed 24 June 2007.

Jump, T. L. and Hass, L. (1987). Fathers in Transition: Dual-Career Fathers Participating in Child Care. In: Kimmel, M. S. (ed) *Changing Men: New Directions in research on Men and Masculinity*. Newberry Park, SAGE, pp. 98-114.

Justice, E. M. and Dornan, T. M. (2001) *Metacognitive Differences between Traditional and Nontraditional – Age College Students. Adult Educational Quarterly.* 51(3), pp. 263-249. [Online] http://aeq.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/51/3/236   Accessed 26 February 2007.

Kantanis, T. (2002) *Same or Different: Issues that affect mature age undergraduate students' transition to university.* [Online] http://fyhe.com.au/past_papers/papers02/KantanisPaper.doc Accessed 13 May 2013

Kasworm, C. (2005) Adult Student Identity in an Intergenerational Community Classroom. *Adult Educational Quarterly.* 56(1), pp. 3-20.

Kelan, E. (2008) Gender, risk and employment insecurity: The masculine breadwinner subtext. *Human Relations*. 61(9), pp. 1171–1202.

Kennedy, J. (2011) *Budget 2012 – Ireland's higher education spending to be cut by 2pc.* [Online] http://siliconrepublic.com/innovation/item/24837-budget-2012-irelands-hig Accessed 13 February 2013.

Kenny, R. (1983) *Commission on Adult Education Report: Lifelong Learning.* Dublin, Stationery Office.

Kerka, S. (2003) *Learning Careers/Learning Trajectories.* ERIC: Trends and Issues Alert. No 45. 2003. [Online] http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED478342.pdf Accessed 24 February 2009.

Kimmel, M. S. (1994) Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity. In: Brod, H. and Kaufman, M. (eds) *Theorising Masculinities.* SAGE, London, pp. 119-141.

Kimmel, M. S. (2008) *Guyland: The Perilous World Where Boys Become Men.* New York, Harper Collins.

Kimmel, M. (2012) *Men and Masculinities.* [Online] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cKNa83G5XI4 Accessed 20 January 2014.

Kimmel, M. S. and Davis, T. (2011) Mapping Guyland in College. In: Laker, J. A. and Davis, T. (eds) *Masculinities in Higher Eduaction: Theoretical and Practical Considerations.* Routledge, New York, pp. 3-15.

Krumboltz, J. D., Mitchell, A. M. and Jones, G. B. (1976) A social learning theory of career selection. *The Counseling Psychologist.* 6(1), pp. 71-81.

Labov, W. (2006) *Narrative pre-construction.* [Online] http://www.ling.upenn.edu/~wlabov/Papers/NPC.html Accessed 9 May 2006.

Lanigan, M. (2005) Why Positive Access Policies in Higher Education Can Contribute to Active Citizenship. *The Adult Learner.* Dublin, AONTAS.

Leathwood, C. and O'Connell, P. (2003) 'It's a Struggle': the construction of the 'new student' in higher education. *Journal of Education Policy.* 18(6), pp. 597-615.

Leder, G. C. and Forgasz, H. J. (2004) Australian and International Mature Students: the daily challenges. *Higher Educational Research and Development.* 23(2), pp. 183-198.

Lee, D. (1997) Interviewing Men: Vulnerabilities and Dilemmas. *Women's Studies International Forum.* 20(4), pp. 553-564.

Lemon, M. C. (2001) The Structure of Narrative. In: Roberts, G. (ed.) *The History and Narrative Reader*, pp. 107-129.

Letherby, G. (2003) *Feminist Research in Theory and Practice.* Buckingham, OU Press.

Levant, R. F. and Kopecky, G. (1995). *Masculinity Reconstructed: Changing the Rules of Manhood – At Work, in Relationships, and in Family Life*. New York, Dutton.

Lewis, A. (2009) Mature Student Age. Personal Communication.

Lewis, B. (2002) *Widening Participation in Higher Education: The HEFCE Perspective on Policy and Progress.* Higher Education Quarterly, 56(2), pp. 204-219.

Lincoln, Y. S. and Guba, E. G. (2000) Paradigmatic Controversies, Contradictions, and Emerging Confluences. In: Denzin, N. K. and Lincoln, Y. S. (eds) *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2nd ed). Thousand Oaks, SAGE, pp. 163-188.

Liddy, M. (2009) HE Course Information. Personal Communication.

Linde, C. (2001) Narrative and Social Tacit Knowledge. *Journal of Knowledge Management.* 5(2), pp. 160-170.

Lundgren, A. S. (2012) Doing Age: methodological reflections on interviewing. *Qualitative Research.* 13(6), pp. 668-684.

Lynch, K. (1997) A Profile of Mature Students in Higher Education and An Analysis of Equality Issues. In: Morris, R. (ed.) *Mature Students in Higher Education: proceedings of conference in Athlone Regional Technical College: 29 March 1996.* Dublin, Higher Education Equality Unit (HEEU), pp. 79-115.

