

TRANSFORMING HABITUS? EXPERIENCES OF MATURE
STUDENTS IN A HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION

By

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Declaration

I declare that *Transforming habitus? Experiences of mature students in a higher education institution* is my own work, except where indicated, and that it has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any university.

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the experiences of mature adults returning to study at a higher education institution. The aims of the research focus on the complicated and complex ways in which dispositions of class, embodied in the habitus, shape opportunities, choices and experiences of a group of mature students enrolled at a school of management studies within a higher education institution. The study focuses on the reasons these mature adults returned to study, the strategies they employed to cope with the academic demands and related expectations during their year of study, and the effects and consequences of the higher education experience on their relationships with significant others in their lives. The study foregrounds class and its role in mediating the choices, actions and experiences of mature students through drawing on Bourdieu's conceptual toolkit of habitus, capital and field.

The study adopts a case study approach and is concerned with the experiences of a group of thirteen students enrolled in the Graduate Certificate in Management programme at the Bay University's School of Management Studies. Data were gathered from two sources: through four in-depth individual interviews conducted with these mature students, and from the application data submitted as part of their initial application to the academy. To develop a more integrated and holistic analytical account, I drew on Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, capital and field and Reay's use of these concepts to illuminate the data and to show the relationship between different aspects of my interpretation. I concluded my analytical work by developing a proposed model, drawing on both Bourdieu's tools and the empirical findings, aimed at making possible the reinterpretation of the findings at a more generalised level.

The study established that class trajectory works differently for mature students, shaping both reasons for entry into higher education, the higher education experience itself, and the relationships between mature individuals and significant others in their lives. The research finds that mature students returned to study to acquire cultural capital that they wished to convert in other spheres of their lives. For working class students, this sphere was work, and for middle class students it was equally the social or personal sphere and the work sphere. Emotional and other related support were expected by mature students,

but these emanated from different sources. For working class students the work and academic environments mattered; for middle class students, the personal and work environment. The academic demands and expectations created issues of anxiety and disconnect for working class students, while middle class students showed examples of fit, ease, and comfort within the higher education environment.

In the study, the work environment acknowledged and valued middle class men, but became non-supportive, and even threatened by middle class women. For working class students, the work environment was mostly disinterested and showed little value for the academic achievements of working class students. This lack of support showed in the social and personal relationships of working class students in the study as well. As a consequence of their return to study, working class students' relationships were often at risk. Emotional capital was readily available and provided through the personal relationships of middle class students of both genders. The social circle of middle class students further supported these students because their friends and families had familiarity with the higher education environment. Both sources of support – emotional capital and familiarity with the field – facilitated a sense of fit and ease within the higher education institution for middle class students.

The thesis concludes by considering the significance of these findings through the lens of a proposed analytical model. I pay particular attention to what these insights might mean for those of us within the higher education environment in terms of providing acknowledgment and support to those groups of students most challenged by their higher education experience.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AACSB	Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business
BU	Bay University
efmd	European Foundation for Management Development
EQUIS	European Quality Improvement System
GCM	Graduate Certificate in Management
GMAT	Graduate Management Admissions Test
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
PD	Postgraduate Diploma
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SABSA	South African Business Schools Association
SACHE	South African Council for Higher Education
SMS	School of Management Studies

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

This chapter introduces the contextual setting within which mature students in the study are found. I present an overview of the higher education context in South Africa and its interaction with the field of work, before introducing the research site, the School of Management Studies (SMS) at the Bay University (BU). I look briefly at the literature regarding mature students in the higher education field, why they return to study and how their experiences are affected primarily by class but also by gender and race. I explore the research questions and reveal my rationale and own interest in the study. I also provide an introduction to the case study and conclude with an overview of the chapters in the thesis.

Aims of the study

This study explores the experiences of mature adults returning to study at a higher education institution. These students were enrolled on a management development programme which provided an accredited higher education qualification at a locally and internationally recognised management school. The study focuses on the reasons these mature adults returned to study, the strategies they employed to cope with the academic demands and their related expectations during their year of study, and the effects and consequences of the higher education experience on their relationships with significant others in their lives. I am addressing the debate raised by Reay and others regarding the higher education experiences of mature students. These experiences, as described by Reay (2001, 2002, 2003), are fraught with risk and uncertainty for certain groups of students: the core issue being that working class students are more prone to confusion and ambiguity and risk losing themselves in the higher education milieu. This study aims to contribute to that debate by understanding what class might mean in the lives of South African students. Class, as a concept in the South African context, is not clearly understood or framed. Because of our apartheid past, our default discourse became race. The study foregrounds class and its role in mediating the choices, actions and experiences of mature students. I seek to understand how class influences the way mature individuals think, make choices and behave in the world of higher education. Within the class frame, I also explore whether class works differently for gender and race. An

additional objective of the study was the development of an analytical model that was aimed at making possible the reinterpretation of the findings at a more generalised level.

The research questions

The research explores the experiences of a group of thirteen mature students in a higher education institution. In particular, it seeks to describe how the students' habitus, that is, their behaviours, attitudes and perceptions shift as a result of their experience on an academic programme which, for the purposes of the research, is known as the Graduate Certificate in Management (GCM) and the consequences of the higher education experience in and on the lives of these students. The terms 'behaviours, attitudes and perceptions' used in the research refer to the broader concept of habitus. Habitus, a concept developed by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, seeks to explain individual and social behaviours and the relationship between structure and agency. Habitus exists, "through and because of the practices of actors and their interaction with each other and with the rest of their environment: ways of talking, ways of moving" (Jenkins 2002 p75). Bourdieu explains habitus as, "a set of *acquired* characteristics which are the product of social conditions" (in Hillier and Rooksby 2005 p45 original emphasis). Habitus is acquired through early socialisation within both family life and the formative years of schooling. These early and formative experiences predispose adults to act and react in particular ways.

The aims of the research focus on the complicated and complex ways in which dispositions of class, embodied in the habitus, shape opportunities, choices and experiences of a group of mature students enrolled at a school of management studies within a higher education institution. According to Bourdieu, habitus, a set of dispositions acquired through formative home and social experiences including schooling, predisposes individuals to think, feel and behave in ways congruent with their formative experiences (1977/2004, 1989a, 1990a, 1993, 1998). This "core" habitus influences life choices throughout the life of an individual, yet is also open to transformation, either in a way that reinforces the individual's habitus or in a way that effects negative or positive change within the individual (Bourdieu 1990b). Therefore the class trajectory of an individual 'makes its mark' and provides the perceptual lens for all further action.

In particular the research looks at:

- the reasons mature students from varied class and cultural backgrounds enter the higher education environment;
- the strategies students employ to cope with both academic demands and related expectations during their year of academic study; and
- the effects and consequences of students' higher education experience in relation to these varied backgrounds, more specifically in their relationships with significant others in both their personal and work environments.

The contextual landscape

This section focuses on the actual context where the mature students in the study are found. I frame the discussion using Bourdieu's field analysis model. Grenfell and James explain the field analysis model as a three level process of the analysis of a field (1998). This model analyses the position of the field, maps out the structure of relations between individuals' positions, and analyses the habitus of individuals at play in the field. I use the first two levels as a guide to map out the contextual landscape of the Bay University's School of Management Studies. I discuss the broader higher education field, the legislative frameworks related to higher education, and, because the study focuses on working adults, the link between higher education and the world of work. I then consider the principal characteristics of the sub-field. Finally the academic programme where the students in the study are situated, its beginnings, student profile, admission criteria and status within the School are then presented.

The concept of field

Bourdieu uses the concept of field – which is discussed fully in the conceptual framework – to describe the social space within which individuals interact but also the space which embodies the “rules of the game”. A field may be defined as a network (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) but, “also a field of struggle for positions” (Harker et al 1990 p8). Bourdieu also clarifies that, “in order for a field to function, there have to be stakes and people prepared to play the game, endowed with the *habitus* that implies knowledge and recognition of the immanent laws of the field, the stakes and so on” (1993 p72 original emphasis). The discussion on the School of Management Studies is loosely framed within Bourdieu's field analysis model. In my discussion I look at three separate issues concerning the sub-field – structure, stakes, and struggles. The School of Management Studies may be defined as a, “relatively autonomous social microcosm”

even though it resides within the broader frame of higher education (Bourdieu 1985). In this study, I define the School of Management Studies as a sub-field – which has its own logic, rules and regularities – within the broader field of higher education. Education is, “seen as a field in a multi-dimensional social space through which individuals (or whole social groups) ... trace a certain trajectory or path” (Harker et al 1990 p97).

Mapping the broader educational context

As Borat explains, “following the onset of democratic rule in South Africa in April 1994, it soon became clear that the transition was a political one, in the narrowest sense of the term. Specifically the South African government has been, and indeed continues to be, beset with the longer term and more inertial consequences of apartheid” (in Chisholm 2004 p31). Although South Africa has put a number of policies, both education and business-related, in place, the question remains whether policy by itself can remedy situations that have been structurally entrenched. Jansen notes that, “policy is not practice, and while impressive architecture exists for democratic education, South Africa has a long way to travel to make ideas concrete and achievable within educational institutions” (2004 p12). Government sought to legislate change in the higher education environment through the introduction of the National Education Policy Act (Act 27 of 1996) and the Higher Education Act (Act 101 of 1997). The Ministry of Education has overall responsibility for norms and standards for higher education, involving funding, planning and the qualifications structure for the higher education system.

The Higher Education Qualification Framework is an integral part of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). In her thought-provoking paper, Ensor describes how, “the South African National Qualifications Framework (SANQF) was implemented with the intention of integrating education and training, in order to boost skill and productivity levels, promote stronger economic growth, as well as addressing issues of equity and social justice” (2003 p326). The NQF, she continues, “promised to accredit workers for accumulated proficiency and undertook to open access to education and training routes that had previously been closed to them. It promised to erode social barriers to advancement by improving access to education” (Ensor 2003 p327). The implementation of the NQF ensured a focus on qualifications. Both organisations and individuals were affected in the sense that credentialism became the key to formalised skills acquisition and educational and job mobility. In the case of the mature students in the study, this links clearly with the reasons they returned to study. As Ensor notes, “career mobility

was an overriding concern ... to overcome skills shortages ... and to improve the life chances” of individuals (2000 p328). The business environment also experienced far reaching changes through the introduction of the Skills Development Act (Act 97 of 1998) and the Employment Equity Act (Act 55 of 1998).

Education and the field of work

The mature students who are the subject of this study are employed and typically funded by their organisations. There are two main Acts that are pertinent to the education of employees within the workplace. The Skills Development Act (Act 97 of 1998) seeks, “to develop and improve the skills of the South African workforce; to integrate those strategies within the National Qualifications Framework.” Essentially the Act is an enabling mechanism which, through a one per cent levy on the payroll of organisations, is designed to provide for both employed individuals through lifelong learning opportunities and unemployed persons through learnership programmes. It also creates an incentive by enabling employers to claim grants in respect of money spent on education and training. The expectation therefore from employed individuals who wish to pursue further studies is that employers can, through the skills levy incentive, fund their studies at little financial risk to the organisation.

The Employment Equity Act (Act 55 of 1998) seeks to, “achieve equity in the workplace by a) promoting equal opportunity and fair treatment in employment through the elimination of unfair discrimination; and b) implementing affirmative action measures to redress the disadvantages in employment experienced by designated groups, in order to ensure their equitable representation in all occupational categories and levels in the workforce.” The Employment Equity Act therefore provides for the employment of individuals who have the potential to perform a job but who may require further training and development. The success of this Act in addressing the “levelling of the playing fields” was not as hoped. As the South African Council for Higher Education (SACHE) reveals, “most reports on the state of the labour market from an equity perspective point to the slow pace at which black people and women are filling high and top management positions, especially in the private sector” (SACHE report 2004 p19).

These two Acts were promulgated to address issues of access and equity but according to the De Klerk Foundation, “African South Africans and women are still seriously under-represented in top and senior management posts. Although Africans, Coloureds and

Indians make up 77% of the workforce, they hold only 25% of all top management positions [Africans 8%, Coloureds 13%, Indians 4% and women of all races 12%]; and 20% of all senior management positions [Africans 10%, Coloureds 5%, Indians 5% and women of all races 18%]” (De Klerk Foundation Report 2005 p4). Education remains to be seen as one way of redressing the perceived management skills shortage. The attainment of an educational qualification from a reputable institution is also viewed as a prerequisite to individual career mobility and progression. It is within this context of the higher education system and the field of work that business and management schools¹ operate. The discussion on the actual context within which the students in the study are located follows next.

Structure of the sub-field

The Bay University’s School of Management Studies² is one of South Africa’s premier management education institutions which is reflected in their local and international ranking. The School was established in the early 1960s. The focus of the School today is one of, “creating an interdisciplinary approach to management education, developing African, Asian and other international links, and on cementing relationships with local organisations” (South Africa’s Top National Companies 2005/06 p315). The School is accredited by the European Foundation for Management Development (efmd) and its Masters programme, besides being one of only six programmes of its kind to be accredited by the SACHE in its first round of accreditation, became the first in Africa to be ranked in the prestigious Financial Times of London Global Top 100 Masters programmes of its kind (SMS website). The School was admitted to the European Academy of Business in Society (EABIS) as an associate member in 2004 and has obtained admission to membership of two international councils – the Graduate Management Admissions Council (GMAC) and the Executive MBA council (EMBAC). Locally the School is a member of the South African Business Schools Association (SABSA) which, “aims to provide a platform for the generation and exchange of innovative ideas as well as the exposure of best local and international practices and experience. This sharing of knowledge is aimed at improving the overall quality of business education on an ongoing basis” (SABSA website).

¹ The terms “School of Management” and “Business School” are used interchangeably.

² There is a potential for recognition of the School which raises ethical issues. This is discussed in chapter four.

Traditionally, schools of business and management offer programmes targeting graduate students who wish to pursue further studies in management, typically at a Masters level. However since 1991, the Graduate Certificate in Management, which catered for students with no prior higher education qualification, was introduced to address issues of access and equity. At the time of the study the SMS's core academic programmes and their delivery mechanisms were: the Masters in full-time, part-time and modular format; the Executive Masters in modular format; the Postgraduate Diploma in part-time format; and the Graduate Certificate in Management (GCM) programme in part-time and modular format. The School of Management Studies provides for working adult students and one of the key differentiators between the SMS and other traditional management schools is that its educational offerings are only post experience; only applicants with the requisite number of years of working experience are eligible to apply. The common approach in international schools is one where students proceed directly to management and business school after gaining their undergraduate degrees. The School is a firm believer that learning needs to be applied to be effective and therefore an admission requirement on all its academic programmes is a prerequisite of a number of years of experience. The assessment of the School by the field of work has been consistently good as seen through comments made by South African employers who have rated the School of Management Studies first in South Africa in this category, leaving the School to conclude that the business world is, "highly satisfied with the combination of skills that graduates bring to the jobs" (SMS³ Review Report 2004 p251).

In the apartheid era South African universities were attached to particular racial groups in that only designated groups were allowed to enter particular designated universities. In later years, students of different races were allowed to enter "white" universities under a quota system. The Universities Amendment Act (Act 123 of 1991) formally removed these restrictions. The South African Council for Higher Education report alludes to "the devastating effect of apartheid on higher education [so] that after ten years of democracy it is still possible to differentiate institutions in terms of historical advantages and disadvantages" (SACHE report 2004 p2).

³ The School prepared a comprehensive audit document in 2004 as part of an international accreditation process for the European Quality Improvement System (EQUIS), the accreditation "arm" of the efmd.

The Bay University is therefore still very much an advantaged institution and also retains many of its original customs and traditions in that its organisational culture or institutional habitus still remains relatively intact. The EQUIS review team highlighted the challenge for elite institutions and universities to provide access to wider communities to ensure societal transformation (EQUIS Report 2004⁴). In the broader South African context, where past imbalances caused by apartheid need both immediate and long-term attention, there are several pressures that affect the School's ability to both remain relevant and address equity considerations. Walters notes that "South African institutions are tenuously balancing the question of access, equity and quality within an increasingly competitive economic environment. Holding the tension between the attainment of social equality, academic quality, economic development is one of the major challenges facing higher education" (1999b p577). Located as it is within the wider higher education context, the School of Management Studies is subject to those same tensions. The School needs to respond both to the field of work's demand for relevant skills through developing its curricula accordingly but also to, "redress past inequalities and transform the higher education system to serve a new social system, to meet pressing national needs, and to respond to new realities and opportunities" (Education White Paper 1997 p3).

Stakes in the sub-field

What are the stakes that exist within the School of Management Studies for students such as the subjects of this study? As with any educational institution, qualifications are clearly the stakes, but what might be different about one offering qualifications in management education? A 2005 report looking at the value of management education to individuals, organisations and society was published by the International Task Force of the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB). The AACSB believes 'management education works' because of its value to both individuals and their organisations. The value to individuals is essentially around developing a portfolio of knowledge, "personal skills that will strengthen their abilities to communicate, solve problems, make decisions, and lead organizations"; the developing of a level of professional competence; the creation of, "personal wealth, self-sufficiency and a sense of well-being"; and finally be able to, "assist others through philanthropic donations"

⁴ The European Quality Improvement System (EQUIS) team visited the School in 2004 as part of the efmd accreditation process and compiled a report on their findings.

(2005 p6). The report also outlines the potential value of management education to organisations and broader society. These include the generation and application of new ideas, theories and knowledge, the production of goods and services that enhance the quality of life which link to the creation of wealth and economic development.

Investment in the academic stakes for students in this study may best be viewed through Bourdieu's notion of *illusio*. The notion of investment, or as Bourdieu refers to it, *illusio*, in the game and its stakes is seen in an example from the sub-field. *Illusio*, Bourdieu explains as, "being caught up in the game ... in the interests of the game and the value of the stakes which is inherent in that membership" (2000 p11). The School of Management Studies employed the services of a consulting group to investigate ways, "to facilitate transformation of the student body" (SMS Review Report 2004 p32). The consulting group looked particularly at the full-time Masters programme which is one of the least diverse in terms of race (more on this later). The application process, including the diagnostic tests used for entrance purposes, was, according to those surveyed, "very difficult", "too expensive", and "culturally biased" (Monitor Consulting Group Report 2004). The School of Management Studies remains the only school of management studies in the country to use the Graduate Management Admissions Test (GMAT) as a criterion for entry to the Masters programme. The GMAT has been developed for a North American audience and therefore allegations of cultural bias are well founded. The cost of the test is also payable in US dollars. However, the GMAT is an essential requirement in the international accreditation process. Given the students' feelings regarding difficulty, expense and bias, it was interesting that the consulting group's research revealed that, "the majority of students and alumni including Black South Africans would regard the removal of the GMAT as a lowering of standards" (Monitor Consulting Group Report 2004 p59); this despite research undertaken by the Bay University's own alternative admissions research group establishing that the GMAT does not appear to be a good predictor of academic performance on a Masters programme. Taking part in the *illusio*, Bourdieu says, means taking the stakes seriously (2000). This example provides us with an opportunity to see what investment in the educational stakes meant to students at the School of Management Studies.

Wacquant writes that, "a field is simultaneously a *space of conflict and competition*" (in Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992 p17 original emphasis). While the discussion regarding *illusio* gives insight into the stakes within the field, I have not discussed either struggles

between players in the field and the issue of access to the field – that is, the struggle to enter the field and how gate-keeping processes function.

Struggles in the sub-field

Struggles in the sub-field typically occur between those already in the field and new entrants to the field (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). These struggles, which take place at staff and student levels, are around issues of access – what and who is valued; and how decisions are made. Although there are initiatives afoot, the pace of internal transformation at the School of Management Studies has been slow. Among the full-time faculty there are only four black⁵ lecturers – three senior lecturers and one associate professor – compared to twenty white faculty members. The gender profile does not compare favourably either: five women to nineteen men. Attracting particularly African teaching staff to academia remains one of the most difficult tasks (Jansen in Chisholm 2004). While acknowledging this challenge in the recruitment of suitably qualified and interested faculty, addressing the racial and gender profile at the School should receive more attention. This is especially important when considering that over the years the composition of the student body has changed, especially since the introduction of the Graduate Certificate in Management, yet this change is not reflected in the teaching staff who are seen as role models and the “public face” of the School. McClelland’s comments can apply to both mature students and faculty when she says, “individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds ... do not simply need a single individual to point out the appropriate path to them; they need to be surrounded by enough examples of success to believe that it is actually possible for them to attain it” (1990 p103-104).

And how is the School being experienced by its students? The School of Management Studies has sought to address equity issues through the formation of the Transformation Forum in 2004. Its terms of reference are to develop a policy and programme around transformation in the School encompassing administrative and support staff, faculty and students, all of whom are represented on the forum. The promotion of, “inter-racial and inter-cultural learning and understanding” among these stakeholders are one of the forum’s principle aims (SMS Transformation Forum Constitution 2004). The establishment of this forum has been seen as a move to strengthen internal governance and respond to external needs and demands (EQUIS Report 2004). Data from the student

⁵ When used in this study, black refers to Indian, coloured and African.

survey commissioned by the School's Transformation Forum found that, among black students particularly, concerns regarding trust, a sense of belonging and inclusion, participation in the decision making and communication were all areas needing attention (SMS Climate Survey 2004).

For many students, entering the field of higher education represents what Reay calls, "a sense of the almost magical transformative powers of education" (2002 p402). There are students who feel included in the education process and context and thus experience this "fit", but there are others who experience the process and context as painful, distressing and alienating. At the School of Management Studies it may be that black students were merely expected to assimilate into current practices, a factor which may have contributed towards their attitudes as expressed in the survey. As Soudien concludes, "dominant racial groups, dominant classes, dominant genders and dominant languages have had to make space for new constituencies but they have done so on their own terms" (in Chisholm 2004 p111). This is particularly true in the case of the students in the study, the mature students with no prior higher education qualification on the Graduate Certificate in Management programme.

While much of the discussion on access and equity has thus far centred on race, and to a lesser extent on gender, the real issue of redress within the South African higher education environment must focus on class as a factor. Groups who have both economic capital and the appropriate cultural capital are easily accommodated and welcomed within the higher education environment as opposed to working class students who do not possess sufficient amounts of relevant capital. The real test of access and equity must address this group's entry into and progress through higher education. Access and equity from a race and gender perspective are relatively straightforward to achieve at the School, in that any applicant regardless of race or gender, meeting the School of Management Studies' selection criteria, may be admitted as a student. In other words, having the "right", that is field-specific, capital enables applicants to be admitted as students. Table 1 shows the 2005 racial breakdown across all academic programmes.