Lynch, K. (ed.) (1999) *Equality in Education.* Dublin, Gill and Macmillan.

Lynch, K. and Feeley, M. (2009) Gender and Education (and Employment): Gender imperatives and their implications for women and men - lessons from research for policymakers. France, NSSE.

Lynch, K. and O'Riordan, C. (1998) Inequality in Higher Education: a study of social class barriers. *British Journal of Sociology of Education.* 19(4), pp. 445-478.

Lyons, R. (2010) *Irish Economy: It's not raining men – Ireland at risk of becoming the opposite of China.* [Online] http://www.ronanlyons.com/2010/03/30/its-not-raining-men-ireland-at-risk-of-becoming-the-opposite-of-china/ Accessed 2 February 2013.

Mac an Ghaill, M. (1994) *The Making of Men: masculinities, sexualities and schooling.* Buckingham, OU Press.

Mac an Ghaill, M. and Haywood, C. (2007) *Gender, Culture and Society: Contemporary Femininities and Masculinities. Palgravew Macmillan, London.*

Mac an Ghaill, M. (1996) Sociology of Education, State Schooling and Social Class: beyond critiques of the new right hegemony. *British Journal of Sociology of Education.* 17, pp. 163-176.

Maher, F. A. (2001) Women's studies in England: mature women students and their educational vision. *Gender and Education.* 13(1), pp. 7-23.

MacInnes, J. (1998) *The End of Masculinity*. Buckingham, OU Press.

Mancuso, S. (2001) Adult-Centred Practices: Benchmarking Study in Higher Education. *Innovative Higher Education.* 25(3), pp. 165-181.

Martino, W. (1999) " 'Cool Boys', 'Party Animals', 'Squids', and 'Poofters': interrogating the dynamics and politics of adolescent masculinities in schools." *British Journal of Sociology of Education.* 20(2), pp. 239-263.

Maynard, E. M. and Pearsall, S. J. (1994) What About Male Mature Students? A comparison of the experiences of men and women students. *Journal of Access Studies.* 9, pp. 229-240.

McEwan, H. and Egan, K. (eds.) (1995) *Narrative in Teaching, Learning and Research.* New York, Teachers College Press.

McFadden, M. and Sturt, C. (1995) 'Second Chance' Education: settling old scores. *Journal of Access Studies*. 10, pp. 40-59.

McGivney, V. (1991) Opening Colleges to Adult Learners: Report of the NIACE-TEED research project on adult learners in colleges of further education. London, NIACE.

McGivney, V. (1992) *Motivating Unemployed Adults to Undertake education and training: some British and other European findings.* National Institute for Adult Continuing Education, Leicester.

McGivney, V. (1996) *Staying or Leaving the Courses: Non-completion and retention of mature students in further and higher education.* Leicester, NIACE.

McGivney, V. (1999) *Excluded Men: men who are missing from education and training.* Leicester, NIACE.

McGivney, V. (2004a) Men Earn Women Learn: Bridging the gender divide in education and training. NIACE, Leicester.

McGivney, V. (2004b) Understanding Persistence in Adult Learning. *Open Learning*. 19(1) , pp. 33- 46.

McKeown, K., Ferguson, H. and Rooney, D. (1998) *Changing Fathers? Fatherhood and Family Life in Modern Ireland.* Cork, Collins Press.

McLeod, J. (2003) Revisiting Gender, Habitus and Social Field, or why Bourdieu now. Paper Presented at *Gender and Education Fourth International Conference.* 14-16 April, 2003. University of Sheffield.

McMahon, B. (1997) The Meaning and Relevance of Education for Working-Class Mature Students: A Personal View. In: Morris, R. (ed.) *Mature Students in Higher Education: proceedings of conference in Athlone Regional Technical College: 29 March 1996.* Dublin, Higher Education Equality Unit (HEEU), pp. 28-34.

McMahon, F. (2000) Continuing Education in Irish Higher Education: A New Era Ahead? *Irish Educational Studies.* 19, pp. 271-283.

Meijers, F. (1998) The Development of a Career Identity. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling.* 20, pp. 192-207.

Mercer, J. (2007) Re-negotiating the Self Through Educational Development: mature students' experiences. *Research in Post-Compulsory Education.* 12(1), pp. 19-32.

Mercer, J. and Saunders, D. (2004) Accommodating Change: the process of growth and Development amongst a mature student population.   *Research in Post-Compulsory Education.* 9(2), pp. 283-299.

Merrill, B. (1999) *Gender, Change and Identity: Mature Women Students in Universities.* Ashgate, Hampshire.

Merrill, B. (2001) Learning and Teaching in Universities: perspectives from adult learners and lecturers. *Teaching in Higher Education.* 6(1), pp. 5-17.

Merrill, B. (2004) Biographies, Class and Learning: the experiences of adult learners. *Pedagogy, Culture and Society.* 12(1), pp. 73-94.

Mink, L. O. (1966) The autonomy of historical understanding. In: Dray, W. H. (ed.) *Philosophical Analysis and History.* New York, Harper Row, pp. 160-192.

Mishler, E. G. (1986) *Research Interviewing.* Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press.

Moogan, Y. J., Baron, S. and Harris, K. (1999). Decision-making behaviour of potential higher education students. *Higher Education Quarterly.* 53(3), pp. 211-228.

Mosse, G. L. (1996) *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity.* Oxford University Press, New York.

Munns, G. and Mcfadden, M. (2000) First Chance, Second Chance or Last Chance? Resistance and Response to Education. *British Journal of Sociology of Education.* 21(1), pp. 59-75.

Murphy, M. and Fleming, T. (1998) *College knowledge: power, policy and the mature student experience at university.*   [Online]   http://eprints.nuim.ie/982/1/College_Knowledge.pdf Accessed 26 August 2009.

Murphy, M. and Fleming, T. (2000) Between Common and College Knowledge: exploring the boundaries between adult and higher education. *Studies in Continuing Education.* 22(1), pp. 77-93.

National Development Plan (1999) *National Development Plan 2000-2006.* [Online] http://www.ndp.ie/documents/publications/evaluation/NDP-CSF-Review.pdf Accessed 1 June 2009.

National Development Plan (NDP) (2007) *National Development Plan 2007-2013 - Promoting Gender Equality.* [Online] http://www.ndp.ie/ Accessed 24 March 2008.

National University of Ireland (NUI) (2011) *Structure and Composition: Role of the National University of Ireland.* [Online] http://www.nui.ie/about/structure.asp Accessed 24 February 2011.

Nelson, L. D. (1998) *Herbert Blumer's Symbolic Interactionism.* [Online] http://www.colorado.edu/Communication/metadiscourses/Paper/App_Papers/Nelson.htm Accessed 25 October 2008.

Network of Experts in Social Sciences of Education and Training (NSSE) *Early School Leaving: Lessons From research for Policy Makers.* [Online] http://www.nesse.fr/nesse/activities/reports Accessed 12 June 2013.

Nuehring, E. M. and Fein, S. B. (1978) Tacit Choices: A Process of Becoming *Pacific Sociological Review.* 21(2), pp. 169-171.

Norton, L. S., Thomas, S., Morgan, K. and Dickins, T. E. (1998) Full-time Studying and Long-term Relationships: make or break for mature students? *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling.* 26(1), pp. 75-88.

O'Byrne, C. (2005) 'Supporting the Story: An Examination of the Case for Narrative Research in Social Science' Assignment 4 EdD. Sheffield University.

O'Connell, P. J., McCoy, S. and Clancy, D. (2006) Who Went to College? Socio-Economic Inequality in Entry to Higher Education in the Republic of Ireland in 2004. *Higher Education Quarterly.* 60(4), pp. 312-332.

O'Connor, P. (2008) *The Challenge of Gender in Higher Education: Processes and Practices. Proceedings of the 4th International Barcelona Conference on Higher Education: Volume 3 – Higher Education and Gender Equity.* [Online] http://www.gunirmies.net/info/default.php?id169 Accessed 26 May 2009.

O'Dubhslainé, A (2006) The White Paper on Education: A Failure to Invest. *Student Economic Review.* 20, pp. 115-127.

O'Leary, Z. (2004) *The Essential Guide to Doing Research.* London, SAGE.

O'Neill, J. M. and Crapser, B. (2011) Using the Psychology of Men and Gender Role Conflict Theory. In: Laker, J. A. and Davis, T. (ed) *Masculinities in Higher Education.* Oxon, UK, Routledge, pp. 16-49.

O'Rourke, R. (1999) Men on the Margins: towards an account of men's experience of adult education. Paper presented at SCUTREA, 29th Annual Conference, 5-7 July 1999, University of Warwick. [Online] http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/documents/000001014.doc Accessed 28 February, 2014.

Oireachtas – Acts of

- Regional Technical Colleges Act, 1992. [Online]
  http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/1992/en/act/pub/0016/index.html
  Accessed 27 March 2007.

- Universities Act, 1997. The Stationery Office, Dublin.

- Institutes of Technology Act, 2006.   The Stationery Office, Dublin. [Online]
  http://www.oureachtas.ie/documents/bills28/acts/2006/A2506.pdf
  Accessed 27 March, 2007.

Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) (1997) *Literacy Skills for the Knowledge Society.* Canada, OECD.

Organisation for Economic Co-operational Development (OECD) (2004) Review of National Policies for Education: Review of Higher Education in Ireland. Examiners Report. France, OECD.

Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development. (OECD) (2006) *Reviews of National Policies for Education: Higher Education in Ireland.*   France, OECD.

Orton, S. (2005) *Widening Participation: A Rough Guide for Higher Education Providers.* [Online]
Available: http://www.swap.ac.uk/widen/introduction.asp?version=printversion
Accessed 6 January 2007.

Osborne, M., Marks, A. and Turner, E. (2004) Becoming a mature student: how adults weigh the advantages and disadvantages of higher education. *Higher Education.* 48, pp. 291-315.

Overcash, J. A. (2003). Narrative Research: a review of methodology and relevance to clinical practice. *Critical Reviews in Oncology/Hematology .* 48(2), pp. 179-184.

Owens, T. (2000) *Men on the Move: A Study of Barriers to Male Participation in Education and Training Initiatives.* Dublin, AONTAS.

Paechter, C. (2001) Using Poststructuralist ideas in gender theory and research. In: Francis, B. & Skelton, C. (ed) *Investigating Gender: Contemporary perspectives in education.* Berkshire, UK, OU Press, pp. 41-51.

Paley, J. and Eva, G. (2005) Narrative vigilance: the analysis of stories in health care.   *Nursing Philosophy.* 6, pp. 83-97.

Parmar and Trotter (2005) Keeping Our Students: identifying factors that influence student Withdrawal and strategies to enhance the experience and retention of first year students. *Learning and Teaching in the Social Sciences*. 1, pp. 149-168.

Parnham, J. (2001) Lifelong Learning: a model for increasing the participation of non-traditional adult learners. *Journal for Further and Higher Education.* 25(1), pp. 57-65.

Parr, J. (2001) What's in it for Mature Women? In: Anderson, P. and Williams, J. (eds.) *Identity and Difference in Higher Education: 'outsiders within.'*   Hampshire, Ashgate, pp. 55-66.

Patterson, V. (2012) Mature Student Entry to HE. Personal Communication.

Patton, M. Q. (2002) *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods.* (Third Edition) Thousand Oaks, SAGE.

Paulson, S. (2010) The Use of Ethnography and Narrative Interviews in a Study of 'Cultures of Dance. *Journal of Health Psychology.* 16(1), pp. 148-157.

Penglase, B. M. (1993) Mature-age Access Students: affective support in the open foundation experience. *Studies in Continuing Education.* 15(1), pp. 39-49.

Peruffo, E. (2012) AONTAS - Men Returning to Education. Personal Communication.

Philips, D. C. (1994) Telling It Straight: Issues In Assessing Narrative Research. *Educational Psychologist.* 29(1), pp. 13-21.

Pini, B. (2005) Interviewing Men: Gender and the Collection and Interpretation of Qualitative Data. *Journal of Sociology.* 41(2), pp. 201-216.

Poe, M. (2004) The Other Gender Gap: Maybe Boys Just Weren't Meant for the Classroom. [Online]
http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2004/01/the-other-gender-gap/302877
Accessed 15 January 2014.

Polkinghorne, D. E. (1988) *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences.* Albany, State University of New York Press.

Polkinghorne, D. E. (1995) Narrative Configuration in Qualitative Analysis. In: Hatch, J. A. and Wisniewski, R. (eds.) *Life history and narrative: questions, issues, and exemplary work.* London, The Falmer Press, pp. 5-24.

Polkinghorne, D. E. (2007) Validity Issues in Narrative Research. *Qualitative Inquirer.* 13(4), pp. 471-486.

Pollard, A. (1985) *The Social World of the Primary School.* London, R. and W. Holt.

Pollard, A. and Filer, A. (1996) *The Social World of Children's Learning: Case Studies of Pupils from Four to Seven.* London, Cassell.

Pollard, A. and Filer, A (1999) *The Social World of Pupil Career: strategic biographies through primary school.* London, Continuum International Publishing Group.

Pyett, P. M. (2003) Validation of Qualitative Research in the "Real World". *Qualitative Health Research*. 13(8), pp. 1170-1179.

Qualifax (2013) *Colleges with RPL Policies.* [Online]
http://www.qualifax.ie/index.php?option=com_contentandview=articleandid=163andItemid=190   Accessed 12 February 2013.

Raphael Reed, L. (1999) 'Zero tolerance': gender performance and school failure. In: Epstein, D., Elwood, J., Hey, V. and Maw, J. (eds) *Failing Boys: Issues in Gender and Achievement.* Buckingham, OU Press, pp. 57-76.

Reay, D. (1998) 'Always Knowing' and 'Never Being Sure': familial and institutional habituses and higher education. *Journal of Education and Policy.* 13(4), pp. 519-529.

Reay, D. (2001) The paradox of contemporary femininities in education: combining fluidity with fixity. In: Francis, B. and Skelton, C. (ed) *Investigating Gender: Contemporary perspectives in education*. Berkshire, OU Press, pp.152-163.