Table 1: Racial breakdown of students across all SMS programmes

Programme	white	Indian	coloured	African
Masters (all formats)	50%	14%	8%	28%
Executive Masters	52%	13%	11%	24%
Postgraduate Diploma	29%	14%	32%	25%
Graduate Certificate in Management	17%	10%	44%	29%

Table 1 shows the racial mix across the programmes. It indicates that black students constituted around 50 per cent in the Masters programmes and that on the GCM programme the racial mix was a more representative one and reflective of demographics within the Western Cape where the School draws the majority of its students.

Table 2: Gender breakdown of students across all SMS Programmes

Programme	Masters (all formats)	Executive Masters	Postgraduate Diploma	Graduate Certificate in Management
Men	72%	78%	57%	56%
Women	28%	22%	43%	44%

Table 2 shows the gender breakdown across all programmes. Women are in the minority on both Masters programmes. They are more representative within the postgraduate course and as well as the GCM.

Reddy has described the higher education sector after apartheid as, “that highly visible

public space where old and new elite mingle” (2004 p34). Given the costs of management education and individuals’ access to funding, in general this statement is true of the student profile at the School of Management Studies. As Libhaber notes of the South African higher education environment in general,

fees are being used as a form of gate-keeping and a new form of exclusion ... The policies in place leave little room for mistake. Access is a pressing need, especially for those who were denied it in the past ... if one is poor, making it into or through the system has become harder. Although the problem of access now seems to shift towards an issue of class, those in the lower-income strata are still mainly black (2005 p2).

Gate-keeping processes at the School of Management Studies are reasonably transparent. The School’s admission criteria are applied to all applicants. These include particular benchmarks on diagnostic and achievement tests, a rigorous application procedure and a personal interview for all applicants who have been assessed to have met the criteria. Course numbers within the School’s programmes are limited (to ensure focus on individual students is possible), and only the “best” students, that is the high achievers, are typically accepted. An example illustrates how the system continues to favour the “elite”. High school mathematics is essential for scoring acceptable marks on the numeracy component of the diagnostic test. Many black students were not offered mathematics as a subject at high school during the apartheid years. (This would not have applied to blacks attending private schools). This “omission” is seen to doubly disadvantage potential students, firstly through not having the mathematical background and secondly through not having been accepted into the academic programme despite meeting all the other criteria. The School of Management Studies does provide additional help in the form of tutorials, but some struggling students, fortunate enough to have been offered a place, often pay for one-on-one services to address their “deficit”.

Having explored the structure, stakes and struggles in the sub-field, the discussion now turns to the Graduate Certificate in Management programme. This is the academic programme mature students in the study had applied to and been accepted into at the School.

The GCM programme

Background

The GCM programme is probably the only academic programme within the School of Management Studies that addresses in some small measure the currently disadvantaged. Established by the School of Management Studies to address issues of access and equity in 1991, the GCM's original purpose was to assist individuals who had been disadvantaged educationally and in other ways by apartheid but who were recognised by their employers as having the potential to move into and through junior to middle management positions. The GCM targeted a "typical" potential student who was seen as "educationally deprived", "needing to be empowered, uplifted and transformed" (GCM internal documentation 1991). Hibbert writes of how the students in the early years of the GCM programme felt like, "pawns in the affirmative action game [experiencing] enormous pressure to conform [and] perform" (1995 p21). One of the major problems she highlights – an ongoing one I would argue – was that the GCM students were not seen as "members of the academic community".

GCM status within the School

As noted earlier, the School of Management Studies has four core academic programmes – the GCM, the Masters programme, an Executive Masters in Management and a Postgraduate Diploma introduced in 2005. By virtue of their academic standing, these programmes are accorded hierarchical status. The GCM programme is on the first, that is, the bottom rung. As the SMS caters for mainly graduate students, the less academically qualified students on the GCM are seen as fortunate to be in the environment. The low percentage of resident faculty teaching on the programme speaks directly to the status of the GCM programme within the School. This indicator also alerts students on the programme to its status within the School of Management Studies. Figures for the period 2000 to 2005 show that, on average, less than 20 per cent of the School's faculty taught on the programme (SMS internal documentation 2005). In the year the data was collected for the study, 17 per cent of the School's faculty taught on the GCM, while all of the faculty taught on the Masters programmes. To make up the teaching complement on the GCM, outside faculty were recruited from within the broader university, other local universities and industry experts.

Within the School of Management Studies, the GCM programme has diversified the student body – but problems of social "mixing", while diminishing, remain. Interestingly,

in the past few years the GCM and Masters students have themselves taken a number of initiatives to address this problem. One of them involves discussion in small mixed groups about the multiple dimensions of diversity and their implications for personal conduct and for management. Others are joint social responsibility programmes, social and sport events (SMS Review Report 2004). These hierarchical indicators – related to programme positioning, faculty positioning, and student interaction – all point to the modest status afforded to the GCM programme and its students within the School of Management Studies.

Admission criteria

Access to the GCM programme is not limited to purely academic criteria as its intention is to widen access to higher education and also to encourage lifelong learning through the provision of access to further study, in particular the Masters programme at the School of Management Studies. Entrance criteria to the GCM programme relate to position at work, years of work experience, age, and academic potential, but also place strong emphasis on personal attributes. Applicants must have a minimum of five years' work experience and be at least 25 years old. Neither a matric exemption nor a higher education qualification is a requirement. The programme therefore serves

as a means of access to higher education for those who have Grade 12, but do not have Grade 12 with endorsement⁶. The selection process is rigorous because the programme aims to have a high throughput rate and to avoid breaking adult learners' confidence. Thus unwritten policy is to rather refuse applicants at entry than have them fail the programme (GCM Review Report 2006 p15).

Applicants must complete several short essays motivating their application and two confidential references, preferably from their immediate manager within their current or past organisations, are required. Applicants are also required to sit a diagnostic test which shows academic potential. Potential students successfully meeting these entrance criteria are interviewed by the GCM programme director to determine their motivation for application to the programme, including their career aspirations. Their ability to manage

⁶ "Matric exemption" and "Grade 12 endorsement" are the required level of entry into higher education for South African school leavers.

conflict, to work under pressure, and to solve problems is explored during the interview, as are their flexibility, worldview and personal circumstances. Through these student recruitment methods the GCM has been a pioneer, at least within the university in which it is situated, in the recognition of prior learning (RPL) from work experience as a valid criterion for admission into an, admittedly junior, academic programme. The programme

is commended for its comprehensive and careful selection process that achieves high levels of predictive validity and makes extensive use and broad-based use of RPL. The diverse student body is testimony to the active admissions process, and this diversity contributes greatly to the richness of the learning environment (GCM Review Report 2006 p22).

Student profile

The profile of the GCM class has primarily been black students typically from working class backgrounds. I make this claim regarding class based primarily on individuals' schooling background, place of family residence and, to a lesser extent, on their employment positions and salaries. Within the South African context, race and class were/are often intertwined, so that it may be assumed that blacks make up the majority of the working class (Soudien in Chisholm 2004).

Tables 3 and 4 show racial and gender profiles across the GCM from 2001 to 2005.

Table 3: Racial profile – GCM 2001-2005

Programme year	white	Indian	coloured	African
2001	11%	2%	39%	48%
2002	18%	7%	29%	46%
2003	22%	8%	32%	38%
2004	28%	5%	35%	32%
2005	17%	10%	44%	29%

Table 4: Gender profile – GCM 2001-2005

Programme year	Men	Women
2001	62%	38%
2002	62%	38%
2003	61%	39%
2004	54%	46%
2005	56%	44%

These tables reveal the diversity of the students over a five year period and point to the programme being the most diverse in the School of Management Studies (EQUIS report 2006). The initial core purpose of developing educationally disadvantaged individuals within corporate companies has changed over the years as the number of corporate partners have diminished and an increasing number of individuals from a widening variety of employment backgrounds have taken the initiative to apply to the GCM programme themselves. The School of Management Studies has also varied the programme's duration and design. From 2000 onwards the GCM was no longer available as a full-time programme and was offered in part-time and modular formats. The modular format was introduced in 1999, as three two-week modules spread over the year with work-based learning between the modules. This format of the programme attracted individuals from both inside and outside South Africa. The part-time course, available only to residents in the local vicinity, was established in 2000.

Despite these changes, the essential philosophy of the GCM remains the same: to equip individuals at junior management level, or those individuals being groomed for junior management positions, with the skills and the confidence to handle the complexities in their business (and wider) environments and to manage their own continuing learning and development. The fees for the programme have deliberately been kept low in relation

to similar offerings to encourage access. While the initiative to apply to the programme is taken by individuals, many employers are willing to either provide partial or full sponsorship once students are accepted into the programme. As indicated earlier, the Skills Development Act (Act 97 of 1998) provides the incentive to do so as companies may claim for any monies spent on the training and development of their staff.

Group work

As syndicate group work is an integral part of curriculum design and is also a source of interpersonal cooperation and conflict, a brief discussion in terms of significance for students in the study follows. Syndicate group work plays an important role in the GCM learning experience. Across all programmes at the School, students are placed in deliberately diverse (race, gender, experience, industry, to name a few) groups of five to six people. The group allocation is done at the start of the academic year and groups are changed midway through the year to allow students to learn from another set of individuals. It is a formal requirement of the academic experience that all students participate in all group activities. Group dynamics – the functioning of groups and group process – is taught to the groups and about 40 per cent of all assessment is group-based and group-assessed. Although challenging at times, the group experience can provide a rich learning experience for students. The challenges within a group relate to the uneven resources students bring to the learning environment and how these resources or capital shape the way students position themselves within a group and how much power they exert over the way the group and individuals within it function.

Learning support

For mature students returning to study at this point in their adult lives, a level of personal and academic support is essential. The GCM programme has a dedicated learning support function which provides academic support to students on a voluntary basis. A level of personal support is provided by the programme administration to ease students' transition into the higher education environment and its academic and related expectations. GCM students are able to discuss their interpretations of assessment tasks, get feedback on their drafts and get assistance directly related to any academic work. The learning support function varies across the School's other programmes where learning support on the Masters programmes entails discussion of problems or challenges experienced by the student in the environment. Essentially, personal support is provided but it does not provide any academic task-related assistance, that is, it does not provide academic

support in the traditional sense. The personal support offered to Masters' students through its learning support function is also available to the GCM students but through its programme director. The learning support services offered by the GCM programme are, "highly praised and valued by students and does much to address learning disparities experienced by students" (GCM Review Report 2006 p22). The issue of support is a crucial one for mature students returning to study. Although personal support is also expected from their work and personal environments, this is often not forthcoming for many students. The GCM addresses this need through the provisions outlined above.

Academic progression

The intended outcome of the GCM of "building a bridge to further study", specifically providing an alternative access route to the Masters flagship programme, has engendered a false sense of automatic progression. The alternative access route has seen low numbers of students progress to further qualifications at the School – under five percent over the period 2000 to 2005 (GCM internal documentation 2005). Reasons provided for the lack of progression include lack of academic ability or academic potential, lack of funding and a lack of quantitative skills (GCM Review Report 2006). Students from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds need to be supported into and through higher education but little has been done to ensure meaningful recognition and inclusion of these students in the academic environment (Hibbert 1995).

Summary

Understanding and gaining insight into the academic context is essential to understanding the experiences of mature students in the study. The expectations of the field, the expectations held of GCM students in particular, held sway over the experiences of mature students in the study. The sub-field is more than a set of structures or rules; it influences practices of those within it (Hodkinson in Grenfell and James 1998). Together with habitus, field shapes the way individuals "play the game" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). I have therefore sketched the environment of the School itself, the broader context within which it operates and provided information relating to the academic programme where mature students in the study are situated. Having provided insight into the higher education context and details of the academic programme, the GCM, the discussion turns to my own rationale for undertaking the study.

Significance of the research

Bourdieu explains that

[s]ocial reality exists, so to speak, twice, in things and in minds, in fields and in habitus, outside and inside of agents. And when habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product, it is like a ‘fish in water’: it does not feel the weight of the water, and it takes the world about itself for granted (in Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992 p127).

For working class students what causes the “weight of the water” in higher education? Why does the transformative potential of education work in different ways for different classes of mature individuals? This study aims to understand what power is exercised by the field of work and the social field, but particularly by a higher education institution and how this is experienced by students within its influence. It aims to contribute to the debate raised by Reay and others by understanding the challenges of higher education for particularly working class South African students, and to a lesser degree, understanding those challenges across gender and race. For those in higher education, especially educators within that setting, the research aims to highlight the multi-faceted nature of the mature individuals coming into our environment and how our institutions contribute to constraining or enabling the learning of these students.

Organisation of the chapters

In chapter two, I first discuss Bourdieu’s concepts, then explain how other researchers have used them, before showing how I have used the concepts in the study. The way Bourdieu understands the world – his general epistemological framework – must be seen through his theory of practice and as part of his conceptual toolkit. There are essentially three fundamental interrelated concepts in the Bourdieuan toolkit: habitus, capital and field. Bourdieu uses his interrelated concepts to describe individual dispositions and behaviour (habitus); to examine the various resources and power each individual possesses and how these establish class position (capital); and locates these within the particular context (field) within which habitus and capital are “at play”. After establishing the link between field and capital, I focus the discussion on habitus, Bourdieu’s most contested concept, and unpack its multi-faceted potential for understanding individual behaviour. A theoretical framework for establishing class is presented.

Chapter three sets out the debates regarding mature students. I present what “constitutes” a mature student, why individuals return to study later in their lives and what challenges they face as a result of this decision. Complexities of class, gender and race are explored in the mature student experience.

Chapter four examines the research design used in the study. The operationalisation of habitus – for exploring student experiences, and capital – for establishing class positions – is discussed. I explain my rationale for using a case study and set out the procedure employed for selecting research participants. The analytical framework used in the study is outlined, along with how the analysis is to be reported. Questions relating to validity, specifically those involving my relationship with the research participants, are answered. A discussion on ethics and the limitations of a case study approach concludes the chapter.

Chapters five, six and seven present the findings of the study. The analytical framework described in chapter four is used to examine the empirical material in these three chapters. Each of the chapters deals with a different phase of the year of study. Chapter five deals with the students prior to the start of the academic process – who they are, where they have come from, why they are returning to study, and their feelings regarding this decision. Chapter six looks at student experiences on the programme and within the School of Management Studies. It also discusses the reactions from students’ significant others during the academic year. Chapter seven is a reflective look, six months after the completion of the academic programme, at the students’ experience and the impact and effect of these experiences on the working and personal spheres of their lives.

The concluding chapter – chapter eight – proposes an analytical model. I concluded my analytical work by developing a model, drawing on both Bourdieu’s tools and the empirical findings, aimed at making possible the reinterpretation of the findings at a more generalised level. The purpose of this model is to facilitate the analysis of mature student experience through a class and gender lens. The chapter concludes by considering the significance of the study’s findings.

A note on racial terminology

Racial terms have officially been removed from civil society through the enactment of new legislation, with the exception of the Employment Equity Act (Act 55 of 1998) which requires workplace reporting in terms of racial categories to track progress aimed

at redressing societal and economic inequalities. In the South African context, “white” denotes/d those persons typically from European origin; “Indian”, those who were descendants from Indian immigrants; “Africans” those black South Africans who speak indigenous South African languages; and “coloureds” those of diverse social origins – “not African and not white” (Rudin 1996). As can be seen, these racial categories were established typically using geographic constructs. Where students in the study are identified along racial lines, the categories used have been self-identified by each student in the application process to the Bay University as per the requirements of the Employment Equity Act. Where used in the study, these forms of racial categorisation unless proper nouns are all shown in lower case as they refer back to apartheid classifications. Furthermore, the use of term “black” denotes all those legally discriminated against during apartheid, that is, Indians, coloureds and Africans.

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CHAPTER TWO

THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework informs each chapter of the study and is presented at this point in the thesis so that the following chapters can be understood in relation to the key concepts presented here. The conceptual framework is, as Skeggs describes it, the “archaeological foundation” on which the study is built (2002). In this chapter I discuss three key concepts – habitus, field and capital. These concepts are the work of Pierre Bourdieu, a French sociologist who developed them to explain individual and group interaction within the broader societal context. He uses his interrelated concepts to describe individual dispositions and behaviour (habitus); to examine the various resources and power each individual possesses (capital); and locates both of these within the particular context (field) within which habitus and capital are “at play”. In this chapter I unpack each of these concepts and reveal how they are connected. I further argue that as these concepts are relational, there are dangers to using any single concept without establishing its relation to the others. I then show how other researchers have used these concepts before I discuss their use within the context of this study. As the study focuses on mature student experiences within higher education, I found the concepts of habitus and capital particularly useful in explaining the experiences of students within their year of study. The concept of capital was also helpful in understanding the reasons mature individuals returned to study. Finally, the concept of field was used to examine the context – the School of Management Studies – within which students in the study were located.

Field

We need to think about the context, or field, to gain a fuller picture and better understanding of the School of Management Studies. Although the School has been discussed in some detail in chapter one, this discussion looks to the theoretical underpinning of how fields or sub-fields function, what constitutes a field and what power relations may be at play. This is pertinent to the study as mature students function within a higher education environment with its own rules, regularities and values. The discussion regarding the concept of field needs to be prefaced by Bourdieu’s views regarding the social world which he describes as a field of power. He contends that, “the

social world can be represented as a space (with several dimensions)” (Bourdieu 1985 p723). It is Bourdieu’s contention that the social space, “is a multi-dimensional space, an open set of fields that are relatively autonomous, i.e. more or less strongly and directly subordinated, in their functioning and their transformations, to the field of economic production” (Bourdieu 1985 p736). Furthermore, “the social space of an individual is connected through time (life trajectories) to a series of fields” (Harker et al. 1990 p9-10). Bourdieu provides us then with a conception of the social world comprising multiple fields with contrasting degrees of autonomy in relation to each other. Although clearly there are things included and excluded within their boundaries, fields are not clearly delineated as, “it is the state of the relations of force between players that defines the structure of the field” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992 p99). This explanation also highlights the relational space of positions and of power between these positions. The definition of a social space also cannot be imposed, “but the idea of a social space can make sense of empirical observation, its precise shape and configuration of forces being derived from the evidence at hand” (Harker et al. 1990 p10).

A field, explains Bourdieu,

is a structured social space, a field of forces, a force field. It contains people who dominate and people who are dominated. Constant, permanent relationships of inequality operate inside this space, which at the same time becomes a space in which the various actors struggle for the transformation or preservation of the field. All the individuals in this universe bring to the competition all the (relative) power at their disposal. It is this power that defines their position in the field and, as a result, their strategies. (Bourdieu 1998 p40-41).

There are several aspects to field that require further discussion. These are structure, stakes, and struggle.

Structure

The concept of field seeks to explain and define the structures or systems within which individuals attempt to achieve their outcomes. What defines the boundaries of a field? Field is, “more than either a set of structures or a set of rules. The practices of the different players in the field and their relation to each other and to the structures of the

field [contribute] to the constitution of that field” (Hodkinson in Grenfell and James 1998 p99). The notion of field is not an arbitrary one, in other words, not every site of practice or group of organisations could simply be referred to as a field. As Grenfell and James contend, “*fields* are bounded spheres identifiable in terms of shared areas of activities and contain and connect with other fields and various levels” (1998 p24 original emphasis). The sphere of education clearly meets these criteria and, “for Bourdieu, higher education is one of a series of relatively autonomous worlds or fields whose complex interactions constitute society” (Maton 2005 p689). Establishing the existence of a field and its boundaries is a lengthy process and, “can only be determined by empirical investigation” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992 p100). Bourdieu further explains that, “the limits of a field are situated at the point where the effects of the field cease” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992 p100). What Bourdieu seeks to clarify is that the parameters of the field cannot be imposed by an arbitrary decision around boundaries but needs to be defined by empirical research.

A field is also never a completely autonomous space and “we need to recognize that Bourdieu acknowledged that the relations between fields work in a hierarchical fashion, with the fields of power and the economy sitting in a superordinate relationship to other quasi-autonomous fields” (Lingard and Christie 2003 p323). Maton concurs:

each field as a whole is relatively autonomous from the fields of economic and political power which dominate society ... A field’s *autonomy* is illustrated by the way it generates its own values and markers of achievement, but the *relative* nature of this autonomy means that these values are not alone in shaping the field; economic and political power also play a role, albeit in a form specific to the field (2005 p689–690).

As systems of social positions and positionings, fields are internally structured in terms of relationships of power, but as Deer notes, “the autonomy of a field remains relative and is threatened by external constraints” (2003 p199). A field is dynamic and is “a critical mediation between the practices of those who partake of it and the surrounding social and economic conditions” (Wacquant in Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992 p105). Note also the existence of subfields. Bourdieu is at pains to clarify that, “a field does not have parts, components. Every subfield has its own logic, rules and regularities” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992 p104). The concept of field has also been likened to a

game but it is, “a game devoid of inventor and much more fluid and complex than any game that one might ever design” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992 p104).

Stakes

Theoretically, “in order for a field to function, there have to be stakes” and more importantly, says Bourdieu, there needs to be an investment by players in the game which endows it with a sense of worth, including a tacit recognition of the rules of the game – which he refers to as *illusio* (Bourdieu 1993 p72). A field, “is not simply a dead structure ... but a space of play which exists as such only to the extent that players enter into it who believe in and actively pursue the prizes it offers” (Wacquant in Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992 p19). What are the stakes in any given field? Within the education field for example, stakes are the qualifications – valued by all parties in the field. All fields are subject to the same forces as “each field calls forth and gives life to a specific form of interest, a specific *illusio*, as tacit recognition of the value of the stakes of the game and as practical mastery of its rules” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992 p117). *Illusio* or investment in the game is crucial to the functioning of a field because, “no one can benefit from the game, not even those who dominate it, without taking part in the game and being taken in by the game” (Bourdieu 2000 p153). In “Practical Reason” Bourdieu asks if a disinterested act is possible within a field and sets out an explanation: “*Illusio* is the fact of being caught up in and by the game, of believing the game is ‘worth the candle’, or, more simply, that playing is worth the effort” (1998 p76-77). Within every field this investment is required from those in or entering the space. The process for new entrants to the field is both explicit and implicit:

the new players have to pay an entry fee which consists in recognition of the value of the game (selection and co-option always pay great attention to the indices of commitment to the game, investment in it) and in (practical) knowledge of the principles of the functioning of the game. (Bourdieu 1993 74).