Reay, D. (2002a) Shaun's Story: troubling discourses of white working-class masculinities. *Gender and Education.* 14(3), pp. 221-234.

Reay, D. (2002b) Class, Authenticity and the Transition to Higher Education for Mature Students. *The Editorial Board of The Sociological Review*, pp. 398-418.

Reay, D. (2003) A Risky Business? Mature Working-class Women Students and Access to Higher Education. *Gender and Education.* 15(3), pp. 301-317.

Reay, D. and Ball, S. (1997) 'Spoilt for Choice': the working classes and educational markets. *Oxford Review of Education.* 23(1), pp. 89-101.

Reay, Diane, David, Miriam & Ball, Stephen (2001). Making a difference? Institutional habituses and higher education choice. Sociological Research Online 5(4). [Online] http://scoresonline.org.uk/5/4/reay.html Accessed 30 April 2013.

Reay, D., Ball, S. and David, M. (2002) 'It's Taken Me a Long Time but I'll Get There in the End': mature students on access courses and higher education choice. *British Educational Research Journal.* 28(1), pp. 5-19.

Reay, D., David, M. E. and Ball, S. (2005) *Degrees of Choice: social class, race and gender in higher education.* Stoke on Trent, Trenthan Books.

Renold, E. (2004) 'Other' boys: negotiating non-hegemonic masculinities in the primary school. *Gender and Education.* 16(2), pp. 247-265.

Rickinson, B. and Rutherford, D. (1996) Systematic Monitoring of the Adjustment to University of Undergraduates: a strategy for reducing withdrawal rates. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling.* 24, pp. 213-225.

Riddell, S., Wilson, A. and Baron, S. (2001) Gender, Social Capital and Lifelong Learning for People with Learning Difficulties. *International Studies in Sociology of Education.* 11(1), pp. 3-23.

Riessman, C. K. (1993) *Narrative Analysis.* Newberry Park, California, SAGE.

Robichaud, M., Dugas, M. J. and Conway, M. (2003) Gender Differences in Worry and Associated Cognitive-behavioural Variables. *Journal of Anxiety Disorders.* 17(5), pp.501-516.

Rogers, A. (2000) *Teaching Adults.* (Second Edition) Buckingham, Open University Press.

Rosenwald, G. C. and Ochberg, R. L. (1992) Introduction: Life stories, cultural politics and self-understanding. In: Rosenwald, G. C. and Ochberg, R. L. (eds.) *Storied lives: The cultural politics of self-understanding.* New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, pp. *1-18.*

Salisbury, J. and Jackson, D. (1996) *Challenging Macho Values: Practical Ways of Working with Adolescent Boys.* London, Falmer Press.

Sallee, M. W. and Harris III, F. (2011) Gender Performance in qualitative studies of masculinities. *Qualitative Researcher.* 11(4), pp. 409-429.

Sandelowski, M. (1991) Telling Stories: Narrative Approaches in Qualitative Research. *Journal of Nursing Scholarship.* 23(3), pp. 161-166.

Scala, M. A. (1996) Going Back to School: participation motives and experiences of older adults in an undergraduate classroom. *Educational Gerontology.* 22(8), pp. 747-773.

Scottish Government (2004) *What support is available for mature Scottish students in higher education in 2004-05?* [Online] http://www.soctland.gov.uk/Publications/2004/04/19219/35687 Accessed 4 March 2009.

Seanad Éireann (1992) *Regional Technical Colleges Bill, 1991: Second Stage (Resumed). Volume 133.* [Online] http://historical-debates.oireachtas.ie/S/0133/S.0133.199207100004.html Accessed 22 June 2009.

Segal, L. (1993) Masculinities in Context. *Theory and Society: Special Issue: Masculinities.* 22(5), pp. 625-641.

Selltiz, C., Jahoda, M., Deutsch, M. and Cook, S. W. (1965) *Research Methods in Social Relations.* London, Methuen.

Sikes, P. (2006) On dodgy ground? Problematics and ethics in educational research. *International Journal of Research and Method in Education.* 29(1), pp. 105-117.

Sikes, P. (2010) The Ethics of Writing Histories and Narratives in Educational Research. In: Bathmaker, A. M. and Hartnet, P. *Exploring learning, identity and power through life history and narrative research.* Oxon, Routledge, pp. 11-24.

Skelton, C. (2001) Typical boys? Theorizing masculinity in educational settings. In: Francis, B. and Skelton, C. (ed) *Investigating Gender: Contemporary perspectives in education.* Berkshire, OU Press, pp. 164-176.

Skilbeck, M. and Connell, H. (2000) *Meeting the Equity Challenge in Higher Education – A Review of International Experience*. Dublin, HEA.