For those entering the higher education environment, the “entry fee” might entail making sacrifices in other areas of their lives, usually in the personal domain where relationships might have to take second place to the new student role and responsibilities. What newcomers must show is both their acceptance of and investment in the game in terms of time and commitment in order to be admitted into the field. Field is however also the

place where struggles take place over these stakes or resources.

Struggle

In his explanation of field, Bourdieu argues that a field is a site of struggle – a struggle between preservation and transformation of the field. As Wacquant states, “a field is simultaneously a *space of conflict and competition*” (Wacquant in Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992 p17 original emphasis). There are various forms that this conflict can take. It occurs between those individuals in the field and also between those in the field and those wanting to get into the field. The first form of struggle is aptly captured by Hay and Lisahunter:

Each field, through the social structures and operations represented in the field generate and consolidate the values and beliefs of the field and rewards the adherents. It is the social arena of practices and relationships that reproduce and legitimate what are resources and how they might be allocated. (2006 p294).

Shusterman confirms this form of contestation by noting that a field is, “not a stationary space but a dynamic field constituted by struggles over changing positions” (1999 p8). The second form of struggle focuses on those wishing to enter the field. Bourdieu describes the process:

In every field we shall find a struggle, the specific forms of which have to be looked for each time, between the newcomer who tries to break through the entry barrier and the dominant agent who will try to defend the monopoly and keep out the competition. (Bourdieu 1993 p72).

Struggles in the field are therefore ongoing. They are essentially about what counts, who counts and who decides. Typically those entering the field wish to transform it and those within the field wish to preserve it. Maton uses the case of higher education which is, “hierarchally structured not only into ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’ but also by competing ideas of what should count as ‘having’” (2005 p690). As noted earlier however, the desires of all parties, whether to transform or preserve, stems from their belief in the game – their *illusio*.

This can be seen in the importance applicants to the School of Management Studies attach to the local and international rankings of the institution and by inference to the quality of their qualification. It is, “investment in the stakes that defines participation in the game and which, being common to all players, sets them against and in competition with each other” (Bourdieu 2000 p183). There are general rules and regularities of fields – stakes and struggles over those stakes – however, “each field has its own system of valuation and practice” (Horvat 2003 p8). What determines what is valued? What is valued can easily be seen through the admittance of newcomers to the field as, “people are at once founded and legitimized to enter the field by their possessing a definite configuration of properties” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992 p107). These properties that exist and function in the field are known as *capital*.

Capital

Probably the best known and widely used of all Bourdieu’s concepts is that of *capital*. Capital may be thought of as the resources individuals possess that grants them power within a field. Individuals are

distributed in the overall social space, in the first dimension, according to the overall volume of capital they possess and, in the second dimension, according to the structure of their capital, that is, the relative weight of the different species of capital, economic and cultural, in the total volume of their assets. (Bourdieu 1989a p17).

Only relevant, field-specific capital acts as a resource and can be used to wield power in a particular field. As Mohr explains:

Every field is a site within which some type of capital operates and, thus, each field includes a fundamental metric according to which any given individual (or group or profession, or class fraction) can be assessed vis-à-vis others according to their relative possession of field specific capital. It is this which determines their likelihood of having power and success within that sphere. (Mohr 2000 p6).

The power exerted by an individual is thus intimately linked to the capital s/he possesses. There are three species of *capital*: economic capital – literally financial wealth; cultural

capital – culturally validated consumption patterns, skills, attributes, tastes and objects; and social capital – networks of relationships used for advancement. Other forms of capital have been introduced such as symbolic, linguistic and emotional capital and these are referred to later in the discussion.

Cultural capital

Cultural capital – which Bourdieu later called “informational capital” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) – exists, “in three forms: in the *embodied* state, i.e., in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body; in the *objectified* state, in the form of cultural goods (pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines, etc.) ... [and] ... in the *institutionalized* state” (Bourdieu in Halsey et al. 1997 p47 original emphasis). To get a better understanding of this species of capital, it may be useful to explore these forms in further detail.

Embodied cultural capital

Bourdieu describes embodied cultural capital as, “external wealth converted into an integral part of the person, into a habitus, (which) cannot be transmitted instantaneously” (in Halsey et al. 1997 p47). It derives primarily from the family through hereditary transmission – and is therefore unequally distributed dependant on the family’s social class – but its inequalities are also reproduced in and sanctioned by the educational system. Embodied cultural capital is embedded in the family and so acquired through early socialisation. Bourdieu adds that, “the accumulation of cultural capital in the embodied state, i.e., in the form of what is called culture ... presupposes a process of embodiment, incorporation ... which costs time, time which must be invested personally by the investor” (in Halsey et al. 1997 p48). Education plays the role of reinforcing embodied cultural capital through its system and practices of reproduction. Accumulation of embodied cultural capital occurs through time, effort and sacrifice but, “it cannot be accumulated beyond the appropriating capacities of an individual agent (and) declines and dies with its bearer” (Bourdieu in Halsey et al. 1997 p49).

Objectified cultural capital

Objectified cultural capital exists in objects. As noted earlier, books, artefacts and dictionaries are examples of objectified cultural capital. Bourdieu explains that while these may be transferable from one individual to another, what is not transferable is embodied cultural capital, that is, the ability to use or exploit the purpose of the object (in

Halsey et al. 1997).

Institutionalised cultural capital

An example of this type of capital is the academic qualification, “which confers on its holder a conventional, constant, legally guaranteed value (and) institutes cultural capital by collective magic ... in a word, to impose recognition” (Bourdieu in Halsey 1997 p50-51). This form of cultural capital is also a form of objectified cultural capital as, like economic capital, institutionalised cultural capital is independent of its bearer. Accumulation of institutionalised cultural capital is possible and takes place through acquisition of successive academic qualifications, for example obtaining a first degree, then a Masters degree and so on. Bourdieu says the process of accumulation, “makes it possible to compare qualification holders and even to exchange them (by substituting one for another in succession)” (in Halsey et al. 1997 p51).

Social capital

This species of capital is linked to the possession of networks, essentially to the membership of a group. Social capital is never completely independent of other types of capital, indeed the volume of the social capital possessed by an individual, “depends on the size of the network of connections he can effectively mobilize and on the volume of capital (economic, cultural, or symbolic) possessed in his own right by each of those to whom he is connected” (Bourdieu in Halsey et al. 1997 p51). Bourdieu notes that, “the network of relationships is the product of investment strategies, individual or collective, consciously or unconsciously aimed at establishing or reproducing social relationships that are directly usable in the short or long term” (in Halsey et al. 1997 p52). Social capital therefore focuses on reciprocity, the use of social relationships to secure benefits and profitable outcomes for its user. These, “network relations within a group are viewed as a potential, but nevertheless concrete and useful, resource from which the individual group member can profit – socially as well as economically” (Svendsen and Svendsen 2003 p618). Furthermore, “the reproduction of social capital presupposes an unceasing effort of socialibility, a continuous series of exchanges in which recognition is endlessly affirmed and reaffirmed” (Bourdieu in Halsey et al. 1997 p52).

Capital conversion

Emirbayer and Johnson explain that “capital encompasses a wide variety of different species of resources, convertible, in principle, into one another at different rates of

exchange; many of these are typically operative within given fields at given times, *both as weapons and as stakes* in the struggle to gain ascendancy over those fields” (2004 p7 original emphasis). The point the authors raise is how capital conversion is struggled and fought over in the field. While the potential exists for various capitals to be converted, exchanged or traded, conversion is by no means a straightforward process as Luke indicates: “the individual’s capacity to convert and combine different kinds of capitals is contingent on the particular laws of conversion at work within and between fields” (Luke in Hasan and Williams 1996 p330). The key issue highlighted by Luke is that the conversion process is dependant upon what and how the particular capitals held by an individual are valued in different fields. An example of conversion potential – that is, the ability to trade or exchange one species of capital for another – might be an educational qualification (institutionalised cultural capital in the field of education) being exchanged for employment (economic capital in the field of work). However Bourdieu cautions that “educational qualifications never function perfectly as currency. They are never entirely separate from their holders: their value rises in proportion to the value of the bearer, especially in the least rigid areas of the social structure” (in Halsey et al. 1997 p58). The most powerful conversion of the three species of capital that can be effected is a conversion to what is known as symbolic capital, “commonly called prestige, reputation, renown, etc., ... the form in which the different forms of capital are perceived and recognized as legitimate” (Bourdieu 1985 p724).

Symbolic capital

Bourdieu later expanded his three species of capital to include symbolic capital which encompasses the three species: “Every kind of capital (economic, cultural, social) tends (to different degrees) to function as symbolic capital ... when it obtains an explicit or practical recognition” (Bourdieu 2000 p242). However he notes that symbolic capital is, “not a particular kind of capital but what every kind of capital becomes when it is misrecognized as capital, that is, as force, a power or capacity for (actual or potential) exploitation, and therefore recognized as legitimate” (Bourdieu 2000 p242). Symbolic capital therefore is the form capital, particularly cultural capital, takes when it conceals the true nature of the capital and becomes recognised as natural. An example of symbolic capital is illustrated through exterior individual difference: “one of the dimensions of symbolic capital, in differentiated societies, is ethnic identity, which, with names and skin color, is a *percepi*, a being-perceived, functioning as positive or negative symbolic capital” (Bourdieu 1998 p104). According to Bourdieu, “symbolic capital is any property

(any form of capital whether physical, economic, cultural or social) when it is perceived by social agents endowed with categories of perception which cause them to know it and to recognize it, to give it value” (1998 p47). However this form of capital is arbitrarily constructed as, “we tend to see it as being someone’s natural or inherent quality, rather than something that a person has acquired through competition, inherited from their family, or learnt in school” (Webb et al. 2002 p152). Symbolic capital – also a resource and source of power – provides, “a source of both material and symbolic profits” for its holder (Bourdieu 2000 p78).

Capital and field – the game

Capital is “both product and process within a field” as it contributes or defines both positions and power of individuals within a field (Grenfell and James 2004 p510). The use of capital allows us to see how fields function and how the key aspects of stakes and struggles play out in the field. Bourdieu uses the analogy of game to illustrate the relationship between capital and field:

We can picture each player as having in front of her a pile of tokens of different colors, each color corresponding to a given species of capital she holds, so that *her relative force in the game*, her *position* in the state of play, and also *her strategic orientation towards the game* ... depend both on the total number of tokens and on the composition of the pile of tokens she retains, that is, on the volume and structure of her capital. (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992 p99 original emphasis).

In later works Bourdieu cautions against the simplistic interpretation of the game metaphor saying, “the social world is not a game of chance ... the competition resembles a handicap race that has lasted for generations or games within which each player has the positive or negative score of all those who have preceded him, that is, the cumulated scores of his ancestors” (in Sikes et al. 2003 p74). What Bourdieu is alluding to here is that individuals come to the “game” with their collective histories. These may be enabling or disabling dependant on both the field and each individual’s volume and structure of capital as, “the kind of capital, like the aces in a game of cards, are powers that define the chances of profit in a given field (in fact, to each field or sub-field there corresponds a particular kind of capital, which is current, as a power or stake, in that game)” (Bourdieu 1985 p724). Struggle is central to understanding the relationship

between capital and field. Capital is both a resource and a power and is used correspondingly by individuals in their desire to conserve or change the field. Calhoun et al. note also that, “fields are constituted by capital, by the attributes necessary to enter into particular endeavours and competitions (“entry costs” in economic jargon), and by the attributes unevenly possessed by those who “play” in a particular field” (1993 p122–123).

To get ahead in the game, that is, to ensure that one is able to play the game, field-specific capital is required as the relevant capital, “governs the potentialities objectively offered to each player, her possibilities and impossibilities, her degrees of empowerment, of power-to-be, and at the same time her desire for power, which, being fundamentally realistic, is roughly adjusted to the agent’s actual empowerment” (Bourdieu 2000 p217).

Finally then:

The social world is, to a large extent, what the agents make of it, at each moment; but they have no chance of un-making and re-making it except on the basis of realistic knowledge of what it is and what they can do with it from the position they occupy within it. (Bourdieu 1985 p734).

Field and capital are however only two sides of Bourdieu’s “conceptual triad” (Wacquant in Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). While field denotes the contextual site and capital reveals the power and resources individuals bring to this site, habitus is the disposition acquired by individuals from their positions occupied in social space – “the mental structures through which they apprehend the social world ... essentially the product of the internalization of the social world” – and through their early family socialisation processes (Bourdieu 1989a p18).

Habitus

Habitus is the concept with which Bourdieu attempts to explain individual and social behaviour and the relationship between structure and agency. Habitus shapes each individual’s actions, thoughts and feelings but is more than a simple acting out of roles. Habitus gives us a “perceptual lens”, predisposes us to act in certain ways and is, “inscribed like a watermark” in all our actions (Bourdieu 2000 p143). Bourdieu defines “habitus” as, “the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product” (1990a p56). The concept of habitus, “is not necessarily a unique or original” one (Grenfell and

James 1998 p15). There is also conflation with the more common term “habit”. Bourdieu stresses the difference between “habit” and “habitus”:

Habit is spontaneously regarded as repetitive, mechanical, automatic, reproductive rather than productive. I wanted to insist on the idea that the *habitus* is something powerfully generative. To put it briefly, the habitus is a product of conditionings which tends to reproduce the objective logic of those conditionings while transforming it. It's a kind of transforming machine that leads us to 'reproduce' the social conditions of our own production, but in a relatively unpredictable way, in such a way that one cannot move simply and mechanically from knowledge of the conditions of production to knowledge of the products. (Bourdieu 1993 p87).

Simply put, habitus frames our present and future actions through the creation of a structure of individual perceptions and behaviours which influence us to behave and think in certain ways in certain circumstances. Though the concept of habitus has been developed by Bourdieu, other authors have brought their understanding to shape and develop the concept. Wacquant (in Zafirovski 2004) provides further insight into the concept. Habitus, for Wacquant, encapsulates a social aptitude, is transferable, enduring but not static. It tends towards being reproductive, and most importantly, the past strongly influences current behaviours, actions, attitudes and perceptions (Wacquant in Zafirovski 2004). But how is habitus acquired?

Acquisition of habitus

According to Jenkins (2002) this happens through explicit and implicit socialisation in early life, specifically within the family environment. Indeed Bourdieu speaks of the great influence of early childhood experience. Thompson is helpful in explaining the process (although lengthy, it is clear and descriptive):

the dispositions which constitute the habitus are inculcated, structured, durable, generative and transposable – features that each deserve a brief explanation. Dispositions are acquired through a gradual process of inculcation in which early childhood experiences are particularly important. Through a myriad of mundane processes of training and learning, such as those involved in the *inculcation* of table manners ('sit

up straight', 'don't eat with your mouth full', et.), the individual acquires a set of dispositions which literally mould the body and become second nature. The dispositions produced thereby are also *structured* in the sense that they unavoidably reflect the social conditions within which they were acquired ... structured dispositions are also *durable*; they are ingrained in the body in such a way that they endure through the life history of the individual, operating in a way that is pre-conscious and hence not readily amenable to conscious reflection and modification. Finally, the dispositions are *generative* and *transposable* in the sense that they are capable of generating a multiplicity of practices and perceptions in fields other than those in which they were originally acquired. (1991 p12-13 original emphasis).

Once habitus is acquired, it underlies and conditions all subsequent learning and social experience (Bourdieu 1977/2000). Schooling is another major influence in shaping and reinforcing habitus. Much of Bourdieu's early work focuses on the role education plays in this regard (1977/2000 (with Passeron), 1988a, 1989b). The process of acquisition differs from just attainment of a quality, that is, "what is learned by the body is not something that one has, like knowledge that can be brandished, but something that one is" (Bourdieu 1990a p73). Bourdieu says the first experiences are the most powerful – mainly because they are family based – and that is also why they shape individuals more than later experiences do. Because we build on those experiences and accumulate all the "data", our habitus continually tends to favour experiences that will reinforce it. As Nash explains, "since it is embodied, the habitus develops a history and generates its practices, for some period of time, even after the original material conditions that gave rise to it have disappeared" (1999 p184). Given that the overall volume and composition of capital determines class position, there is also a link between habitus and capital in the acquisition process as habitus is, "acquired through the lasting experience of a social position" (Bourdieu 1989a p19).

Habitus as a multifaceted concept

Bourdieu's ideas also underpin the work of Reay who uses Bourdieu's concept of habitus as a "method rather than a theory; a way of seeing the world" (Reay 1995 p358). Reay introduces a multi-layered understanding of the concept through her four themes: habitus and agency; habitus and collective and individual trajectories; habitus as embodiment;

and habitus and the complex interplay between past and present (1995, 2004). Using these themes provides a helpful way to get to grips with the complexity and fluidity of the concept.

Habitus and agency

The concept of habitus, “offers an invaluable tool for exploring the inter-dependence of social determination and human agency, the structured and generative capacity of human action” (Noble and Watkins 2003 p522). Although as Reay points out, “while the habitus allows for individual agency, it also pre-disposes individuals towards certain ways of behaving” (2004 p433). The habitus tends to produce practices patterned after the structures that created it and, “functions at every moment as a *matrix of perceptions, appreciations and actions*” (Bourdieu 1977/2004 p83 original emphasis). As young people grow up, they absorb and re-interpret meanings drawn from the culture which they inhabit. Reay explains that individual choices are bounded by the framework of opportunities and constraints the person finds herself in – her external circumstances. But while individuals are constrained by external forces, within Bourdieu’s framework they are also hindered internally by what he calls “a world within a world” – the habitus (Bourdieu 1990a p56). This subsequently results in the tendency to behave in ways that are expected of “people like us”, causing limited choices to be made and considered.

Besides using habitus to explain choices, what Bourdieu is saying is that habitus will also “prevent” individuals from taking particular opportunities, for example accessing higher education, because these are “not for the likes of us” (1990a p56). Within Bourdieu’s framework, the individual is circumscribed by an internal framework – which makes some possibilities inconceivable, others improbable and a limited range acceptable (Reay 2004). Choice is central to the notion of individual agency and through the use of habitus we are able to see how structure permeates choice throughout an individual’s life trajectory.

[Habitus] captures the manner in which choices and actions can have durable effects upon their manner of being-in-the-world, so as to affect further, future choices. Specific biographical and historical trajectories, the concept suggests, give rise to specific ways of perceiving, conceiving, reasoning and acting, as agents (both individually and collectively) attempt to cope with and adapt to their situations. (Crossley 2002 p51-52).

Habitus as a compilation of collective and individual trajectories

Reay also discusses the idea of habitus relating to both the individual and the social group to which they belong (1995, 2004). There are shared trends and inclinations for groups and individuals. Individuals have a unique trajectory and location in the world internalised through a matchless combination of schemata, but this is shared by those subjected to similar social conditions and conditionings (Bourdieu 1977/2004; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). Because habitus is, “a set of *acquired* characteristics which are the product of social conditions ... [it] ... may be totally or partially common to people who have been the product of similar social conditions” (Bourdieu in Hillier and Rooksby 2005 p45). Individuals have different biographies and, depending on circumstances, end up at different places. However habitus, to borrow a metaphor Bourdieu himself uses, contains the “inner history” which both allows and disposes successive generations to reproduce the world they inherit from their parents' generation. This “inner history” shapes their behaviour, thoughts and actions. However, “individuals are seen to be doubly constrained in their choice of personal trajectory – by the ethos to which they were first habituated in the family and by the institutionalized process of socialization which they might have experienced” (Robbins 1991 p154). Reay et al. highlight that, “a person’s collective history is constitutive of habitus but so also is the whole collective history of family and class that the individual is a member of” (2005 p24).

Habitus and embodiment

Bourdieu explains that habitus, “is that which one has acquired, but which has become durably incorporated in the body in the form of permanent dispositions” (1993 p86). Habitus is not only seen in the body through behaviours such as walking and speaking but also in thoughts and perceptions (Bourdieu 1997/2004). These dispositions encapsulate what Wacquant (in Zafirovski 2004) calls “social aptitude” and what Bourdieu refers to as “feel for the game” where, “having a feel for the game is having the game under the skin; it is to master in a practical way the future of the game; it is to have a sense of the history of the game” (Bourdieu 1998 p80). There is an objective and subjective sense to “feel for the game”. The objective sense is felt in the practical mastery of the rules of the game. The subjective sense provides, “a meaning and a *raison d’être*, but also a direction, an orientation, an impending outcome, for those who take part and therefore acknowledge what is at stake” (Bourdieu 1990a p66). Habitus shapes the way individuals take up their positions in the environment and is central to having a “feel for the game” as, “the social order inscribes itself in bodies” (Bourdieu 2000 p141).

Habitus as a complex interplay between past and present

Emirbayer and Johnson note that, “the habitus, formed in the past, shapes possible modes of present action and reaction, thereby linking the social past to the social present” (2004 p18). Transformations of the habitus can occur and are brought about through subsequent experience. Interestingly Reay says, “habitus can be envisaged as a continuum”, replicating itself at one end through encountering the familiar with reinforcement taking place; and at the other, transforming itself through an encounter which has either a negative or positive effect on it (1995 p357). Bourdieu himself says that habitus, “is endlessly transformed, either in a direction that reinforces it ... or in a direction that transforms it and, for instance, raises or lowers the level of expectations and aspirations” (1990b p116).

In summary then, Reay describes habitus as, “a deep, interior, epicenter containing many matrices” (2004 p435). Through the use of these four themes we are able to get a better sense of the complexities and subtleties of the concept.

Criticisms of the concept

Habitus is the central concept used in the study and it is therefore worthwhile to look at what detractors and critics of the concept have to say and consider whether these objections have any substance. Two of the most frequently noted critiques are its supposed determinist nature and its alleged ambiguity or vagueness. A further strand of criticism which relates to operationalising habitus is discussed in chapter four. References to habitus as “powerfully generative” and “transforming”; along with “unpredictable” and “fluid” have been integrated through the rich description of the concept in this chapter and provide a further buttress against claims of determinism and ambiguity.

Determinism

Various authors argue that habitus is merely mechanistic determinism (Farnell 2000; King 2000; Jenkins 2002; Lovell 2003; Mutch 2003; Noble and Watkins 2003). The main thrust of their argument is that habitus, as they see it defined by Bourdieu, presents limited options which are defined with narrow parameters. As Noble and Watkins posit, “habitus tends to be deterministic ... and a static entity” (2003 p524). Individual agency – that is the ability to act independently – appears to be absent from the construct and Bourdieu’s “social universe ultimately remains one in which things happen to people,

rather than a world in which they can intervene in their individual and collective destinies” (Jenkins 2002 p91).

Bourdieu refutes these interpretations explaining that

habitus is not the fate that some people read into it. Being the product of history, it is an *open system of dispositions* that is constantly subjected to experiences, and therefore constantly affected by them in a way that either reinforces or modifies its structures. It is durable but not eternal! (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992 p133).

It would be naïve to assume that individuals carve out their own destinies and trajectories regardless of circumstance – there are constraints on agency. Individuals are constrained by external forces and further inhibited by internal forces – their habitus – their own perceptions, values and attitudes gained over a period of time. Habitus orients action; it does not determine it as some authors would have us believe. Included in the deterministic argument is the notion that habitus is static. However Friedman points out the habitus is capable of transformation and shifts through an individual’s changed social realities:

Because the field is subject to major influences, both from within and outside itself [habitus] inevitably undergoes a slow process of change, so that what were acceptable practices, say, three or four decades ago, would not necessarily be acceptable conduct now, or at least would seem odd, quaint or old-fashioned. (in Hillier and Rooksby 2005 p317).

Clearly then it would appear that the concept is open to change albeit over a period of time and that, “habitus change constantly in response to new experiences” (Bourdieu 2000 p161).

Ambiguity

The other criticism levelled at the concept focuses on what habitus consists of or what constitutes the habitus. Brubaker says that, “doubts arise about the usefulness of any concept so vague and versatile” (1985 p760). Farnell also feels that there is, “no satisfactory explanation by which the habitus can be linked to what people do or say”

(2000 p399). Bourdieu explains that, “*the habitus goes hand in glove with vagueness and indeterminacy*” (1990b p11 original emphasis). This is understandable as these are human behaviours, attitudes and perceptions we are dealing with. Though it is clearly difficult to express its intricacies, Bourdieu attempts to detail the enactment of the habitus as, “the countless minute choices, perfectly improved and perfectly necessary, that one is able to operate instantaneously at every moment of life and whose achieved product one discovers at the end, almost like a spectator” (in Hillier and Rooksby 2005 p48). The other facet of ambiguity may well be a result of Bourdieu’s complicated and complex writing style.

It is, and continues to be, a challenge to work with Bourdieu’s theoretical concepts, especially habitus, which is why Bourdieu insists that the concepts be used as thinking tools and be put to work empirically. It was hard to engage with his writing and I was reassured by Wacquant’s comment regarding, “the extreme difficulty of Bourdieu’s style and prose” (1989 p31). The struggle however, “is worthwhile, just because to do so forces us to think. Without concepts of thought – we will not make much progress” (Nash 1999 p185). Despite his misgivings and concerns, Jenkins also admits that Bourdieu’s work “is demanding, thoughtful and ambitious” (2002 p98). In summary, criticisms regarding habitus being deterministic and ambiguous are noted and, as stated earlier, have been addressed both by Bourdieu himself and through my full description and discussion of the concept.

The interrelationship of field, capital and habitus

Because the concepts of field, capital and habitus are interrelated, they should not be used empirically without, at the very least, reference to the others. It cannot be stressed sufficiently that any piece of research would be incomplete without some level of inclusion of all the concepts. This is not to say that a single concept cannot be used as a focus area. Clearly focusing on one of the concepts is acceptable. It is when a single concept is used without any reference to the others where, “selective and truncated use of individual concepts without positioning within the larger model has presented a serious shortcoming in the research that has attempted to use Bourdieu’s model and has limited the effectiveness” (Horvat 2003 p3). It would be incomplete for example to discuss habitus without reference to the field that constitutes it or is constituted by it. Likewise, using capital without reference to either field or habitus renders it meaningless as capital only functions in relation to a field. Field is Bourdieu’s starting point to understanding

the world. He notes that, “what exists in the social world are relations” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992 p97). The concepts of habitus and capital are his way of interrogating and understanding those relations. Thinking of fields relationally also, “seems to open the door on a complex picture of multitudinal layering and interconnecting links” (Grenfell and James 1998 p168).

Although Bourdieu’s conceptual framework can be summed up as: “[habitus] (capital)] + field = practice”, he does caution against a simplistic interpretation of this “formula” (Bourdieu 2000 p101). Bourdieu explains the interrelationship between the concepts: “every field is inhabited by tensions and contradictions [where] every agent acts according to his position (that is according to the capital he or she possesses) and his habitus, related to his personal history” (in Hillier and Rooksby 2005 p47). There is also a close relationship between dispositions, as seen in the habitus, and positions, represented by capital. Embodied cultural capital gets, “converted into an integral part of the person, into a habitus” (Bourdieu in Halsey et al. 1997 p48). Embodied cultural capital is linked to the individual biologically. If we live in a world that is not radically different from the one that shaped our primary habitus, there is an “unproblematic agreement” between our position (as defined by capital) and our dispositions (our habitus) (Bourdieu 2000 p157).

When individuals are endowed with the appropriate habitus for example the “proper” speech patterns, “it is this congruence which underlies the confidence and fluency with which they speak” (Thompson 1991 p21). The interrelationship between habitus and capital, particularly embodied cultural capital, is further illustrated in the following example using linguistic capital: “differences in terms of accent, grammar and vocabulary ... are indices of the social positions of speaker and reflections of the quantities of linguistic capital (and other capitals) which they possess” (Thompson 1991 p18). This shows the link and overlap between habitus – acquired primarily through the family – and certain species of capital, namely embodied cultural capital which is also acquired in the first instance from the family. The convertibility of certain species of capital into what constitutes the habitus therefore occurs.

As previously discussed, capital does not exist and function except in relation to a field. This relationship is also mirrored between field and habitus where, “the field structures the habitus ...[and] ... habitus contributes to constituting the field as a meaningful world,

a world endowed with sense and with value, in which it is worth investing one's energy" (Bourdieu in Wacquant 1989 p44). When there is a lack of congruence between habitus and the field, "an individual may not know how to act and may literally be lost for words" (Thompson 1991 p17). The fit or congruence between habitus and field is central to understanding the mature students in the study who have little or no prior experience in the field of higher education. The concept of capital is helpful in two ways: in understanding what mature students bring to the field – in terms of field-specific capital – and also appreciating what they hope to gain in terms of resources and power from the educational field.

Bourdieu's concepts and the research study

How are Bourdieu's concepts helpful in understanding mature students' experiences? Bourdieu's concepts lend themselves to the three central questions in the research study: i) why students return to higher education; ii) what happens to students during the academic year; and iii) what the consequences of the educational experience are on their relationships with significant others in their lives. A class framework provides the lens through which these questions are explored. Within the notion of class, I also explore trends of gender and race where relevant.

Capital and mature students

The literature suggests that mature students' return to study is characterised by a desire for capital acquisition; that is, the acquisition of objectified cultural capital – the academic qualification. Though it is clear students return to study for many reasons, their motivations are linked to one species of capital or another. Students from a middle class background are holders of various forms of capital – social, cultural, economic - and are, in a very real sense, privileged. They have been socialised into the "rules of the game" and enter higher education in a knowing, mostly planned manner. James argues that, for the majority of these students "the purpose of entering higher education is to re-shape their identities in ways they know will put them closer to the people around them" (1995). The risks associated with a middle class higher education experience are, "about staying as they are and who they are" (Ball et al. 2002a p69). In other words, middle class students do not experience the higher education environment as threatening or strange. The milieu is familiar and welcoming. The middle class student feels, to use Bourdieu's phrase, like "a fish in water".

Habitus and mature students

For many students, entering the field of higher education represents an entry into an arena where “almost magical transformative powers” exists (Reay 2002). Varying levels of comfort or discomfort are felt by individuals who are familiar or unfamiliar with the context (the field) within which they find themselves. The students’ feelings prior to the start of the academic year are dependant on the compatibility of their habitus with the higher education field and their existing amounts and forms of capital. Some students will therefore tend towards feeling included in the education process and context and will experience this as such, while others may experience the process and context as painful. Reay, in her 2002 study on mature students, argues that underlying the process of becoming somebody, becoming self-fulfilled, lies the complexity about what it means to be a working class student “crossing the divide” to higher education.

The working class - the group Bourdieu calls, “the wallflowers of the educational dance” possess little in the form of capital that counts in the higher education field (Robbins 1991 p37). Their experience with higher education produces underlying feelings of confusion and ambiguity and, “feelings of being an impostor” (Reay 2002 p403-4). These feelings may be amplified during the academic year when students’ ability to “play the game” (already affected by their habitus and capital) comes into the public domain via academic assessments and social interaction. As Bourdieu explains, “such experiences tend to produce a habitus divided against itself, in constant negotiation with itself and with its ambivalence, and therefore doomed to a kind of duplication, to a double perception of self, to successive allegiances and multiple identities” (1999 p511). In his “Weight of the World” interviews, several conversations deal with the tension and disjuncture individuals experience in having to deny the past in this search for the “upward mobility” that higher education is thought to provide (Bourdieu 1999). It raises the question whether particularly students from working class backgrounds, women and black students hold onto their sense of self, given the power of both institutional habitus and their desire to stay “true to themselves”. Members of these groups are likely to feel habitus dislocation and a lack of “feel for the game”.

Field and mature students

Citing Castells (1997), Reay explains that some students found the only way to fit in was to “enter a world of fluidity and change where they can create a new self unconnected with the former social selves in school and in the family” (2002 p410). But at what cost

does this occur? Bourdieu says that these students, “are obliged to bluff nonstop, for others and for themselves” (1999 p424) which raises the question of social fallout and other individual personal consequences for these students. The impact and consequences of the higher education experience on students’ relationships with significant others, both in their work and personal spheres, comes into sharp focus. For those students from working class backgrounds, how does the potential transformation of their habitus – gained through the acquisition of educational capital – affect their relationships with partners, family and friends? How does the field of work respond to newly empowered individuals? Does a change in capital in fact produce an automatic change in habitus or a change in class position? McNay notes:

as a relational concept the field yields an understanding of society as a differentiated and open structure and provides a framework in which to conceptualize the uneven and non-systematic ways in which subordination and autonomy are realized in women’s lives. By construing intimate and domestic relations as overlapping but distinct fields of behaviour, their interconnection and relations with other fields of sociality can be thought not as implacable opposition but in terms of multiple disjunction, overlap and conflict (1990 p113).

Although referring particularly to women, McNay’s overarching idea of whether success or failure in any one field has an impact upon another field remains relevant across gender, class and race. With particular reference to the study, the possibility of impact on other fields is explored through viewing the consequences of the higher education experience – the transformation or reproduction of the habitus – on both the field of work and the personal and social domain for each of the individual students. Although transformation of the habitus is possible, Bourdieu is clear that, “these [transformations] will remain within certain limits, not least because the habitus defines the perceptions of the situation that determines it” (1993 p87). Bourdieu further claims that, “a credential such as a school diploma is a piece of universally recognized and guaranteed symbolic capital, good on all markets” (1989a p21). The question is therefore, despite Bourdieu’s claim, does the academic qualification translate in this way across class, gender and race in all fields?

Summary of Bourdieu's concepts and their use in the study

Does the mature student experience in higher education challenge what is familiar and secure and does this challenge present itself in vastly differing ways to different social classes of students? While this study aims to shed light on these questions, Reay's research in the primary classroom and higher education settings appears to confirm this. Access to higher education is commonly seen as the acquisition of both cultural and symbolic capital. For working class students though, there are far more challenges. Reay says that working class students are, "engaged in a transition from one class to another" in conjunction with their move to higher education (2002 p409). Indeed she argues that for many in this grouping, it is the multiple transition that is problematic.

In summary, Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, capital and field are helpful in providing a lens with which to view the mature student experience. The habitus and field-specific capital of the mature student is "at play" within the educational field. This combination of factors differs from individual to individual, although there are certain characteristics common to particular groups, for example those of class, gender and race. Essentially, however, the combination or interrelationship between these factors influences their actions or practice. The notion of class and the development of a framework for understanding class is what the discussion turns to next.

Establishing a "class" framework

Ball (2003) outlines three aspects of work on class: theory – an attempt to define "class"; analysis – operationalising class for research purposes in terms of categorising individuals; and class practices – which focus on the lived realities of individuals and groups. In this section I focus on the theoretical component. While systems, notably in the United Kingdom and the United States, have developed a clear-cut categorisation of class, the South African scenario has traditionally focused on other forms of differentiation, mainly race and income. If "class" is one of the key lenses for exploring the mature student experience in this study, then it is essential to explain what is meant and understood by "working class" and "middle class". Given that it is not a clear-cut concept or that current categories do not adequately address the differentiators, I now map out my understanding and usage of the concept.

Notions of class

The traditional notion of class stems from Marx, where initially "class" was seen purely

as an economic conception and determined exclusively by relations to the means of production. For Marx, who interestingly wrote very little about social class himself, “the defining feature of a social class is that its members bear a shared relationship to the means of production – land, industrial capital and financial capital” (Craib 2002 p343). Since then, various contemporary Marxist theorists (Carchedi 1975, Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich 1977, Poulantzas 1977, Wright 1978, 1985) have built on Marx’s construct and their views show both political and ideological shifts. It is not my purpose to unpack these various viewpoints but merely to note that the shifts have occurred.

Weber developed a different understanding of class – the most important aspect being that class position is determined by an individual’s ability to gain access to “life chances”. Weber’s generic connotation of class is explained as, “the kind of chance in the *market* (being) the decisive moment which presents a common condition for the individual’s fate” (Weber in Giddens and Held 1983 p62 original emphasis). Weber viewed social stratification in three ways: classes, status groups and parties, noting that, “whereas the genuine place of classes is within the economic order, the place of status groups is within the social order, (and the action of parties) is oriented towards the acquisition of social power” (Weber in Giddens and Held 1983 p68). Weber’s understanding of the concept lent itself to further theoretical attempts, “to show the way in which different conditions of employment, different levels of remuneration, different types of contracts, different levels of skills and so on were as or more important in conditioning people’s actions and ideas than a simple relationship to the means of production” (Craib 2002 p346).

Bourdieu’s understanding of class

Bourdieu does not conceive of class in quite the ways illustrated above, although he has been influenced by and appropriated themes from both these key theorists. As Brubaker explains, “if Bourdieu’s programmatic aims are derived from Marx and Durkheim, the substance of his theory owes most to Max Weber” (1985 p747); a view confirmed by Reay who adds that, “his own theoretical framework is a complex drawing on the ideas of not only Marx, but Weber, Durkheim and Merleau-Ponty” (2004 p431). However as noted earlier, the way Bourdieu looks at the concept of class must be seen through the way he views the world – his general epistemological framework – and as part of his conceptual toolkit.

Bourdieu describes a social class as, “a class of identical or similar conditions of existence or conditionings...at the same time a class of biological individuals having the same habitus (insofar) that each member of the same class is more likely than any other member of another class to have been confronted with the situations most frequent for members of that class” (1990a p59-60). In his definitive 1984 work on taste and difference in French society, *Distinction*, Bourdieu argues that one should envisage class as a construct that comprises people who share common dispositions, conditions of existence and preferences and are capable of similar practices in social settings. If we follow Bourdieu’s train of thought, all aspects of an individual’s social conditions and conditionings contribute to their class membership. Brubaker explains that for Bourdieu:

social life exists only in and through the symbolically mediated experience and action of individuals, but these individuals have been formed under definite material conditions of existence, and their every activity – including their symbolizing activity – depends on social facts existing prior to and independently of that activity (1985 p750).

To understand Bourdieu’s notion of class we must look at how he constructs “a theory of the social space” (Bourdieu 1985 p723). For Bourdieu, as noted earlier, the social world comprises different spaces or fields. A field can be described as a space where, “agents or groups of agents are defined by their relative positions within that space” (Bourdieu 1985 p724). Bourdieu cautions against using class merely as a theoretical construct for sets of individuals who occupy similar positions and maintains that these are merely “classes on paper”. “Classes on paper” are understood to have a theoretical existence and are not really classes for Bourdieu. One of Weber’s key beliefs was that, “‘classes’ are not communities; they merely represent possible, and frequent, bases for social action” (Weber in Giddens and Held 1983 p61). Classes, Bourdieu asserts, “that can be separated out in social space...do not exist as real groups”, noting further that a social space means that, “one cannot group just *anyone* with *anyone* while ignoring the fundamental difference” (1985 p725).

While it is clear that Bourdieu does not see class simply as a product of the relation of individuals to the means of production nor does he see occupation as the only indicator of class position, it can be argued that the notion of “classes on paper” does have a meaning (who belongs to which class). Bourdieu’s position suggests that there are other meanings

that can be made among them, for example: What does it mean to belong to a class? And how is class reproduced and experienced?

Class and capital

For Bourdieu the differences between social classes are also apparent through their overall volume of capital but essentially he notes that, “one can construct a space whose three fundamental dimensions are defined by the volume of capital, composition of capital, and change in these two properties over time” (1984 p114). The link between class and capital also ties up with habitus in two ways: firstly because of the potential of its exchange value, capital is a factor together with habitus which shapes an individual’s range of choices in any situation. Secondly, one’s class position or one’s position in the social space – influenced by the volume of one’s economic, cultural and social capital – shapes the context within which an individual’s habitus is formed. Individuals, “do not enter fields with equal amounts, or identical configurations, of capital” (Grenfell and James 1998 p21). According to Savage, “Bourdieu’s approach to class is one where the notion is, implicit, as encoded in people’s sense of self-worth and in their attitudes to and awareness of others – in how they carry themselves as individuals” (2000 p107). This brings us to discuss the link between class and the concept central to the research study – habitus.

Class and habitus

Habitus, according to Bourdieu, is “acquired through the lasting experience of a social position (and) consequently...produces practices and representations that are available for classifications” (1989a p19). Reay notes that “because there are classes of experience there are also classes of habitus or the habitus of classes” (2004 p434). Bourdieu aptly describes the relationship between individual habitus and class habitus in the following way: individual habitus links to social trajectory while class habitus can be thought of as “common schemes of perceptions, conception and action” (1990a p60). With reference to class habitus he asserts that, “‘interpersonal relations’ are never, except in appearance, *individual-to-individual* relationships and that the truth of the interaction is never entirely contained in the interaction” (Bourdieu 1977/2004 p81 original emphasis). This is understood to mean that every individual is predisposed to act and behave in a manner consistent with their class habitus. An argument is being made for groups of people to have acquired not the same but similar habitus as a result of their common experience. This is due to their societal position – or class – as discussed earlier.

Wilkes offers the notion that, “habitus is the link in the dialectic between objective and subjective components of class” (in Harker et al. 1990 p116). He suggests that for Bourdieu, class is seen as both “an act of social construction, as well as the product of the objectivist division of labour” and that, “class habitus creates meaning which allows participants of a social class to “know the value” of certain practices and certain objects in a field, thus either acting towards a reproduction of the habitus of class, or its transgression” (in Harker et al. 1990 p123). These differing perspectives appear to confirm that class and its application within educational research is a complex process. As Wacquant says in a rather tongue-in-cheek manner “none of this makes the business of class analysis any easier” (in McNall et al. 1991 p58). In this study, class is the main lens through which the mature student experience is viewed. The two other lenses of the study relate to gender and race.

Brief perspectives on a gender and race framework

The study focuses on the higher education field and individuals’ lived experiences through the lens of class. However within the class frame, I also explore whether class worked differently for gender and race. As noted earlier, some of the discussion pertinent to class resonates with issues of race and gender. Authors are divided on the suitability of using Bourdieu’s concepts to explore questions of race and gender (Dillabough 2004; Horvat 2003; Kraiss in Calhoun et al. 1993; Moi 1991; Skeggs 2005). Moi asks whether Bourdieu’s concepts, “can simply be applied to gender or whether they require rethinking and restructuring in order to become usable” (1991 p1020). Kraiss, in questioning how, “‘male’ and ‘female’ actions, ways of thinking, and judging, [are] reproduced in social practice”, finds Bourdieu’s concepts a useful way of exploring these (in Calhoun et al. 1993 p157). Although she admits Bourdieu’s theoretical toolkit is helpful, ultimately Skeggs feels that, “he cannot account for the nuanced practices of those who do not operate from a dominant position” (2005 p30). The same questions raised here regarding gender could be asked of race and whether it is possible to use field, capital and habitus to better understand race and racial identity (Moi 1991). Dillabough acknowledges that Bourdieu’s usefulness goes beyond merely a single category and helps, “to identify the complex social processes implicated in intersecting axes of inequality (class, race and gender)” (2004 p491). This is supported by Horvat who argues that Bourdieu’s theoretical model, “offers researchers a highly flexible model for understanding human social interaction” (2003 p10).

Krais explains that, “in the course of the socialization process every agent inevitably acquires a gendered habitus” (in Calhoun et al. 1993 p170). The observations being made regarding gender – that one is both born with a particular sex but also socialised into a gendered identity – are true of race, particularly within the South African context. Because of its racialised past, race in South Africa has been the key construct of identity and because of its sustained impact, “the racial discourse of apartheid has been sustained and carried over into the new South Africa” (Soudien in Chisholm 2004 p91). Describing the South African scenario, Dolby notes that, “to maintain political and economic domination, the apartheid state had to deploy ‘race’ in multiple and contradictory ways, which allowed for the maintenance and consolidation of white power and control” (2000 p8). In the current scenario, that is in the post-apartheid, democratic state, “race can no longer be ‘explained’ through the logics of apartheid” (Dolby 2000 p12). I would argue that while understanding race does not take place simply through classificatory categories e.g. coloured, Indian, white and African, these categories are still firmly embedded in the habitus of many individuals and most certainly the mature students in this study who were exposed to apartheid mechanisms throughout their formative years including their schooling period.