Skilbeck, M. (2001) *The University Challenged: A review of International Trends and Issues with Particular Reference to Ireland.* Dublin, HEA.

Smyth, E. and Hannan, C. (2007) School Processes and the Transition to Higher Education. Oxford *Review of Education*. 33(2), pp. 175-194.

Smyth, J. and Hattam, R. (2002) Early School Leaving and the Cultural Geography of High Schools. *British Educational Research Journal*. 28(3), pp. 376-397.

Snyder, T. (2007) Mature Student Ages. Personal Communication.

Somers, M. (1994) The Narrative Constitution of Identity: A relational and network approach. *Theory and Society.* 23, pp. 605-649.

Sommers, C. H. (2000) *The War Against Boys.* [Online] http://www.theatlantic.com/past/issues/2000/05/sommers4.htm Accessed 15 January 2014.

Southern Illinois University Carbondale (SIUC) (2009) *Welcome to Student Development.* [Online] http://www.siu.edu/~studdev/nontraditional/ Accessed 14 April 2009.

Squire, C. (2006) *Reading Narratives.* [Online] http://www.uel.ac.uk/cnr/forthcom.htm Accessed 2 February 2006.

Staples, R. (1982) Black Masculinity: The Black Man's Role in American Society. San Francisco, Black Scholar Press.

Steele, R., Lauder, W., Caperchione, C. and Anastasi, J. (2005) An Exploratory Study of the Concerns of Mature Access to Nursing Students and the Coping Strategies Used to Manage these Adverse Experiences. *Nurse Education Today.* 25, pp. 573-581.

Støren, L. and Arnsen, C. (2007) Women's and Men's Choices of Higher Education – what explains the persistent sex segregation in Norway? *Studies in Higher Education.* 32(2), pp. 253-275.

Strauss, A, (1962) Transformations of Identity. In Rose, A. M. (ed.) *Human Behaviour and Social Processes: An Interactionist Approach. Henley, Routledge.*

Taskforce on Lifelong Learning (2002) *Report of the Taskforce on Lifelong Learning.* Dublin, Stationery Office.

Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP) (2008) *Teaching and Learning Research Programme: Strategies for improving learning through the life-course. July 2008 The Learning Lives Project.* [Online] http://www.tlrp.org Accessed 20 February 2009.

Tett, L. (1999) Widening Provision in Higher Education – some non-traditional participants' experiences. *Research Papers in Education.* 14(1), pp. 107-119.

Tett, L. (2000) 'I'm Working Class and Proud of It' – gendered experiences of non-traditional participants in higher education. *Gender and Education.* 12(2), pp. 183-194.

Thomas, L. (2005) The Implications of Widening Participation for Learning and Teaching. In: Duke, C. and Layer, G. (eds.) *Widening Participation – Which Way forward for English Higher Education?* London, NIACE, pp. 98-113.

Thompson, E. H. and Pleck, J. H. (1987) Reformulating the Male Role. In: Kimmel, M. S. (ed) *Changing Men: New Directions in   Research on Men and Masculinity.* Newberry Park, SAGE, pp. 25-36.

Thomson, P. (2008) Field. In: Grenville, M. (ed.) *Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts.* Stocksfield, UK, ACUMEN, pp. 67-84.

Thornhill, D. (1998) *Challenges for the Millennium – The Future Shape of Third Level.* [Online] http://www.ucc.ie/publications/heeu/Millennium/challenges_millenium.htm   Accessed 5 April 2012.

Thornhill, D. (2002) Widening Access to Higher Education in Ireland. In: Thomas, L., Cooper, M. and Quinn, J. (eds.). *Collaboration to Widen Participation in Higher Education*. Stoke-on-Trent, Trentham Books, pp. 49-69.

Thurtle, V., Hammond, S. and Jennings, P. (1998) The Experience of Students in a Gender Minority on Courses at a College of Higher and Further Education. *Journal of Vocational Education and Training.* 50(4), pp. 629-645.

Tolson, A. (1977) *The Limits of Masculinity.* London, Tavistock.

Torres, M. (2007) Complicit Masculinity In: Flood, M., Gardiner, J. K., Pease, B. and Pringle, K. International Encyclopaedia of Men and Masculinities. London, Routledge, pp. 78.

Toynton, R. (2005) Degrees of Disciplinary in Equipping Mature Students in Higher Education for Engagement and Success in Lifelong Learning. *Learning in Higher Education.* 6(2), pp. 106-117.

Trotter, E. and Cove, G. (2005) Student Retention: an exploration of the issues prevalent on a healthcare degree programme with mainly mature students. *Learning in Health and Social Care*. 4(1), pp. 29-42.

Tuckett, A. (1990) A Higher Education System Fit for Adult Learners. In: Parry, G. and Wake, C. (eds.) *Access and Alternative Futures for Higher Education.* London, Hodder and Stoughton, pp. 113-133.

Universities and Colleges Admissions Services (UCAS) (2009) *What does it mean to be a mature student in Scotland?* [Online] http://www.ucas.com/students/maturestudents/chooseuni/scotland Accessed 3 March 2009.

University College London (UCL) (2003) *The Learning Needs of Mature and Part Time Students at UCL.* [Online] http://www.ucl.ac.uk/calt/tqef/matureptreport.pdf Accessed 4 March 2009

University of Texas Dallas (UTD) (2011) Gender Studies. [Online] http://www.utdallas.edu/genderstudies/recruit.html Accessed 17 February 2014.

Usher, R. and Bryant, I. (1989) *Adult Education as Theory, Practice and Research – the captive triangle.* London, Routledge.

Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) (2005) *Mature Students 2005: entry to full-time third-level courses.* Dublin, The Department of Education and Science.

Wakeford, N. (1993) Beyond Educating Rita: mature students and Access courses. *Oxford Review of Education*, pp. 217-230.

Wakeford, N. (1994) Becoming a mature student: the social risks of identification. *Journal of Access Studies.* 9, pp. 241-256.

Walker, M. (2001) *Narrative and Fiction.* Notes for a Master's in Educational Research. Module 2. Sheffield University.

Walker, M. (2005) 'First Generation' Students in England: social class narratives of university access and participation. Unpublished Paper, School of Education, University of Sheffield.

Waller, R. (2004) 'I *really* hated school, and couldn't wait to get out!': Reflections on 'a wasted opportunity' amongst Access to HE students. *Journal of Access Policy and Practice.* 2(1), pp. 24-43.

Waller, R. (2005) 'I Call Myself a *Mature* Student. That One Word Makes All the Difference': Reflections on Adult Learners' Experiences. Auto/Biography. 13, pp. 53-76.

Waller, R. (2006) 'I don't feel like 'a student', I feel like 'me'!': the over simplification of mature learners' experience(s). *Research in Post-Compulsory Education.* 11(1), pp. 115-130.

Walters, M. (1997) Mature Students – Overcoming the Barriers to Higher Education. In: Morris, R. (ed.) *Mature Students in Higher Education: Proceedings of Conference in Athlone Regional Technical College.* Dublin, Higher Education Equality Unit, pp. 21-27.

Walters, M. (2000) The mature students' three Rs. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling.* 28(2), pp. 267-278.

Warmington, P. (2003) 'You Need a Qualification for Everything these Days.' The impact of work, welfare and disaffection upon the aspirations of access to Higher Education students. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*. 24(1), pp. 95-108.

Webb, S., Davies, P., Williams, J. and Green, P. (1994) Alternative and Access Entrants to Higher Education: routes, tracks, triggers and choices. *Journal of Access Studies.* 9, pp. 197-214.

Weil, S. (1986) Non-traditional Learners Within Traditional higher Education Institutions: Discovery and Disappointment. *Studies in Higher Education.* 11(3), pp. 219-235.

Weil, S. (1989) From a Language of Observation to a Language of Experience: studying the Perspective of diverse adults in higher education. *Journal of Access Studies.* 3(1), pp. 17-43.

Wellington, G., Bathmaker, A. M., Hunt, C., McCulloch, G. and Sikes, P. (2005) *Succeeding with Your Doctorate.* London, SAGE.

Weiner, G. (1994) *Feminisms in Education: An Introduction.* Buckingham, OU Press.

Weiss, L. (2003) Gender, Masculinity and the New Economy. *The Australian Educational Researcher.* 30(3), pp. 111-128.

West, L. (1995) Beyond Fragments: adults, motivation and higher education. *Studies in the Education of Adults.* 27(2), pp. 133-156.

West, L. (2008) Gendered space: men, families and learning. In: Ostrouch, J. and Ollagnier, E. (eds) *Researching Gender in Adult Learning.* Frankfurt am Main, Peter Lang Publishing Group.

White, H. (1989) The Rhetoric of Interpretation. In: Hernadi, P. (ed.) *The Rhetoric of Interpretation and the Interpretation of Rhetoric.* Durham, NC, Duke University Press, pp. 1-22.

White, T. (2001) *Investing in People: Higher Education in Ireland from 1960 to 2000.* Dublin, Institute of Public Administration.

Wiersma, W. and Jurs, S. G. (2005) *Research Methods in Education: An Introduction.* (Eighth Edition) Boston, Pearson.

Wikipedia (2012) *Institutes of Technology in Ireland.* [Online] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Institutes_of_technology_in_Ireland Accessed 29 1 2012.

Williams, J. (1997) The Discourse of Access: The Legitimation of Selectivity. In: Williams, J. (ed.) *Negotiating Access to Higher Education: The Discourse of Selectivity and Equity.* Buckingham, SRHE and OU Press, pp. 24-46.