Although it is easy to analyse South African experiences merely through a racial lens, because the dominant approach to difference has been that of race, “privileging race ... as a category of analysis, underplays the ways in which a whole range of conditions and processes influence the sense of cohesiveness and fragmentation within groups” (Soudien in Chisholm 2004 p90). Dolby further argues that, “many of the common approaches to multiculturalism are flawed, as they rely on an overly simplistic notion of race and difference, which fails to take into account race’s intricacy as a social force ... [and] ... empirical researchers need to investigate and map exactly how ‘race’ evolves as a meaningful concept” (2000 p19). Citing Wolpe (1988) Soudien clarifies that, “neither race nor class, by itself, is capable of explaining the nature of South African social formation and the ways in which privilege, power and position are distributed” (in Chisholm 2004 p90).

This discussion points to the value of Bourdieu’s concepts of habitus, capital and field and what they can offer in the attempt to understand the complexities of the field of power, the uneven distribution of the varying species of capital and habitus acquired under changing and difficult circumstances. Horvat states that, “race and class are often

conceptualized as independent of one another” (2003 p1). She views the divisions between these “categories” (and I include gender) as not particularly helpful ones saying that we need to examine how class and race *interact* to shape experiences because, “the habitus is generated by the social conditions of lived experiences including race, ethnicity, geographic location, and gender” (Horvat 2003 p2).

Through using Bourdieu we are able to see that not only are both gender and race embodied in the habitus, but both have visible and invisible effects. Skeggs tells us that, “gender operates as a hidden form of cultural capital, but also as a disposition” (2005 p22). Although in the sense that it is embodied symbolic capital, gender rarely operates as a resource for women. Within the South African context however, race functioned and continues to function in terms of power and the potential for domination. While the study foregrounds class, the importance of gender and race is by no means minimalised and despite the detractions outlined, the benefits of using Bourdieu to look at issues of class, gender and race are apparent. Both Skeggs (2002) and Horvat (2003) speak of the “layered effect” – where the lenses of class, gender and race are overlaid enabling one to see the full spectrum of effects on individuals. A more integrated picture emerges of how class, gender and race function to structure and influence educational opportunities and experiences.

Conclusion

This chapter introduced Bourdieu’s concepts of field, capital and habitus. The discussion focused on structure, stakes and struggles prevalent within any field. The different species of capital were explored as was the potential for capital conversion, more specifically conversion to symbolic capital. With the link between capital and field established, the discussion then turned to habitus. I introduced the concept of habitus, how it is acquired, its multi-faceted potential for understanding individual behaviour and also criticisms of the concept. In responding to criticism of not only habitus but Bourdieu’s overall conceptual frame, Wacquant acknowledges that, “Bourdieu’s work is not free of contradictions, gaps, tensions, puzzlements and unresolved questions” (in Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992 pxiii). The role of the researcher using a Bourdieuan framework is, I believe, not one of complete submersion and total acceptance at face value of his concepts but the use and application of his concepts as I *interpret* them. I then argued that these concepts should not be used empirically without an acknowledgement of their interrelatedness. Finally the theoretical framework used for

establishing class was unpacked drawing on Bourdieu and others. I presented Bourdieu's view on social groupings. How these boundaries or groups might be established when conducting research will be discussed further in the chapter on research design. Though not foregrounded in the research, a perspective on a gender and race framework was presented.

The habitus of the mature student is different for each student as a result of individual background, socialisation, and life experiences. What is explored through the research is how mature student habitus is reinforced or transformed through a particular higher education experience and how the acquisition of capital, particularly cultural capital, affects the social and work spheres of these individuals across class.

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CHAPTER THREE

MATURE STUDENTS IN THE FIELD

This chapter sets out the debates in the literature regarding mature students – who they are, why they return to study and what challenges mature individuals face. In the previous chapter I set out the aims of the study which focus on the experiences of mature students in a higher education institution. This chapter draws primarily on research that has been conducted around mature students but also literature regarding students in higher education in a more generalised way. The discussion then turns to complexities primarily of class, but also those of gender and race. In those accounts, we begin to appreciate that the experiences of mature students are many and varied and are always mediated by their social contexts.

The mature student

In prior research, mature students have been referred to as “non-traditional”, “adult learners” and “older students” and, “these labels characterise the difference between students who progress directly from school to Higher Education and those who do not” (Stevens 2003 p235). According to Wilson (1997), mature students are older individuals – usually 21 years and above – who make a conscious decision to return to study. Typically mature students, “have not completed the formal academic prerequisites required for university entrance (or) have applied for entry some years after completing high school” (Leder and Forgasz 2004 p183). Reay talks about how individuals with no higher education qualifications are considered, “‘unfinished’ and ‘incomplete in some way’” by the prevailing dominant discourses of globalisation and individualisation (2001 p338). Wilson, in comparing mature students to their more traditional counterparts, concludes that mature students, while not a homogenous group, are usually admitted to higher education in British educational institutions through non-conventional means and because of this, “may feel particularly vulnerable and marginal” regarding their academic capabilities (Wilson 1997 p350). Kimmel and McNeese referring to differences between younger and older students, note that “lack of confidence in ability ... increases with age” (2005/6 p40). Wilson further argues that, “there is no one identity of “mature student” ... they are marginal, have made bigger leaps into the unknown, suffer from the age gap, lack self confidence, are isolated, burdened by family responsibilities and more

likely to suffer financial hardship” (1997 p361).

Though Waller also describes the label as being, “too general, too inclusive and insufficiently nuanced to be of much practical use” (2005 p71), I use the term “mature student” in this study to portray a student, older than 25 years, who is not traditional in the sense that s/he is older than the young adult who enters higher education directly after school and that s/he brings life and work experience to the learning environment. This life and work experience in the form of acquired behaviours, attitudes and values – the individual’s habitus – shapes the higher education experience of mature students in particular ways. Having briefly presented an understanding of what constitutes “mature student” by drawing on prior research, and how the term will be used in this study, the discussion moves to the reasons mature individuals return to study.

Returning to study as mature adults

In their research Britton and Baxter (1999) focus on four distinct reasons for mature individuals to return to study. These are unfulfilled potential, struggling against the odds, credentialism and transformation. These reasons deal with the motivations and the conscious choices made by mature individuals when they decide to (re)enter the higher education arena as students.

Unfulfilled potential

Having not studied previously or having experienced a brief unsuccessful exposure to higher education, mature individuals feel that their true potential, in terms of academic achievement, has not been fulfilled. There is a sense of a, “*latent or submerged self* waiting to be reclaimed. Education is ... a means of realising the self or becoming the self one always was” (Britton and Baxter 1999 p185 original emphasis). Mature individuals therefore return to study to realise an unfulfilled purpose.

Struggling against the odds

This reason describes how education is seen as a way out of a situation, where mature individuals use the education process as a means of improving their prospects especially in the employment arena. Britton and Baxter describe this need for individuals to address their downward mobility as, “a moment of realisation at which a decision to change the pattern of their life, expressed as a need to take control over their future prospects” occurs (1999 p186).

Credentialism

The pressing desire to acquire a formal qualification is another reason for mature adults to return to study. Linked to the working environment, it is the desire to seek validation for one's potential and accomplishments. According to Britton and Baxter, "education is not seen as a vehicle to realise the self but is viewed instrumentally" (1999 p188). The mature individual has a strong sense of personal identity but no corresponding social identity in the workplace due to the lack of a formal qualification. As Britton and Baxter note, "the model of self is that of an *unrecognised self*" (1999 p188 original emphasis).

Self transformation

The final reason focuses on the potential for change in the individual's identity brought about through education. This is where an event or series of events occur in the individual's life and they decide to "change their identity". According to Britton and Baxter, "changes in the self and identity are the prime and explicit focus" of this category (1999 p189). The authors draw upon Giddens (1991) and Beck's (1992) notion of the reflexive self to explain how new identities might be created.

Kimmel and McNeese (2005/6) found that mature adults are highly motivated by both intrinsic and extrinsic benefits. The intrinsic benefits deal with, "being motivated by the desire for personal accomplishment, the desire to be a role model for their children, the desire for knowledge or skills in the degree field, and encouragement by their children and parents" (2005/6 p40). The extrinsic rewards sought by mature adults are, "advancement opportunity at work, the assurance of a pay increase or promotion, and the desire to enter a new field" (2005/6 p40). What is clear from both Kimmel and McNeese and Britton and Baxter's accounts is that, regardless of the particular reason or objective, mature students are highly motivated and make a *conscious* choice to return to study in the higher education field although that choice may be influenced by internal or external factors.

Challenges facing mature students

Davies and Williams (2001) explore the decision-making process for mature students' return to study. Here notions of fragility and risk, specifically around issues of access to higher education, are discussed. Davies and Williams' research looks at issues of risk assessment. When mature individuals embarked on their decision-making process in terms of returning to study, there were a number of risk categories identified by their

research cohort. These included future rewards which concerned, “the impact of higher level qualifications on future employment prospects and earnings”; personal achievement where the mature individual considered whether they were good enough to succeed in an academic setting through, “submitting to an extensive external validation of suitability before and during study”; finance which focused on the costs of study, particularly securing funding for these studies; time constraints which, “linked to the multiple roles and complex lives” of the potential students; and lastly, resources and services which concerned the timing of the academic programme and the availability of support services (Davies and Williams 2001 p195-198). Clearly mature students make a tremendous investment in a multitude of ways when they decide to (re)enter the academic field. The authors further note three sources of fragility – issues of accessibility, the newness of the learner identity; and complexity of the investment.

Issues of accessibility

The authors’ research focuses mainly on potential entrants to higher education. Many mature individuals had carefully considered the process of entering the higher education field, yet some of these individuals decided not to pursue further studies. Davies and Williams conclude that one of the sources of frustration and fragility centred on information from the higher education institution regarding the chosen course/s of study which was either not readily available, complete or sufficient. When applicants were not provided with the required level of information, this resulted in levels of anxiety and doubt culminating in some instances in withdrawal of interest from potential applicants.

Student identity

For the potential entrants to high education in their study, the adoption of a student identity was relatively new. Returning to study as a mature students presented a challenge and a movement to a position for many individuals, “where they were redefining their educational identity” (Davies and Williams 2001 p191). According to Davies and Williams, “the shift to a learner identity construed as ‘mature student in higher education’ was a complex process of coming to wonder if and then to believe that higher education was ‘for me’ or ‘for people like me’” (2001 p192). The authors suggest that this was a key area of concern for potential applicants.

Complexity of the investment

In general agreement with other authors, Davies and Williams reveal that higher

education is, “seen as preparation for a new career or a means to enhance prospects in previous or current employment (and) a clear and wide spread belief that there were strong economic benefits in from a higher education qualification in the long term” (2001 p189). Building on the work of Davies and Williams, Osborne et al. (2004) summarise their findings on the reasons students return to study. These are “interest in the subject to be studied, the chance to enhance career prospects, a wish to improve existing qualifications, a desire to change the direction of their life, and the fact that they had always wanted to study but never had the opportunity” (Osborne et al. 2004 p305). Davies and Williams also note that beyond the financial investment, “the investment of time was equally important, especially for those with families” (2001 p190).

The costs to the mature student’s family are clearly outlined and the authors make an important point when they say “study was not only an investment of the individual student’s time but the time of other people around them in a variety of ways” (Davies and Williams 2001 p190). Wilson, when contrasting traditional with mature students, further notes the demands of family life that, “mature students are different due to their home lives and commitments there; it is these pressures from home that potentially make for a difficult life as a student” (1997 p358).

Although there were benefits to be gained from higher education such as an increase in self esteem and status, these had to be contrasted with losses in family time and home and job responsibilities. The actual or potential barriers facing students in pursuit of the higher education experience were the, “cost of studying, the need to work to earn a living, responsibilities of current job, domestic/family responsibilities, lack of childcare, lack of confidence, and fears of long terms debt” (Osborne et al. 2004 p305-306). This view is supported by Kimmel and McNeese’s findings that the, “barriers to adult students were the absence of childcare facilities, the role of personal caretaker for elders, and the lack of funds expressly dedicated to childcare (and) concern about paying back student loans” (2005/6 p40). Osborne et al. conclude that mature individuals’ decision to return to study is clouded with uncertainty and trepidation as, “mature students have multiple roles of responsibility, which carry considerable emotional and financial burdens” (2004 p312).

Norton et al. (1998) focus extensively on the impact on personal relationships when the mature individual returns to study. They identify a key factor namely the renegotiation of

traditional roles. If these traditional roles are not renegotiated between the mature student and their partner, either role overload or role strain occurs. Role overload creates a negative impact on the relationship while role strain results in role conflict where the student role is in conflict with the family role. The importance of adequately preparing partners for the student's return to study is highlighted as partner support is considered essential. Lack of partner support produces, "the effect of stress on the relationship itself and on the student's psychological well-being" (Norton et al. 1998 p86). But Brine and Walker argue that partner support, "does not necessarily imply an easy transition (if there are) no other friends or family with experience of university" indicating that the wider social milieu of the mature students also plays a significant role (2004 p104).

What is clear from the prior research presented thus far is that mature students have a different experience from mainstream younger university students, their purposes for returning to study are wide and varied, and that acquiring academic status contributes to a shifting role in terms of their identity and in their relationships with others. As Stevens notes, mature students in higher education rapidly encounter, "a legion of hitherto unknown experiences; engagement with academics and academic discourse, division into home and college self-identities, epiphanies of self development, and shifts in relationships" (2003 p251).

Complexities of class, gender and race

Class accounts

This section of the chapter deals with how research regarding mature students has been conceptually framed. The research on mature students thus far has covered the generalities of mature students: how they differ from their more traditional counterparts, why they return to study as mature adults and the risks and challenges facing them prior to enrolment and during their higher education studies. However, there are assumptions regarding mature students as "a distinct social category with particular shared characteristics, although this is often not the case" (Tett 2000 p185). What Tett is alluding to is the role class, gender and race play in mediating both the experiences and the decision making of mature students. James (1995) and Reay, (1995, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004) are both helpful in contextualising the complexities of higher education and the broader societal structures and influences at play. As James maintains, social factors permeate every aspect of student experience and therefore one cannot speak of a common experience (James 1995).

Viewing the higher education experience as identity changing, James argues that for working class people, being educated means a change in class identity, a movement “upward”. This is supported by Ostrove who says that, “education is traditionally seen as a primary means of upward mobility” (2003 p774). Reay cautions that beyond the mere movement upward, “for working-class students choosing higher education is about being different people in different places, about who they might be and what they must give up” (2002 p412). Archer (in Archer et al.) suggests that the main reasons students enter higher education are economic value, social value (for example enhancing one’s social standing), personal development and class mobility, but argue that, “risks, costs and benefits of participation are not equal for all social groups” (2003 p119). Waller suggests that by, “by re-engaging with formal education, mature students are involved in changing their earner identity, a process that may also challenge class and/or gender identity/ies” (2005 p57). As Reay points out, “while the middle-class mature students can talk easily of becoming ‘the real me’ through higher education, such ways of relating to higher education are more difficult for the working-class students” (2001 p337).

Reay also argues that the experiences of working class students differ from those of middle class students when they return to study and these differences create further tension and risk beyond the general ones described by Osborne et al., Wilson and others, for, “not only were they moving from one stage of education to another, a majority were also engaged in a transition from one class to another” (Reay 2002 p409). It is this transition that creates the disjuncture for working class students in the higher education field. However Tett suggests that, “for many working-class students, pursuing a higher degree is not only about personal achievement but also about carrying the banner for their community. The significance of this responsibility should not be underestimated since it can fuel a powerful sense of motivation and commitment amongst the students” (2004 p262). I would argue that while this may be motivational, “carrying the banner” could also be(come) an additional burden for the mature student.

Reay et al. identify the role of familial habitus in the decision-making process for working class students noting that “an important aspect of familial habitus is the compilation of values, attitudes and knowledge base that families possess in relation to the field of higher education. It is profoundly influenced by the educational experience of parents” (2005 p61–62). Students without this particularly type of familial cultural capital find it difficult to imagine being part of the higher education system. The

importance and expectation of higher education has typically been ingrained in middle class students. The underlying motivators for mature individuals to return to study at this juncture in their lives differ across class. For middle class students, the higher education experience will put them closer to those around them, while for working class students the opposite is highly likely. Middle class students engage, “in higher education choice in contexts of certainty and entitlement” (Reay et al. 2005 p62).

The role played by the higher education institution is equally important in shaping the experiences of mature students and here I wish to present two points, the first focusing on the interplay between the individual and the institution, and the second which looks at the reproductive role played by higher education. In their research, Bamber and Tett remind us that, “individual learning always takes place in a social context. To over-play the impact of situational and institutional factors might be to under-play the part played in terms of the sheer effort made by the individual students themselves, just as the same could be conversely true” (1999 p471). What the authors are pointing to is the interplay between habitus and field and that these are mutually constituting (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). Individual effort from students themselves plays a role in determining academic success. However support within the higher education environment is critical in terms of its contribution to that success and while time consuming, is absolutely essential.

Peer or group support is also considered meaningful. “Group support in the form of learning clusters, tutorial groups, and encouragement to cooperate over the composition of assignments, is also beneficial. These levels of support are essential if students are to be enabled to make the kind of personal development required by the course” (Bamber and Tett 1999 p472). For the mature students in this study, levels of support ranging from academic support to more personal levels of support were provided within the higher education setting by the GCM programme administration. Levels of support were also expected from these mature students’ social and work contexts. However, as cautioned by Brine and Waller (2004), Reay et al. (2005) and others, these levels of support are not evenly distributed across class and gender. I now turn to the second part of the discussion on the reproductive role played by educational institutions.

According to Bourdieu, the purpose of the education system is a reproductive one where the power dynamics present in society are replicated in educational institutions (Bourdieu

and Passeron 1977/2000). For working class students, “there is less of a fit between educational institution and family and friends. Most are managing a degree of dissonance and a significant minority are having to cope with tensions that make choice conflictual and problematic” (Reay et al. 2005 p38-39). Linked to earlier comments on the importance of supportive personal relationships with partners and the student’s wider social milieu (Norton et al. 1998, Brine and Waller 2004), we see how working class students face further challenges. Juggling already established roles with a new student role – unfamiliar to those closest to the mature student – presents a real predicament for the working class student. This dilemma is also true for women students.

Gendered accounts

While class is the primary focus of the study, I also look at the effects of gender and race. Therefore another important aspect of the mature student experience to consider is the role of gender. Britton and Baxter analysed their four reasons mature students return to study to show how men and women express their identity differently. They argue that some accounts, “are masculine (*self-transformation*) and some are feminine (*struggling against the odds* and *credentialism*) whilst some are common to both men and women (*unfulfilled potential*)” (1999 p190 original emphasis). For Ostrove, “the opportunity for upward mobility was a salient theme among women from working-class backgrounds” (2003 p782). Building on Reay’s earlier comments regarding the tensions and contradictions for working class students, Brine and Waller argue that, “for working-class women, returning to education challenges their identities as learners, their class identity and their class femininities” (2004 p99). There are particular risks associated with mature women students. There is the

risk of academic failure, economic and material risk, risk to personal relationships and risk to class identity. Critically these areas of risk are also areas of opportunity: of academic success, of economic and material well-being or stability, of new and improved personal relationships, and for some, of changed class identity (Brine and Waller 2004 p102)

While it may be argued that these might apply to men – and I would agree – what is clear is that they would not apply *equally* as, “both education and family are greedy institutions which demand that women fulfill their different requirements to the full” (Edwards 1993 p136). What women tend to do is adopt coping strategies to deal with the

potentially conflicting demands from these areas. Citing Tynes (1990), Norton et al. also note that the relationship may be affected, “if one partner becomes more skilled and productive in the world of work than the other” (1998 p76). This situation may be aggravated in cases where the student is a woman. Citing Edwards (1993), the authors indicated that, “the experience of being a student had boosted these women’s confidence, but they still felt constrained by their family responsibilities, and in at least 25% of cases their relationships had suffered in some way” (Norton et al. 1998 p77). As Tett also argues in her research, “differences have emerged in the emphasis placed on the domestic domain by the female students as compared with the implicit influence of the future labour market by the male students” (2000 p190).

For women, the multiplicity of roles – partner, parent, daughter, student and others – presents a particular challenge. Edwards discusses the mental presence of family for mature women students; their families were always present in their thoughts, whether this related to their family’s happiness or domestic tasks. Edwards explains that for some of the women, “despite acknowledging that time limits and domestic responsibilities did mean that they never really ‘escaped’, they valued the way that they were not responsible for others and the different ways of being and thinking that education required of them” (1993 p89). For other women, however, the separation was not possible and they remained mentally connected to their role of partner and parent: “They felt comfortable with the existence of their family lives in their minds when they were within the education institution” (Edwards 1993 p90). The connectedness/separation of education and family is thus more apparent in women’s experiences. Mature women students who wanted their relationships to connect to their student identities,

wanted their partner’s support in domestic ways, but more importantly, they wanted their partners’ interest, both in the domestic tasks undertaken and in their studies. Women who wanted connections wished to discuss what they had learnt with their partners and for their partners to be interested in this and meeting their student friends. They also wanted to talk to their children and parents about what they were learning (Edwards 1993 p129).

This connectedness is often not possible as Norton et al. found: “There were indications of possible role stereotyping on the part of the students’ partners. This meant that

whereas some of the women were very supportive and saw their male partners' studying as a way of improving career prospects, this did not appear to be the case in the reverse situation" (1998 p82). Those women in the study who preferred the separation of education and family, "enjoyed 'cutting off' from their family selves and having a separate identity as student ... They referred to higher education as not being part of 'real life' ... [and] ... were aware of making efforts not to show off their academic knowledge within the home and in personal relationships with partners or parents" (Edwards 1993 p130). The women who mixed separation and connection between their two roles reported a sense of "switching on and off" as their way of dealing with the two competing arenas. Interestingly, in her study Edwards noted no particular trends of race or class across this connectedness/separation dilemma where middle class and black women were just as likely to want or not want the same things.

Beyond their most intimate relationships with their families, Brine and Waller also highlight the role of the extended social milieu on the experiences of mature women students, noting that, "whilst the women positively desire change for themselves, their family and friends may feel threatened by it, presenting an additional risk for the student" (2004 p111). This risk has the potential to irretrievably damage these relationships but also has equal potential to coerce the mature student into repression of their student identity and to conceal any changes resulting from their higher education experience. The sense one gets from this discussion is that women have to juggle their lives – physically, emotionally and psychologically – because of the challenges brought about through their return to study.

Racialised accounts

Most of the discussion regarding race and education in South Africa is focused primarily on issues of access, identity and the framing of "race". Several studies reveal the subtle ways in which attitudes towards race and difference are embedded in the thinking of individuals in a divided society (Leibowitz et al. 2007, Robus and McLeod 2006, Waetjen 2006, Walker 2005a, 2005b). However there are few, if any, studies that concentrate on mature student experience through a racial lens in South Africa.

Because of the country's apartheid past, race was, and in many ways still is, seen as the key differentiator between individuals. The default discourse to explain differences between groups is typically that of race. Issues of class were/are subsumed by issues of

race. In a study undertaken by Finchilescu et al. (2007) which dealt with interracial mixing at universities within South Africa, the authors note a lack of mixing across race groups. In their findings they note how race and class have become intertwined to a degree that it is at times difficult to separate the two:

While there has been some improvement in the economic position of blacks since the end of apartheid, this is probably not sufficiently wide spread to change the view (or fact) that whites are privileged. Socio-economic status, even within racially homogeneous societies, has always been a determinant of friendship and social engagement. This item indicates that the association of race with advantage or disadvantage is still strong in South Africa (Finchilescu et al. 2007 p732).

A commonly accepted and frequently used term is “previously disadvantaged” – a euphemism to describe blacks regardless of class background who were discriminated against in the apartheid past. Waetjen (2006) observes the trend in the usage of the term is shifting and that race and class are being teased into separate categories. However it would be safe to say that, “in South Africa, class tendencies are closely associated with race” (Makoe 2006 p362). Despite the advent of a democratic process post-1994, race has not disappeared from public discourse. However the language used to describe race or race-related issues is subtly altering as Liebowitz et al. (2007) discuss. The authors note that, “black and white students frequently referred to themselves in terms of where they live, and associated this with issues of status, resources, and identity. They referred to those who live in ‘townships’, ‘rural areas’ or ‘privileged areas’” (Liebowitz et al. 2007 p708).

Discourse to denote difference is slowly changing and the form it takes centres on place or location (as described above); the use of “us and them” terminology; “privilege” and “underprivileged” vocabulary; and employing the “so-called” phrase to indicate discomfort with a racial term for example, “so-called” coloured. Even though the public discourse is changing, Walker questions whether, “racism and its dimensions of power continue in both old and newer guises” (2005b p130). While racial identities may be shifting, these are primarily at the younger student level – those who were typically seven or eight years old in 1994. Mature students, the focus of the study, have all experienced racially segregated schooling, residences, social lives and employment opportunities. I

would argue that exposure to a highly racialised environment shaped a stronger racialised habitus in these students.

Daniel (2007) discusses black (African American and Latino) students' experiences⁷ which are characterised by isolation, lack of relevance of the curricula to black experiences and perspectives, issues of invisibility and differences with university staff, faculty and fellow students. For these black students, the education process is, "one of uncertainty, sacrifice and strain. This is due in part to concerns that students bring along with them, but more significantly, to the marginal experiences which seem to characterize their socialization" (Daniel 2007 p39). The point Daniel is making here is that while the experiences in the higher education institution contribute to the negativity felt by these students, the habitus of black students - their attitudes, perceptions and dispositions – also affects their higher education experience.

Kimmel and McNeese (2005/6) report on the racial differences between mature students in terms of motivation and barriers to higher education in the United States and Canada. The key differences between black and white students were that black students, "were significantly more likely to face barriers from family discouragement" (2005/6 p38). Black students also showed a higher lack of confidence than white students in their belief in their ability to cope with the demands of the higher education environment. The motivation of black and white students differed as well with black students expressing, "significantly higher motivation towards the degree to gain new knowledge and skills" (2005/6 p39). Unfortunately the authors provide little discussion on these differences and we are left merely knowing what the situation is and not why or how it has come about.

Although not directly related to mature students, a study was undertaken by Ball et al. (2002b) on what they call "minority ethnic" students' decision- making regarding higher education in the United Kingdom. Cautioning against generalisations being made from their work – the sample is drawn from a mix of nationalities – the authors provide several

⁷ While I will be drawing on international literature to discuss what it means to be a black student, particularly a mature black student, I note that in all instances these students are referred to, in one way or another, as minority students. Clearly this is not the case in South Africa where blacks – Africans, coloured and Indians - constitute over 90% of the population (Statistics South Africa 2007).

worthwhile insights around minority ethnic trends. Minority ethnic students tend to be either contingent or embedded choosers of higher education. Contingent choosers tend to be extrinsically motivated, that is their choice of higher education institutions, “involve the balance of practical constraints with a limited number of positive criteria” (Ball et al. 2002b p341). For example, financial considerations are paramount. Also typically there is no history of higher education in the family. Embedded choosers on the other hand, have a tradition of higher education within their families. These students, “approach higher education choice with confidence and certainty” (Ball et al. 2002b p342). There is evidence of prior planning in their decision making. The contingent choosers appear to be of working class backgrounds and the embedded choosers show all the hallmarks of middle class status. However the authors strongly remind us that they are not suggesting, “that class ‘washes out’ ethnic differences” but are merely wishing to shed light into non-traditional applicants’ decision making regarding higher education (Ball et al. 2002b p355).

Not all black experiences are the same, even among black women. Rigg and Trehan (1999) describe the diversity of black women’s experiences on a management development programme at a business school in the United Kingdom. The black women students reacted to discriminatory behaviour in various ways – by asserting themselves and challenging others to deliberately withdrawing from group and individual interactions. These experiences therefore ranged from enlightenment and empowerment resulting in a, “new sense of insight and personal potential” from one set of women, to, “a loss of confidence, and a reinforced sense of powerlessness” for another (Rigg and Trehan 1999 p266 - 268). The authors explain that if the position of a black woman, “within the learning social system is affected by race, she may feel there are more political consequences for her than for a white woman or man, from ‘taking the lead’ or ‘sticking her neck out’. This in itself can be silencing” (Rigg and Trehan 1999 p277). The point the authors are making is that the educational setting mirrors the socio-dynamics of wider society. Within the learning environment therefore, it seems that black women consider the cost and ramifications of their actions before they assert themselves. If they lack self-belief and tenacity, they may withdraw, which has an impact on both their educational success and self esteem. Class may be another way of understanding why these differences come about, although some authors feel it may be difficult to know which is the determining or more dominant factor. Wright argues that the categories of class and race,

define a profile of experiences that are tied to specific locations. This is easy to grasp when thinking about class, but think about the way racial categories tie students to particular locations. Think about how a racial label ties a Black student to a particular stigmatized and inferior (academic) location. Further, think about the complications involved when one's class status (middle class) ties one to particular opportunities, interests, and success while one's race status (Black) ties one to others that are less than positive. The question then becomes, which category dictates the lived experience? It is here that the intersection of race and class is salient (2005 p7).

Wright agrees that both race and class mediate the student experience, but I would argue that just as class is a construct with differing positions, so people from the same racial category occupy different spaces. There is no common "black student experience". Class and gender mediate black and white student experiences. However I concede that in many contexts, "Black students still face worlds of continuing educational inequity and are still struggling to construct a social, political and academic identity that transcends deficit notions of race" (Wright 2005 p2). It would be far more useful to locate individual within their gendered, racialised, class positions to fully understand their experiences.

The discussion on race has been quite broad in that it presents arguments and opinions regarding both young and mature black students, ethnic minorities with gender and class overlays. In summary, the experiences of black students differ from those of white students. There are differences for their return to study and in the potential barriers they face. We see how race is compounded by class and gender. In the South African context, the discourse and effects of race are still very much in evidence. Walker argues that for those in South African universities, "all the students' lives are marked, whether acknowledged or not, by race, by racialised subjectivities, and by a past of racial separateness" (2005a p53).

Conclusion

Drawing on prior research, this chapter has presented the debates regarding mature students in general before looking at complexities mainly of class, but also of gender and how these are framed conceptually. The peculiarities of race, particularly those within a

South African context, were presented, and I also found it helpful to draw upon research regarding race and students from other contexts. Given these and other insights of prior research regarding students in higher education and particularly those around mature students, we should be better able to understand the actions and experiences of mature students in this study.

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CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH DESIGN

According to Merriam, research design can be thought of as an “architectural blueprint” (1988 p6). The “architectural blueprint” for this chapter is informed by Maxwell’s (2005) interactive model of research design. He says, “because a design always exists, it is important to *make* it explicit, to get it out in the open where its strengths, limitations, and consequences can be clearly understood” (Maxwell 2005 p3 original emphasis). Maxwell suggests five components to his model: those of goals, conceptual context, research questions, methods and validity. Accordingly this chapter uses his model as “an integrated and interacting whole, with each component closely linked in a linear or cyclic sequence” (Maxwell 2005 p4). As the conceptual framework has already been presented, the discussion begins with the broad methodological approach. The rationale for using a case study for exploring the goals of the research is then outlined. The procedure for selecting research participants is explained before data collection techniques and their rationale are discussed. The analytical framework used to interrogate the data is outlined, along with examples taken from students’ transcripts to show its usage. I then present how the analysis is to be reported. The chapter concludes with a discussion on validity, ethics and the limitations of a case study approach.

Broad methodological approach

The design for the study has been shaped by Bourdieu whose, “attempt to carry out philosophically motivated research on education has been an attempt to rethink our everyday assumptions about educational practices” (Grenfell and James 1998 p28). Although loathe to pigeonhole his approach, Bourdieu characterises his work as, “constructivist structuralism” or “structuralist constructivism” (1989a p14). Structuralism can be defined as a belief that, “social analysis should be concerned with exploring beneath “surface appearances” in order to reach the deeper, ultimately more “real”, structures seen as determining social relations” (Jary and Jary 1991 p634). Bourdieu explains his interpretation of structuralism as objective structures that exist within the world that guide or fashion individual practices or behaviour and constructivism as, “a twofold social genesis”, using habitus and field as the concepts to account for this (1989a p14). Constructivists are committed to the “view that what we take to be objective

knowledge and truth is the result of perspective. Knowledge and truth are created, not discovered by mind [but] are actually the product of complicated discursive practices” (Schwandt in Denzin and Lincoln 1998 p236). Bourdieu believes that, “social and cultural reproduction occurs by means of a constant reciprocity or dialectic between agency and structure” (Grenfell and James 1998 p30). Guba and Lincoln suggest that, “constructivism connects action to praxis” (in Denzin and Lincoln 2005 p184) and Grenfell and James confirm that Bourdieu’s work displays, “the reciprocal movement between theory and practice” (1998 p28). Bourdieu strongly maintains that, “one cannot grasp the most profound logic of the social world unless one becomes immersed in the specificity of the empirical reality, historically situated and dated, but only in order to construct it as an instance ... in a finite universe of possible configurations” (in Calhoun et al. 1993 p271-272).

The GCM programme

The study focuses on mature students enrolled in a university academic programme providing management development for mature individuals. This programme is known as the Graduate Certificate in Management (GCM). The programme’s original purpose was to assist individuals who had been disadvantaged educationally and in other ways by apartheid but who were recognised by their employers as having the potential to move into managerial careers. The primary purpose of the GCM remains to develop management and business administration skills in individuals moving into and through junior to middle management positions, and caters for individuals with work experience but with little or no tertiary qualifications. A key benefit is its positioning as an alternative access point for further postgraduate study (GCM internal documentation 2006). A document that provides an overview of all GCM courses is attached (see appendix one).

Rationale for a case study approach

I am adopting a case study approach with the unit of analysis in this study being a select group of students from a single cohort of the GCM programme. According to Eisenhardt, “the case study is a research strategy which focuses on understanding the dynamics present within single settings” (1989 p534). Yin notes that the need for case studies, “arises out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena ... [it] allows an investigation to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events – such as individual life cycles [and] organizational and managerial processes” (2003 p2).

The experiences of mature students constitute the real-life events as do the impact and consequences of the higher education experience in students' lives. Typically, "the researcher collects extensive data on the individual(s) on which the investigation is focused [and] also records details about the context surrounding the case" (Leedy and Ormrod 2005 p135). The case study method is ideal if, "you deliberately wanted to cover contextual conditions – believing they might be highly pertinent to your phenomenon of study" (Yin 2003 p13). Grenfell and James relate the approach to Bourdieu's concepts:

in many respects, case studies offer an excellent opportunity to research in a Bourdieuan way. Case studies of individuals indicate particular habitus constituents and life trajectories. Individuals are also always positioned in some field or other at any one time and place. There is then the possibility of researching the interaction between habitus and field in empirical terms (1998 p173).

Unit of analysis

Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999) caution that the answer to the question: "Who or what do you want to draw conclusions about?" is the key to understanding the purpose of the study. Therefore the selection of the unit of analysis is crucial as, "the unit of analysis is the basis for the case [and] it can sometimes be difficult to identify the boundaries of the unit of analysis" (Rowley 2002 p19). The unit of analysis defines, "what the 'case' is" (Yin 2003 p22). Rowley further notes that, "a key issue is that the case study should only ask questions about the unit of analysis, and any sub-units" (2002 p19). The unit of analysis in this study is a select group of students. As Merriam notes, "the focus of research in a case study is on *one* unit of analysis. There may be numerous events, participants, or phases of a process subsumed under the unit" (1988 p46 original emphasis). In this study the individual students are subsumed under the overriding unit of analysis. Following Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999), the purpose of the research is therefore to draw conclusions about students' experiences through their memberships of different groups which are primarily class, by also the sub-groupings of gender, race and age.

Constructing the object of the research

Drawing on Bourdieu, Silva and Edwards suggest that, "researchers must recognise that unless they themselves construct the object of their research, they are left dealing with

objects that have been pre-constructed within narrow approaches. Both theory and method are part of the construction of the object, rather than separate” (2004 p4). Using his concept of field, Bourdieu recommends that, “at every stage, make sure that the object [you] have given [yourself] is not enmeshed in a network of relations that assign its most distinctive properties” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992 p228). Grenfell and James explain that if we do not heed Bourdieu’s advice, it “can lead the researcher to invest their own relation to the object of study in the research rather than explain and understand it in its own terms” (1998 p158). What Bourdieu is alerting us to is that we must think relationally. To think relationally is to consider the relationships and processes between those involved and things or structures – typically between habitus, field and capital – and seeing those links and complexities (Grenfell and James 1998). Bourdieu advises the researcher to immerse herself, “completely in the particularity of the case at hand without drowning in it ... [which] allows you to think relationally [in terms of] a particular case constituted as a ‘particular instance of the possible’” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992 p233-234). Thinking relationally in this study means considering the habitus of mature students in relation to structures – the fields of higher education, work and the social – and the dynamics of the field-specific capital at play within each of these fields.

Selection procedure

The selection of the students focused on mature students entering higher education for the first time. These students were enrolled on the Graduate Certificate in Management (GCM) programme in one particular year and included a selection of students from varied class and cultural backgrounds. O’Leary makes the point that selection, “is generally non-random, with researchers handpicking ... on a pragmatic and theoretical basis” (2004 p117). This was true in my case both because of the clear delineation of *who* I wanted in the study and also because of my familiarity with both the GCM programme and its students.

Challenges with selection

My initial plan was to draw a selection of students meeting the criteria I had originally chosen – that is, mature individuals entering higher education for the first time. I envisaged that individuals new to the higher education environment would have a heightened sense of their experiences and thus would provide sharper, more focused accounts. It was not as easy as anticipated to find students across all profiles of class,

gender and race. The focus therefore changed to “students without a higher education qualification”. Although I particularly wanted to explore experiences of those unfamiliar with the higher education environment, the broadening of the focus now meant that students who had previous, unsuccessful encounters with higher education, that is, they had not completed their qualifications, were included. McDonnell et al. say that, “the design of any research study is influenced not just by theoretical but by pragmatic considerations” (2000 p384) and this was certainly the case in my selection process. There were several more students who fitted this profile, but not all were selected as the idea was not to get a sufficiently representative sample to *prove* an idea, but to understand the experiences of a group of varied individuals.

The decision for selection of the participants was a practical one that hinged on timing, i.e. those students who had already been accepted on the programme in that year were approached first. Because of my interest in exploring any gender and racial similarities or differences, I looked for men and women and students across all racial groups because race is so intimately connected to class in the South Africa context. Therefore although the study is about class, it was difficult to choose participants along class lines up front as the measurement for establishing class positions – which is based on Bourdieu’s classification scheme – required a great deal of familial information⁸. It must be noted that where students are classified middle class, this is by no means a fixed category in the traditional sense. Class boundaries weaken a little with the added complexity of race. The collective experience of class is often in tension with the collective experiences of race. Therefore race is a complication of class. I illustrate this difference with an example of two students: Ryan is white and middle class and has attended schools where the majority of children were middle class (and white). By comparison, Zoë (Indian middle class) has attended schools where the majority of children were working class (and black) and subsequently her schooling might be thought of as working class. This example shows the complexity of class and race within the South African context.

The final selection

The final size of the selection was thirteen with the following profile: six men; seven women; three white; three Indian; five coloured; and two African students⁹. The

⁸ The explanation of Bourdieu’s indicators and their usage is fully explained in the analytical framework.

⁹ Note: six of these students had previous experience of the higher education environment

participants were all mature students. Within the context of the study, a “mature” student is seen as a “mature-age” student who is 25 years and older. The selection of research participants was large enough to allow the research question to be answered in a convincing manner, and small enough to achieve the required depth during interviews with each student. The purpose was to achieve an intimate understanding of the nuances that make the context under study unique and to find richly informative stories that shed light on the issues of risk, uncertainty and fit (Lincoln and Guba 1985). The range provided the opportunity to consider how issues such as class, and to a lesser extent, gender, race and age impacted on the experiences and potential habitus shifts of students. The participants were all from a single cohort of the GCM programme. A participant profile is shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Research participant profile

Age			Highest education			Post-school work experience (years)		
25-30	31-35	36 +	Matric	Std 9	Std 8	5-10	11-15	16+
3	5	5	11	1	1	4	5	4

Class background		Race				Gender	
<i>Working class¹⁰</i>	<i>Middle class</i>	<i>African</i>	<i>coloured</i>	<i>Indian</i>	<i>white</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>
6	7	2	5	3	3	6	7

¹⁰ As noted earlier, a full explanation on how class trajectories were established follows in the analytical framework.

Marital status			Programme funding			
<i>Single</i>	<i>Married</i>	<i>Cohabit</i>	<i>Company sponsored (full)</i>	<i>Company sponsored (partial)</i>	<i>Company loan</i>	<i>Self funded</i>
6	5	2	6	3	1	3

Data collection – strategies, rationale and data gathering sequence

Data collection

In order to address the research questions, two sets of data were gathered. The research questions in this study relate to the reasons mature students from varied class and cultural backgrounds return to study through enrolment on the GCM programme, the strategies these students employ to cope with both academic demands and related expectations during their year of academic study, and the effects and consequences of this particular higher education experience on these students’ relationships with significant others in their personal and social lives as well as in the field of work. The first set of data was the biographical and programme application data pertaining to the students and the second and primary set of data was collected through student interviews.

Biographical data and personal documentation

Through their application for acceptance into the GCM programme, students completed a fairly extensive submission including their rationale for returning to study and any personal preparation they envisaged related to their return. These personal dossiers¹¹ also contained confidential reference reports from their immediate managers on both their suitability for the academic programme and the level of support to be provided by their organisations. Although the question of return to study was revisited in the interviews, this initial source of data was considered key to understanding the motivation of the students’ desire to return to study. During the academic year, students in the study were also asked to complete a “family history questionnaire” (see appendix one) which was used to establish their class trajectory. The section on operationalising class, later in the chapter, provides the rationale for this questionnaire.

¹¹ The ethical issues pertaining to the use of these dossiers is discussed later in this chapter.

GCM student interviews

In total, four in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted. Students were interviewed prior to the start of the programme, twice during the academic year, and six months after the end of the programme (see appendix two for interview schedules). Each interview ranged from thirty five minutes to an hour dependant on the level of response from individual students. The first interview focused on the reasons the students had returned to study and their feelings regarding this return. Their educational history was also explored. Reactions from family, friends and the work environment provided insight into the level of support anticipated for the year ahead. The second and third interviews provided the opportunity to ask how students were coping with the academic year given their varied backgrounds. Students' support mechanisms at home and work were followed up in the light of the earlier levels of interest and support reported to the students from their significant others. The final interview allowed students to reflect on changes as a result of their year of academic study – changes in their own behaviour, attitudes and perceptions which had been observed both by themselves and also by others – and equally important, the effects and consequences that had occurred in their personal, social and work spheres after the completion of the programme.

Rationale for using interviewing as a primary source of data collection

There are methodological choices to be made by the researcher when asking particular questions (Agar 1980; Filstead 1971; Lincoln and Guba 1985; Maxwell 2005; May 1993 and O'Leary 2004). Ascertaining the choice of any method depends on how much the method helps us understand the phenomenon we are studying. There are also disadvantages to the use of any method. We need to establish whether by using the methods of choice, useful data is gathered and more importantly, whether that data is useful for the specific purposes of the study. As Trow notes, "there is more than one way to gain knowledge of the richness, the subtlety and infinite variety, of social life" (in Filstead 1971 p147).

If the purpose of the case study is to explain both social process and meaning, "this requires an understanding of depth and complexity [in] people's situated or contextual accounts and experiences" so the qualitative interview is most suited (Mason 2005 p65). Researchers using qualitative methods, "typically study a relatively small number of individuals ... to preserve the individuality of each of these in their analyses ... Thus, they are able to understand events, actions, and meanings are shaped by unique

circumstances in which these occur” (Maxwell 2005 p22). I chose interviewing because I wanted to deepen my understanding about student experiences, raise questions about the intended and unintended consequences of an educational experience, and illuminate complexities surrounding the relationship between mature students and the context of higher education. Maxwell notes that, “the strengths of qualitative research derive primarily from its inductive approach, its focus on specific situations or people, and its emphasis on words rather than numbers” (2005 p22).

Interviews can provide in-depth information, the interviewee can ask for clarity on a question, and the researcher can ask for any explanation if unsure of any responses (Terre Blanche and Durrheim 1999). Although the unstructured interview is seen as the ideal method, it is difficult to draw out themes or develop a comparative measure using this method. Semi-structured interviews are more suited to the research questions and allow for probing and deviation from a completely structured set of questions to glean further information (Struwig and Stead 2001). Another advantage of this type of interview is that it is fluid and flexible and suitable when, “the researcher has a number of topics, themes or issues that they wish to cover, or a set of starting points for discussion” (Mason 2005 p62). Semi-structured interviews were used in the study for these reasons outlined above as it was possible to allow for free discussion within a broad framework. At the end of each interview, I checked my interview schedule to confirm that I had covered all my questions.