Willis, P. (1977) *Learning to Labour: how working class kids get working class jobs.* London, Gower Press.

Wilson, F. (1997) The Construction of Paradox?: One Case of Mature Students in Higher Education. *Higher Education Quarterly.* 51(4), pp. 347-366.

Witherell, C. and Noddings, N. (eds.) (1991) *Stories Lives Tell: Narrative and Dialogue in Education.* New York, Teachers College Columbia University.

Wolter, A. (2000) Germany: non-traditional students in German higher education: situation, profiles, policies and perspectives. In: Schuetze, H. G. and Slowey, M. (eds.) *Higher Education and Lifelong Learners.* London, Routledge Falmer, pp. 48-66.

Woodley, A. and Wilson, J. (2002) British Higher Education and its Older Clients. *Higher Education.* 44, pp. 329-347.

Zeller, N. (1995) Narrative Strategies for Case Reports. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education.* 8(1), pp. 75-88.

A1-289

Appendix A – Participant Information Sheet

Research Project Title

The Involvement of Male Mature Students in HE: Exploring men's route to HE and their HE expectations. A case study of students in an Institute of Technology.

Researcher

Anne Gannon, Lecturer in Computing, Declan Institute of Technology.

Focus of the Research

The aim of this study is to explore the reasons why men decided to return to higher education and the route that they took to get there. It also aims to look at the various support systems that are in place and whether the expectations that the students had when embarking on the process of becoming a student have been met.

Data Collection

A total of approximately sixteen participants are being recruited from within Declan Institute of Technology (WIT) for this research project. The participants will be selected from various courses within the college as well as a number of Heads of Course and members of the support services.

The data will be collected via at least one and possibly two interviews between October 2006 and June 2007. In these interviews, various areas will be explored including:

- the student participants: the route that they took in order to return to college
- their expectations and the college experience
- school life
- support: external and internal

The interviews will last for approximately one hour, while subsequent interviews, if required, will be of a shorter duration. The interviews, which will be recorded, will take place at a time and a location that is convenient to the participants.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

The anonymity of the participants will of course be preserved. Those taking part in the study will not be named and will only be referred to using a pseudonym.

The data of the participants will not be disclosed to any other participants in the study. All data will be held in a secure location accessible only by the researcher.

The participants are invited to join in the research project but they may withdraw their participation at any time without explanation. Once agreeing to participate, the participants will be asked to sign a consent form.   They will be given a copy of the Consent Form and a copy of the Information Sheet for their records.

Reporting of Findings

The findings of the research will be reported in the doctoral thesis, to which the public will have access via the University of Sheffield library. It is also anticipated that the research will be presented at relevant academic conferences and/or published in relevant academic journals. In all cases, both the true identity of the individual participants and any information, which they have deemed confidential, will not be published at any stage.

Further Information

If you would like further information or would like to discuss any aspect of the study with me, I would be delighted to talk to you further.

Office: C38A, Main Road Campus

Office telephone number: 2498

E-mail: agannon@declan.ie

Appendix B - Consent Form

_____

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Title of Project: **The Involvement of Male Mature Students in HE:**

Exploring men's route to HE and their HE expectations.

A case study of students in an Institute of Technology.

Name of Researcher: Anne Gannon

Participant Identification Number: 14

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated: *27/3/07* for the above project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason.

3. I understand that my responses will be anonymised before analysis. I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses.

4. I agree to take part in the above project.

_____   _____   _____
Name of Participant   Date   Signature

_____   _____   _____
Researcher   Date   Signature

Copies:

One copy for the participant and one copy for the Principal Investigator / Supervisor.

Appendix C – Confirmation of Ethical Clearance Letter

The University Of Sheffield.

Ms Anne Gannon
186 Viewmount Park

Ireland

30 August 2006

Head of School
Professor Wilfred Carr

Department of Educational Studies
The Education Building
388 Glossop Road
Sheffield S10 2JA

Telephone: +44 (0114) 222 8091
Fax: +44 (0114) 279 6236
Email: j.booker@sheffield.ac.uk

Dear Anne

**Re: The Involvement of Male Mature Students in HE: Exploring Men's route
to HE and their expectations. A case study of students in an Institute of
Technology**

Thank you for your application for ethical review for the above project. The reviewers have now considered this and have agreed that your application be approved with the following suggested, optional amendments (ie it is left to the discretion of the applicant whether or not to accept the amendments and, if accepted, the ethics reviewers do not need to see the amendments):

> Amend info sheet to say that interviews will be recorded with the permission of the interviewees

You may now proceed with your project. Please find attached the relevant forms giving ethical approval.

Could you please return to me a signed hard copy of Part B – Declaration of the Ethics Application Form for our records.

Best wishes.

Yours sincerely

Jean Booker

Jean Booker

EdD (Dublin) Course Secretary