Bourdieu sees the interview as a relationship that is always a, “slightly arbitrary *intrusion*”, explaining that this social exchange, “implies understanding (of) what can and cannot be said, the forms of censorship that prevent the saying of certain things and the promptings that encourage the stressing of others” (1999 p608-609 original emphasis). Bourdieu proposes a particular method of interviewing in his “*Weight of the World*” interviews. He maintains that, “the social researcher simply gathers material through listening or uses knowledge of the respondents’ own hopes and assumptions to facilitate their memory or introspection” (in Fowler 1996 p12). Getting an insight into the experiences of others requires trust and the establishment of a relationship. In traditional research, the relationship between researcher and the participants exists for a limited time and has a defined focus – to obtain specific information. Indeed the relationship usually exists only for that purpose. Kelly advises researchers to be especially cautious when dealing with particularly sensitive or personal experiences, saying that, “the interviewer

needs to ensure, at all times, that the interviewee is comfortable with the level of exploration and discussion” (in Terre Blanche and Durrheim 1999 p387). In this study the relationship between the researcher and the participants included other dimensions as will be discussed later in the chapter.

A further question requiring a response is: why use *interviewing* as a method of getting at habitus? Reay argues convincingly that, “habitus cannot be directly observed in empirical research and has to be apprehended interpretively” (2004 p18). In answering the question of “what is habitus and how can it be seen?” in the conceptual framework chapter, it became clear that habitus is not a clear-cut, neat and bounded concept. Bourdieu maintains that, “it is only *in the relation* to certain structures that habitus produces given discourses or practices” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992 p135 original emphasis). This particular study with its focus on the behaviours, attitudes and perceptions of mature students with no prior higher education qualification presented an opportunity for understanding individual and collective habitus within a higher education setting.

Data gathering sequence

Biographical data and personal documentation

The initial source of data – the students’ personal dossier – was used after gaining students’ consent regarding its use. It provided a springboard for discussion regarding students’ reasons for return to study. (For example, students may have provided one set of reasons for their return to study in their application dossier and revealed their main reasons in our first interview. This could also be seen as an example of how students provided application information they considered appropriate for the “cultural fit”). The data also provided discussion in terms of the level of support expected from significant others in the work and home environments. “Significant others” was a term I used to define those people – identified by the students themselves – who were valued most by them in their home, social and work environments. They were people whose opinions students cared about (Ronnie 1999). Biographical data were also useful in determining past educational levels and, in the case of the family history questionnaire, individual class trajectories.

GCM student interviews

The pilot study

A pilot study was undertaken prior to the student interviews. Pilot studies are used to

identify possible problems with proposed research using a small selection of respondents before the main study is conducted (Struwig and Stead 2001). I used a single respondent, a mature student from the previous year's GCM intake fitting the selection criteria, to pilot the data collection strategy and obtain insight into possible key themes emerging from the interviews. The pilot interview took an hour and fifty minutes using an initial set of questions developed for the first interview. The duration of the interview pointed to the lengthy and leading questions being posed, to the personal, slightly intrusive nature of the questions, and to my partial discomfort with the intrusive nature of the process. The exercise alerted me to potential drawbacks both in terms of practical issues regarding length of time and questions and in making me more aware of the role of the interviewer. The interview schedule was analysed for any inconsistencies, gaps or flaws in the instrument through examining the data generated from this pilot. Practical use was therefore made of the pilot to construct the final first interview schedule and also to gauge possible themes.

The first interview

The first interview of the study took place shortly after students had been accepted into the GCM and before the commencement of the academic programme. The initial interview consisted of exploring the student's educational history and initial feelings about returning to study. Students were asked if they objected to the use of any data gathered in their application interview and from their application portfolios.

The second interview

Interview two was conducted midway through the academic year. I read and re-read the transcripts and listened to the taped conversations of the first interview to prepare for the second round of interviews with students. This also helped with developing the interview schedules. Becoming familiar with each student's previous response allowed the second (and subsequent) interviews to flow smoothly. In this way, familiarity with students' lives provided a springboard to further discussion regarding their experiences. The second interview picked up on some of the earlier themes. Students were asked if the academic programme was meeting their expectations. The state of their relationships with other students and their feelings regarding their levels of comfort within the environment were explored. I questioned them regarding the levels of support and reactions from those in their personal and social milieu as well as their work environment.

The third and fourth interviews

Interview three was conducted in the latter half of the academic year and followed up on all the topics raised in the second interview and focused particularly on how students were adapting to the institutional context. Interview four took place six months after the end of the programme. As this was the final interview, I invited the students to reflect on the year and focused on how the students' personal history shaped their responses to the contemporary setting; their feelings regarding their first graduation ceremony; and what effects the return to study had on their personal and work lives. The entire set of data was gathered over an eighteen month period.

Operationalising habitus

The use of Bourdieu's concept of habitus to explore the experiences of mature students with no prior higher education qualification was seen as both useful and appropriate. Bourdieu says that, "the concept of habitus is a very useful tool, indeed an indispensable instrument for social analysis. But to realize this, one must first rid it of all the misinterpretations it has received, and use it carefully, with theoretical rigour or, better yet, with a practical mastery of its properties" (in Hillier and Rooksby 2005 p49). To develop a set of questions for the interviews I had to operationalise habitus which was not an easy task.

What is clear from the chapter on the conceptual framework is that habitus is viewed from a variety of perspectives, even by Bourdieu himself (Robbins 1991; Jenkins 2002). Reay offers a summary looking at four key components of habitus: Firstly, habitus and agency – the notion of individual choice, opportunity and constraint; secondly, the compilation of collective and individual trajectories – habitus has a history and this can be explored in terms of trends and inclinations for individuals and groups; thirdly, habitus as embodiment – a feel for the game; and finally, the complex interplay between past and present – what transformations of the habitus can occur and are brought about through subsequent experience. By drawing these four perspectives together, Reay says "habitus can be viewed as the complex internalized core from which everyday experiences emanate" (2004 p9). As I have already discussed these perspectives thoroughly in the previous chapter, I will show how the use of these four perspectives guided the development of the interview topics. A short summation of the key elements of each perspective is useful for locating the reader.

Habitus and agency

Through the use of habitus we are able to see how structure permeates choice throughout an individual's life trajectory. As Reay acknowledges, "while habitus allows for individual agency, it also predisposes individuals towards certain ways of behaving" (2004 p433). Bourdieu appears to be saying that individuals are constrained by their own habitus while on the other hand there is a notion that, "when habitus encounters a field with which it is not familiar, the resulting disjunctures can generate change and transformation" (Reay 2004 p11). The interview topics related to this category are: the students' purposes and motivations for applying to the programme; and educational alternatives considered post-school and challenges and constraints facing them in this process.

Habitus and collective and individual trajectories

Reay explains that, "a person's individual history is constitutive of habitus, but so also is the collective history of family and class that the individual is a member of" (2004 p434). Furthermore if we are to view the effects of the higher education experience on these students, we must acknowledge that, "the structure of those worlds is already pre-defined by broader racial, gender and class relations" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992 p144). Though no specific interview topics were generated from this perspective, it alerted me to class trajectories and trends across class, race and gender lines and was extremely useful in developing the analytical framework.

Habitus as embodiment

Habitus, in the form of dispositions, is incorporated in the body, which Bourdieu refers to as "feel for the game" (Bourdieu 1993). The "feel for the game" is played out within the classroom environment, and outside its confines, through the social interaction at the School of Management Studies. According to Bourdieu, people – typically those who lack the necessary field-specific capital – will act "out of sync" as there are discrepancies between their habitus and the field. The topics related to this category are: students' knowledge of expectations regarding academic and related behaviours; knowledge and understanding of expectations in terms of "the game" inside and outside the classroom; relationships with other students – both within the GCM programme and with those in other programmes at the School of Management Studies; and changes noted by themselves and others as a result of acquiring academic capital.

Habitus and the complex interplay between past and present

According to Reay, “while habitus reflects the social position in which it was constructed, it also carries within it the genesis of new creative responses that are capable of transcending the social conditions in which it was produced” (2004 p434-435). The interview topics related to this category are: a reflection on students’ school experiences; the influence of earlier experiences on their higher education experience; plans for further study; reactions of partners, family and friends to the students’ academic progress during the year; and reactions of partners, family and friends to the students after the academic year had been completed.

Summary

Bourdieu uses habitus both as a concept and a method – a way of understanding the world. The most evident drawback to the use of this concept is that habitus itself can be interpreted and explained in many ways. Bourdieu himself appears to have redefined the concept as his writing progressed. The danger in using habitus as a method is in its potential for, “becoming whatever the data reveals” (Reay 1995 p357). Reay notes that it is problematic to use habitus merely as a way of explaining the data and that habitus should be used “as a way of interrogating the data” which she sees as Bourdieu’s challenge (2004 p19). Mutch suggests there are, “some problems with habitus itself, notably the difficulty of dealing with change and the vague nature of the concept for use at a more detailed level of analysis” (2003 p384). I was therefore aware at the start of the study that habitus would have to be clearly defined. I have clarified how I interpreted habitus and how it was used in this study and I am conscious of its potential for ambiguity. I argue, as Reay does, that this very drawback of vagueness is also a strength of the concept in that it can be viewed from multiple perspectives as outlined above.

I now discuss how class was operationalised in the study. Because class is particularly entangled with race in the South African context, it is essential to clarify its meaning and use within the study.

Operationalising class in the study

Ball notes three aspects of class – theorising, analysis and class practices (2003). It is with the second aspect of analysis or operationalising class that this section is primarily concerned. Although both Marx and Bourdieu look at the social space and the positions of people within that space, what Marx does not fully explain is how the “outside” is

internalised – which I believe Bourdieu has addressed through his concept of habitus. Habitus is seen in the context of this study as a platform to *ask* the question, not answer the question, of class. In each individual, class gets entangled with race and gender. These in turn produce a specific habitus. As this study foregrounds class, it is essential to discuss what is understood by class and how this lens can be developed and used.

To revisit Ball's outline of the three aspects of work around class, it may be both useful and practical to view these three steps as hierarchical. In other words, one has to define one's understanding of class – as I have done in the chapter two – and then operationalise class within the specific area of research. But the third step which looks at practice is the only step that tells us what class actually means in and inside people's lives and in that sense class practices tell us what class is and how people “become” and reproduce their class. Habitus, it is argued, is therefore seen as the key concept for investigating class – but also gendered and racialised – practices.

Bourdieu tells us that, “social position, adequately defined, is what gives the best prediction of practices and representations” (1985 p739) but he warns that, “social class is not defined by a property (not even the most determinant one, such as the volume and composition of capital) nor by a collection of properties ... but by the structure of relations between all the pertinent properties which gives its specific value to each of them and to the effects that they exert on practices” (1984 p106). He goes on so say that, “individuals do not move about in social space in a random way, partly because they are subject to the forces which structure this space”, further noting that, “it is the specific logic of the field, of what is at stake and of the type of capital needed to play it, which governs those properties through which the relationship between class and practice is established (Bourdieu 1984 p112–3).

It is argued therefore that capital is the key concept to operationalise class. Bourdieu's set of indicators used for classification purposes in *The State Nobility* gathers from the students the, “cultural and social capital of their families” (Bourdieu 1989b p148). Using familial capital as an indicator of social class, Bourdieu attempted to locate students within “the space of positions”. The set of indicators included the following: parents' occupation and education, maternal and paternal grandfather's occupation and education, family's place of residence, number of family members having done post-school studies, and family size. The use of grandparents as a source of data enabled both a familial

trajectory to be established and guarded against the father's occupation being used as a sole measure, as doing this Bourdieu notes, "may be insufficient for characterizing social position" (1989b p242). However as these are all mature students in the study, it was not always possible to gather complete sets of data relating to grandparents.

Educational history is seen as another key aspect to the study. The choice or selection of participants involved in this study is based on educational trajectory; i.e. those students without any formal higher education qualifications have specifically been selected on this basis. For the purposes of the research, students' educational history was seen as important for understanding their experiences. This look at the educational history, familial and subsequent trajectory of these mature students is rooted in the family which Bourdieu's work seems to suggest is a place where, "social class is just as readily captured by empirical studies" (Grenfell and James 1998 p58). This is supported by Wilkes who writes that, "family can thus be constituted as the connection between class trajectory and individual trajectory, thus supporting the claim [...] that the family, and the strategies of family reproduction, should be units of study for class analysis" (in Harker et al. 1990 p127). As Wacquant notes, "class is not a given, it is constituted" (in McNall et al. 1991p51). As students' experiences are revealed, it is envisaged that the notion of class and its effects will be made more apparent.

Analysis and interpretation of the data

The next section presents the analytical framework through explaining how Bourdieu's concepts were used. I use extracts from the data to illustrate the analysis and highlight the way the concepts were used in the study. I then present how the analysis is to be reported. I introduce this section by looking at the initial phases of the data analysis process.

An overview of the analysis and interpretation of the data

Agar (1980) explains the research process as a non-linear one. As we collect data, we make sense of it through analysis; then return to the setting to see if our interpretation makes sense; gather more data and refine our interpretations. Lincoln and Guba warn against the gathering of indiscriminate data and note that, "as the sample unfolds ... the enquiry as a whole is achieving a sharper and sharper focus, thus rendering a good deal of information initially believed to be important, relatively irrelevant" (1985 p234). This reinforces the need for structure in the interviews and during the observation phases. Lincoln and Guba suggest the following successive phases: orientation and overview;

focused exploration using a structured approach; and participant check. These phases are intended to reduce the potential for information overload.

As Agar notes, “as you choose what to attend to and how to interpret it, mental doors slam shut on the alternatives” (1980 p48). These choices may be consciously made, while others come about through your personal and professional background as, “all interpretations of data – however collected – involve inferences regarding their meaning and significance” (Trow in Filstead 1971 p148). As interviews were the primary source used, extracts from transcribed interview texts were sorted on the basis of their similarity. Using the data and drawing on relevant theory, various organising themes and sub-themes emerged and were developed. In this way, different student behaviours, experiences or perceptions of their experiences were mapped, as examples in the analytical framework will show. The advantage of using this method is that transcribed interviews, “provide a more accessible equivalent of complex, abstract conceptual analyses (and) can produce the shifts in thinking and seeing” (Bourdieu 1999 p622). The coding process, where the data was clustered together under various organising themes and sub-themes, was revisited as a deeper understanding developed about the key organising themes. The key organising themes were initially seen to be; the significant drivers for the return to study as mature individuals, issues of tension and uncertainty for those students entering a higher education institution for the first time, complexities of fit, belonging, risk, fragility and sacrifice associated with class and gender issues, and uneven consequences of students’ decisions to return to study as mature individuals.

The analytical framework

While the conceptual framework describes Bourdieu’s concepts and how they are understood within the context of this study, these interdependent concepts also provide, “an analytical framework for appreciating the relative independence of forms of accumulation, arenas of social endeavour, and schemes of practice and perception” (Collins in Calhoun et al. 1993 p127). What the analytical framework does therefore is to explain how the concepts were used to organise and interrogate the data. Bernstein’s notion of internal and external languages of description is quite useful in describing the process and as Ensor explains, while the internal language of description describes the theoretical framework, the external language of description, “provides the basis for what is to count as data and provides for its principled reading (1999 p58). This section then is concerned with the development of an external language of description. Analysing the

mature student experience will be done through utilising a framework underpinned by the three key concepts of habitus, capital and field.

Establishing class positions

Positions, particularly those of class, are determined by familial resources and I therefore determined the students’ class trajectory from their family history. As noted earlier in the chapter, Bourdieu’s set of indicators used for classification purposes in *The State Nobility* gathers from students’ the, “cultural and social capital of their families” (Bourdieu 1989b p148). The set of indicators includes; parents’ occupation and education, maternal and paternal grandfather’s occupation and education, family’s place of residence, number of family members having done post-school studies and family size (number of siblings including parents). It is however pertinent to note that these students, regardless of class background, may have established or are now establishing positions in the middle class by virtue of their occupations as first line managers or technical experts and their resultant incomes. However, because of the influence of their formative years, it needs to be understood where students have come from in order to understand their responses to situations, in this particular case, the higher education environment. I present two examples of determining class trajectory going back two generations to illustrate the use of Bourdieu’s indicators.

Ryan and Iris’s data

Ryan’s data

Father’s occupation	Paternal grand father’s occupation	Paternal grand mother’s occupation	Father’s education	Paternal grand father’s education	Paternal grand mother’s education
Manager	Own business	Housewife	Matric	Qualified technician	Matric
Mother’s occupation	Maternal grand father’s occupation	Maternal grand mother’s occupation	Mother’s education	Maternal grand father’s education	Maternal grand mother’s education
Housewife	Qualified technician	Housewife	Matric	Qualified technician	Matric

Iris's data

Father's occupation	Paternal grand father's occupation	Paternal grand mother's occupation	Father's education	Paternal grand father's education	Paternal grand mother's education
Farm worker	Farm worker	Domestic worker	Std 4/ grade 6	None	Std 2/ grade 4
Mother's occupation	Maternal grand father's occupation	Maternal grand mother's occupation	Mother's education	Maternal grand father's education	Maternal grand mother's education
Domestic worker	Farm worker	Housewife	None	None	None

Ryan comes from a family of five who have owned their own home – as have both sets of grandparents – and lived in the middle class suburb of Claremont all their lives. He is the first in the family to enrol for a higher education qualification. Iris comes from a family of ten who have not owned property until very recently. Her parents are, in fact, the first in their families to buy a house, albeit a very basic three-roomed property. There has been little in the form of formal education in her family background. Her sister is the only one in the immediate family to have achieved a higher education qualification. It can be concluded, using familial occupation as an indicator of class, that Iris is from a working class background and Ryan has a middle class trajectory. Ryan's grandfathers were skilled technicians and his father owned his own business. His mother and grandmothers were all housewives. Iris's father and grandfathers were all farm labourers. Her mother and one of her grandmothers were domestic workers, and the other was a housewife. As Bourdieu advised, I looked beyond merely using the father's occupation as a measure and used more detailed information incorporating two past generations (Bourdieu 1989b). This methodology was used to establish class trajectories for all thirteen students in the study.

Moving from initial organising themes to key themes

The original organising themes were informed by the literature and also through an initial analysis of the data. As the analysis progressed, the original organising themes streamlined into three broader themes. These themes were also a product of the

conceptual framework. I simplified the organising themes into three themes to denote the three key phases in the lives of the mature students in the study. The themes essentially dealt with the period before the commencement of the academic year which I called “possibility and opportunity”; the period during the academic year called “strategy”; and the period after the academic year which I called “effects and consequences”. Each of the themes is related directly to each of the research questions, that is, why students return to study as mature adults; student experiences throughout the year of study; and the shifts and outcomes of the academic experience on the students’ lives.

The “possibility and opportunity” theme

In this theme I considered who the students are, where they came from, why they returned to study and their expectations at the start of their higher education experience. This theme therefore focused on the post-school experiences of the group of mature students, their higher education aspirations, and their initial expectations of the higher education environment they would now enter. There are various sections within the theme of “possibility and opportunity”– return to study, the post-school experience and expectations of the higher education field.

Return to study

This first section of the “possibility and opportunity” theme set out to explore and discuss the motivations of the selected group of non-degreed mature students returning to study. Students entering higher education are, as Bourdieu explains, “legitimised to enter the field by their possessing a definite configuration of properties” that is, forms of specific capital (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992 p107). Capital, in its various forms, comprises the resources that also allows or disallows a degree of control or ability to manoeuvre. Students’ resources determine their choices, influence their habitus and therefore their strategy to act.

Before I presented the reasons mature individuals return to study, I first considered what occurred in the lives of the students after they completed high school which spoke directly to issues of choice and opportunity. I then focused on the students considering a return to the educational environment as mature adults. Mature students return to study for a variety of reasons which are essentially about building on existing forms of resources or acquiring relevant forms of resources that will support or promote other spheres of students’ lives. These intentions focus on the educational experience and

resultant qualification as a way of addressing apparent shortcomings. I use Neil, Ryan, Dee and Jade as examples to show how the reasons for returning to study relate to capital acquisition:

I applied for a position as a team leader, not knowing much about management, but I had an idea of exactly how things might work best. As soon as you are thrown into the role, you had to start making decisions and I found that I had a knack for making better decisions than worse ones but I still was in the dark about some of the issues. So I said to myself I need to learn more about management. I can wing it as far as I can, but how far would it take me? And then obviously because of the fact that our company is growing rapidly and the fact that they do need management, I think then obviously this [the qualification] will tip me up on the scale in the ranking. (Neil)

I want to do a Masters (and) I don't want to dive straight into the Masters and drown, so I wanted to do something which would lay the foundations for the Masters. That's the main reason and top of it I'm getting a qualification. (Ryan)

The SMS/BU is a well known establishment and accredited institution so I feel comfortable obtaining a recognised diploma from you. ... I chose the SMS for its excellent credentials, location and its exciting vibe. (Dee)

I enjoy exchanging ideas and learning about new innovations in the field. I think the GCM programme is an excellent opportunity to establish contacts with other business women in the field. (Jade)

As I worked through students' reasons for their return to study, I began to see these reasons in terms of various forms of capital. In Neil's extract, the desire for skills development is seen in "I was still in the dark about some of the issues" and career progression is seen in "how far would it take me?" I argue that "skills development" can be seen as a form of embodied cultural capital and "career progression" as a form of objectified cultural capital. In Ryan's example, the focus is on "credentialism" which is another form of embodied cultural capital. In Dee's extract, her attention is on the

institution and its reputation which provided an example of symbolic capital. For Jade, the networking aspect was key – an example of social capital. Following this pattern allowed me to classify all the reasons for students’ return to study as different forms of capital – either symbolic, objectified and embodied cultural capital or social capital.

Post-school experiences

The second section considered whether students had any past or prior engagement with the higher education field. I traced what occurred in the lives of these individuals immediately after completing their high school education. There were two potential paths to be followed: students who proceeded directly to higher education in their late teens or those who did not do so. As I explored the data, a clear pattern emerged: those individuals who were expected to proceed to higher education and those who were not. These distinctions along class lines can be seen in the examples below:

“Everyone tells you, you have to study something or you’re dead in the water” (Ryan middle class)

“Sorting out my family’s financial situation was more important than me going to study. I knew that I would get into work and then eventually study and that ‘eventually’ became longer and longer and longer until I was presented with this opportunity. You’re simply caught in a rut and you don’t break out of that rut” (Tina working class).

The examples show the traditional biography for middle class individuals and the expected educational trajectory for working class students. After completing their formal high schooling, young working class adults with higher education aspirations cannot pursue these due to financial constraints. For middle class individuals who do not proceed directly into the higher education system after school, or proceed into the field but become disinterested, it is from a position of *choice*.

Expectations of the higher education field

The third and final section of the “possibility and opportunity” theme considered the students’ perceived mastery of both the higher education environment and the conditions existing in that environment. The focus here was on the students’ feelings prior to the GCM educational experience. Having explored their post-school experiences, I

considered students' feelings about returning to study as mature adults. In this section I discuss the expectations the students held of themselves in terms of what they believed possible prior to the start of their academic programme. I then examined how adept students considered themselves in terms of handling the higher education environment. The following are examples from middle class student Zoë and working class student Sara:

I think if you put your effort in and if you're at an institution where education is sound, then you can't other than be successful, unless you've really not come in with any kind of commitment. I haven't come in to waste my money and my year. (Zoë).

I am a bit nervous about it, but I think I am very motivated, because I don't know what to expect. Like I was saying to you about that [admissions] test, it was horrific. I was totally traumatised by it. But I think I am very motivated. I'm nervous. I don't know what to expect. I don't know how I am going to cope, because all I know is that it's just a big workload. Not that I don't know how I am going to cope, I know that I will cope, but it's just fear of the unknown ...but I just don't know what to expect. But I think the motivation is there, the drive to go is there, so I hope I make a success of it. (Sara)

In these two examples we see how the individuals display a sense of what is possible in terms of success. For Zoë, a middle class student, it all comes down to personal commitment and individual effort to make a success of the academic year. The higher education institution will do its work if the individual does hers, Zoë feels. For Sara, a working class student, the year ahead is shrouded with the unknown and uncertainty and her extract is littered with words like "nervous", "horrific", and "traumatised". In Sara's example there is no expectation of the institution's role. When contrasting these accounts, one student portrays confidence in herself and the institution, while the other lacks confidence and does not expect the institution to play another kind of role. These examples display the differences between class positions or, to put it another way, the differences between those who hold differing levels of capital. Because of these existing levels of capital, students' ability to "play the game" is either compromised or enhanced.

The “strategy” theme

There are two main sections within the theme of “Strategy” that focus on the academic “game”. The first looks at acknowledging the game while the second centres on playing the game which includes recognising the rules. The theme of strategy examines mature students’ feel for the academic “game”, how they cope with the academic demands and the related expectations during their year of study and their subsequent experiences in the academic “game”.

Acknowledging the “game”

Bourdieu uses the analogy of a “game” to explain the concept of field. The game, he says, follows rules that are not explicit or codified. It is a game devoid of inventor and is fluid and complex. It defines itself by – amongst other things – defining specific stakes and interests (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). In the case of the School of Management Studies, these stakes are the certificates and degrees awarded to successful students. What constitutes the game is important here, including the criteria for success, who gets there and why, and what ultimately gets rewarded. As discussed earlier, “in order for a field to function, there have to be stakes” and more importantly, says Bourdieu, there needs to be an investment by players in the game which endows it with a sense of worth, including a tacit recognition of the rules of the game – which he refers to as *illusio* (1993 p72). This *illusio* or interest, which is dependent that the students’ participation in the game, also “differentiates itself according to the position occupied in the game and with the trajectory that leads each participant to this position” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992 p117). Therefore the various capitals that each student holds affect both their position in the game, their understanding of the nature of the game and their ability to play it.

Before any contemplation of strategy can begin, in other words, before the student can “work out” how they are going to cope with the academic environment and experience, s/he must acknowledge that a “game” is taking place. Acknowledging the game also considers that the student endows the academic environment and experience with a sense of worth, that is, the game is worth playing, worth the effort and potential sacrifice of time, money and commitment; and that the reward will be in keeping with the initial expectations held (more on this later). In the first section of the “strategy” theme I considered to what degree students were aware of the academic game and how they understood it. The academic game in the School of Management Studies was further complicated by the positioning of the academic programme in which this group of

students was enrolled. The GCM is the entry level programme, the less prestigious programme, which contrasts sharply with the school's flagship programme, the Masters degree. How students came to experience their programme in relation to the other academic offerings was also discussed.

In the case of *illusio*, I looked at the data for examples of both awareness of the game and interest in the academic game. The extract quoted below points to Jade both being aware of the game and endowing it with a sense of worth. This is opposed to Ryan whom she quotes as being dissatisfied and, in his refusal to acknowledge the game as worth playing, challenges her perceptions of *illusio*.

Ryan is determined to get onto the Masters next year. He's going to (be) studying for his international test or wrote his international test or whatever and this is all like, it's *so* not an issue for him. He's getting like A's for everything [...] and he's like 'If I don't get 100 per cent for this then I'm stupid'. He makes comments like that! Did he not learn anything from this you know? [...] I'm almost disappointed that he feels he didn't [...] He says he hasn't found *anything* challenging on this. So I said 'Well maybe then you obviously are meant to do the Masters. So why didn't you just do it the first time?' He said well, he didn't think that he could and I said, 'There – you learnt something. This gave you the confidence to tell you that the Masters [can be achieved]'. Don't make it [the GCM] meaningless because it's not. (Jade)

Following the methodology described above, I perused the data for similar examples of student interest and acknowledgement of the academic "game".

Playing the "game"

Field is the environment where habitus and capital are "at play". The environment enables bearers of the right capital and habitus to fit easily into that environment, indeed even adapt or change it, as opposed to those who, having less or none of the appropriate resources and behaviours, must adapt themselves to that environment. In this third section of the "strategy" theme, I looked at how the students both understood and played the game. I would argue that beyond the acknowledgement of the game, the ability to understand the game and recognise its rules determined the students' ability to play the

academic game.

Recognising the rules

Once the awareness of the game is established, I needed to consider whether students were aware of the rules governing the game. The rules of the academic game are often neither straightforward nor clear and many of the requirements, norms and customs may be implicit or taken-for-granted ones. I examined to what degree the student understood what was expected both academically and personally within this environment. I looked for examples of students' awareness of academic rules or expectations. The first extract below highlights the legitimate expectation – certainly on the part of the academic field – of referencing within the academic context:

I think I must have used referencing once or twice in my life before and there was no real structure. And now [...] you've got an assignment and you have to reference. Now it's bad enough the time is running out. Now you've still got to reference and you don't know how. (Greg)

A further extract looks at expectations of the interaction between lecturers and mature students:

You can, in fact, size up immediately whether you can challenge and debate with a lecturer and whether you just say 'Okay, we'll just give you what you want' (Zoë)

Another extract looks at group work and assessment of such work by the group themselves:

Do we give her a mark or not? Do we include her? [...] I didn't like the fact that she put me in that position that I had to make that decision. (Tina)

In each of these examples, I looked at the data through the lens of recognition of the rules of the game. Were students aware of the rules? Of the required behaviours? And more importantly, how did groups of students, specifically those of different class, react to the same situations?

Engaging with the academic “game”

Bourdieu tells us that both the inclination and ability to play the game are socially and historically constituted, therefore the notion of class – as measured by the distribution of capital – needs to be considered. According to Bourdieu, people, typically those who lack the necessary capital, will act “out of sync” as there are discrepancies between their habitus and the field. Bourdieu explains that the sense of the game, “implies an anticipated adjustment of the habitus to the necessities and probabilities inscribed in the field” (in Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992 p125). Bourdieu describes the capacity of habitus to engage with a sense of the possible both in the present and in the future as, “a particular but constant way of entering into a relationship with the world which contains a knowledge enabling it to anticipate the course of the world, is immediately present ... in the world, and the forth-coming” (2000 p142). This highlights the ability of some students to understand the expectations of the game, highlights their ability to anticipate any future expectations from the environment, and influences their playing of the game.

Recognition of the rules of the game determines to a large extent students’ ability to function in the environment. If the game constitutes coping with the academic demands and expectations both inside and outside the classroom, those with an inadequate or poor grasp of the rules and the game are hampered in their efforts to succeed (which may occur without the student even being aware of the shortcoming). I looked at particular incidences throughout the students’ higher education experience which highlighted their ability to play and therefore succeed in the game. In the extract below, a student describes her attendance at a School of Management Studies event where she is the only GCM student amongst the Masters students:

You can just ... you can ... you can ... sense it in their whole posture. And even for those that do look at you, you can sense the question behind their eyes when they look at you ... what are you doing here? Almost like...because everyone seems to know everyone else, but if you don’t know at least one person, you’re on our own completely, there’s nobody that tries to draw you in and ... and I wonder what I would be like, I wonder about myself. When I’ve done my GCM and when I’ve done my Masters, will I move around like these people? Will I move the way they move? (Zoë)

Using both habitus and capital as lenses we are able to see how habitus is revealed in bodily movement through Zoë's description of un-ease of movement. She reveals in her thinking that the acquisition of academic capital – through acquiring the GCM and perhaps the Masters qualifications – might address this deficiency. My own familiarity with the academic context allowed for easy reading of the incidents in the data which were “out of sync”, although it did present a challenge with the identification of examples where the converse was true. Where “out of sync” data was identified, I looked for examples found in (typically) middle class accounts where understanding of the rules or behaviour was clear or appeared known.

The “effects and consequences” theme

This theme of the framework focused on what shifts or transformations occurred and were brought about through subsequent experience. In this instance, what happened to these mature students as a result of the higher education experience? I looked firstly at what students' expectations were at the start of the academic experience in relation to the actual outcomes achieved. The second aspect considered the consequences of the students' higher education experience in their lives. What happened when the (changed) student encountered the other facets of her world namely the field of work and the social field, the one of family and friends? What happened to relationships with significant others, such as partners, families, and close friends in the social field, and managers and fellow employees in the field of work? This theme looked specifically at how the higher education experience affected these relationships and interactions.

Transformation lies, Bourdieu explains, “in the gap, experienced as a positive or negative surprise, between expectation and experience (where) the extent of this gap and the significance attributed to it depend on habitus” (2000 p149). To fully explore this potential for transformation I needed to discuss students' expectations and then the actual outcomes, that is, their experiences of higher education. Habitus is structured and restructured by subsequent experience, and as Bourdieu has alluded, habitus can be replicated through encountering a field that reproduces its dispositions or habitus can be transformed through a process that either raises or lowers an individual's expectations. What happens through capital acquisition – in this instance the acquisition of a higher education qualification – is that some degree of transformation or reproduction of the habitus takes place. If the higher education experience and environment was one where a student felt at home and within a familiar setting of known norms and behaviours, it was

likely that reproduction or reinforcement of the individual's disposition would take place. Alternatively, if a student confronted an unknown, unfamiliar situation, some form of adaptation or change – either positive or negative – would be brought about in the individual.

This is one of the key questions in the study and I examined the complexity of individual change; if, and in which ways, mature students' behaviour, perceptions and attitudes had transformed. In response to my questions “Did you get what you wanted from the course? Did it fulfil your expectations?” and “What things stand out for you?,” some of the data gathered were direct and to the point:

My perception, before I came here as a white person brought up in a white world, was that black people can't teach me anything. They can't. They can't teach me anything. And that perception changed. No doubt about it.
(Doug)

While other data revealed nuances of struggling sensitivities:

We're coming from diverse backgrounds [...] You tend to understand things broadly because of that – the contribution that is actually happening in class here. That was an education in itself [...] When you are in the class, you sort of get manufactured [...]. You go through that process and I can tell you it's a growing process [...] It can be a very personal process as well. It can be a very ugly process as well. It has the potential of many dynamics, many things and we just have to manage ourselves in the process and just get out of there. (Sam)

Using the lens of habitus I was able to see changes to individual perceptions and attitudes as a direct result of the education experience. Besides an interesting description on the educational process by Sam, through using the habitus lens, I was able to see, through his comment “we just have to manage ourselves in the process and just get out of there” how mature individuals make an effort – or have to make an effort – to hold on to their sense of identity through their encounter with the higher education field.

Relationships in the field of work

This section considers the ramifications of the higher education experience on and in the lives of these students. Did it bring them closer to the people around them? Or did it create tension and disjuncture in the other facets of their lives? I explore how the potentially changed individual related to significant others in both the world of work and in their social milieu. All of the students were working adults either in first line management or trainee management positions. Many of the individuals anticipated being offered promotional or other opportunities after gaining their qualification. Certainly all of them assumed that they would be valued and appreciated for the new skills and knowledge they would bring to their organisations – which may not necessarily have been the case. I also looked at the effect on relationships with significant others – managers and colleagues – within the workplace as a consequence of this experience. I present an example to illustrate:

I'm enjoying it [the new job]. I was frustrated in that [previous] job. I think I'm on a different level to my colleagues already [...] I'm extremely confident. I have a lot more belief in myself and my ability and my thinking and my experiences. I'm a lot more sure of myself, a lot more calm, a lot more confident. My ability to handle whatever level [within the organisation] has improved because of the confidence, you see. I can sit and talk with the MD or whoever [...] whereas before you're more tentative... gosh this guy must know things. So your attitude's different and your responses are different and the way you *feel* about yourself is different.

The extract above shows how the success of the educational experience put the student closer to the people around him in the field of work and that the resultant academic success raised his standing or position within the working environment. This is an example of successful capital conversion.

Relationships in the social field

Given their class trajectories, it was either a case of mature students being late, but expectant, arrivals in the higher education environment or individuals who took the initiative themselves when their own, rather than family, circumstances allowed them to return to study. I examined how these different trajectories played out in terms of how

these individuals – with their recently acquired academic capital – related to their partner (for those involved in relationships) and own family members, their parents and siblings and their social circle. I discuss whether the higher education experience and resultant qualification allowed them to fit better in their worlds or whether it created issues of ambiguity having the potential to affect and alter relationships. Here is an extract from a working class woman who received the following response from her partner when reporting on her academic success:

His response to me was, ‘I hope they don’t think that I’m going to get this kind of marks [he had applied to the School for the following year]. So don’t expect this from me because I’ll never be able to live up to these kinds of expectations’. Immediately that ruffled my feathers. I’m like ‘Gee, thank you for the support! I’ll make sure to get bad marks next time, so that you can look better’. He said to me, ‘Why are you so sensitive? I was just kidding’. I knew [...] it was not a joke. It’s obviously a concern of his [...] I actually had an argument with him about it because I just felt it was, it was not called for. But it was such a man and a Dale thing to do so I should have expected it.... (Jade)

Here the extract shows that the acquisition of academic capital does not always play out to a success in another milieu. While this is not an issue of capital conversion, it is an issue of support and what can be expected in terms of emotional capital from significant others. Using the lens of emotional capital, the absence of such capital and its effects are clearly observed.

A class lens with aspects of gender and race

An integral part of the analysis considers the primary themes through a class lens. Where pertinent, I also explored whether class worked differently for gender and race when discussing the various themes of “possibility and opportunity”, “strategy” and “effects and consequences”. According to Bourdieu, individuals have a unique trajectory and location in the world internalised through a matchless combination of schemata. This trajectory is also shared by those subjected to similar social conditions and conditionings, that is, those from the same social class (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). The data I looked for within the various themes focused on collective trajectories and common experiences around class. As noted earlier, I also explored whether class worked

differently for gender and race although these aspects are not foregrounded in the study.

Reporting the analysis

As was suggested by the case study approach, “findings were presented under thematic headings” (McDonnell et al. 2000 p388). There are various ways of selecting themes or categories when conducting case studies. One way, “is to select categories or dimensions and then look for within-group similarities coupled with intergroup differences. Dimensions can be suggested by the research problem or by existing literature” (Eisenhardt 1989 p540). The data analysis of the study relating to and drawn from the student interviews, biographical data and personal documentation is organised into three chapters.

Table 6: Format for reporting the analysis

CATEGORIES	Possibility and opportunity	Strategy	Effects and consequences
Capital acquisition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Returning to study 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledging the “game” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviewing reasons for returning to study
Academic habitus development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post-school experiences • Feelings regarding the return to study 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognising the rules • Playing the “game” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflections on playing the “game” • Developing student habitus
Habitus, capital and the field of work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expectations and reactions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reactions and responses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reactions and responses
Habitus, capital and the social field	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expectations and reactions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reactions and responses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reactions and responses

As seen in Table 6, four categories are used throughout the three chapters that present the empirical findings. Each chapter deals with a different phase in the student experience and this is carried through each category. *Capital acquisition* looks at the reasons for students' return to study, students' awareness of the process of acquiring academic capital, and finally reviews these reasons at the end of the academic year in light of what has been achieved through the acquisition. *Academic habitus development* looks at students' post-school experiences and their feelings about returning to study; their playing of the "game" or strategies employed to cope with the academic demands and related expectations in their higher education experience; and the development of their academic habitus at the conclusion of the programme. *Habitus, capital and the field of work* considers the interplay between students, their burgeoning academic habitus which resulted from their pursuit of academic capital, and the reactions forthcoming from the field of work from the start of the experience to six months after the conclusion of the academic year. *Habitus, capital and the social field* examined the interaction between students, the change in their behaviours, attitudes and perceptions resulting from their academic capital acquisition, and their social milieu. Reactions and expectations were elicited regarding the reaction received by students in their home, family and broader social environments.

I organised the data across all four categories. I was then able to take the class positions – through establishing familial capital and trajectory of each student – and view students' reasons for return to study, the strategies they employed to cope with the academic demands and related expectations while in the higher education environment and the effects and consequences of their higher education experiences in terms of both the field of work and the social field, through or in relation to this positional lens.

Questions of validity

Maxwell indicates that there are two specific threats to validity – researcher bias and reactivity (2005). Researcher bias cannot be dealt with, "by eliminating the researcher's theories, beliefs, and perceptual "lens" ... but with understanding how a particular researcher's values and expectations influence the conduct and conclusions of the study" (Maxwell 2005 p108). The other aspect of validity is the influence of the researcher on the individuals in the study. I draw on Grenfell and James' (1998) themes of reflexivity in addressing both issues of bias and reactivity. Although "reflexivity is involved at every stage of the research process", there is one theme that I wish particularly to discuss which

deals with “objectifying relationships with the researched” (Grenfell and James 1998 p 177).

Relationships with the researched

As Maxwell notes, “the relationship you have with a participant in your study is a complex and changing entity” (2005 p83). In my case, this already potentially complex relationship was further exacerbated by my insider role. At the start of the study, I was involved with students on a professional level as programme director of the GCM. This afforded both the advantage of gaining better insight and access but also included the potential drawback of influencing perspective. The role of the programme director revolved around setting the academic and administrative structures of the GCM. Student involvement centred mainly on individuals’ access to the programme and provision of personal support throughout the year. My role in this position ended at the start of the students’ academic year when I took up another academic position outside the School of Management Studies.

The new role in relation to the research participants involved no direct contact, other than interviewing for the study. Through my initial contact of personally interviewing all applicants to the programme (one of the roles of the programme director), students were familiar with who I was. The students selected for the research were all approached after their official acceptance onto the programme. Would the data be compromised as a result of a prior relationship – albeit in the recent past – between the researcher and the participants? Although I had first-hand knowledge of the participants, I made no assumptions that my prior relationship with them would automatically yield openness and trust or eliminate potential for distortion or concealment in our interviews. I did however anticipate that, “there would undoubtedly be some tangling of the threads influencing the questioning and the responses” (Agar 1980 p61).

I have been and am now a mature student at a higher education institution and have faced issues of fit, risk, fragility and tension around the return to study. In many ways, I have shared similar experiences to the students whose experiences are being researched in this study. Bourdieu aptly says that being able to share a common ground with the research participants enables a, “grasp of the social conditions of which they are the product; this means a grasp of the circumstances of life and the social mechanisms that effect the entire category to which any individual belongs” (1999 p613). While no claim on a scale

this large can be made, this commonality with the students in the study can be seen as valuable from Bourdieu's perspective.

Power dynamics played a role in the relationships with the researched. In setting up the interview, the researcher sets the scene in terms of purpose and agenda, certainly at the initial stage, and

asks questions, prompts answers, and elicits reformulations of responses. Respondents provide answers and give accounts of their lives in terms of their understanding of the settings in which they are located. Thus gender, race, class and other types of power relations are conveyed by the researcher and form an essential backdrop to the answers that respondents provide. (Scott and Usher 1999 p109).

This raises the issue of the power dynamic that existed between myself and the research participants. James, in reflecting on his own research tells us that, "in any given interview, two histories, trajectories and current positionings were, to some extent, under scrutiny – mine and the interviewee's" (in Grenfell and James 1998 p130). I would describe my relationships with the students as professional. A clear sense of mutual respect and regard developed between us over the eighteen months of the study. Any initial discomfort soon passed and, because there was nothing to be gained, or lost, in being candid during the interviews, students soon relaxed and were easily able to share their experiences. Beyond my own habitus however, because class, and to a lesser degree gender and race, was foregrounded in the research, I was always even more conscious of these aspects in the interview. I was amazed by students sharing their past and present experiences with me – which were so different to my own at times – and all saying, in one way or the other, "you know what I mean". This type of student response indicated to me that a close personal rapport had developed between us and that levels of commonality in any of the three categories – being a woman, being middle class, being black – had provided sufficient common ground for the development of this rapport.

There was a further outcome to the relationship between myself and the participants – an unexpected one, although upon reflection an entirely legitimate reaction. When students expressed dissatisfaction, unhappiness or distress with aspects of the GCM programme – be it academic or interpersonal – I felt a tremendous responsibility to "fix" the issue. I

felt a moral responsibility to assist them as *students*, and not just to relate to them as my research participants. In one interview I admitted these feelings to the student and acknowledged a sense of accompanying guilt (after all I had admitted students to the programme and was now unable to influence or remedy the situation). This admission provoked a response from the student who expressed appreciation regarding my concern. This “expression of concern” was sufficient to enable her to attempt to remedy the situation through raising the issue with the relevant person. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that research participants may benefit from the research process by being listened to and gaining insights into their own behaviours. My own experience shows elements of reciprocity in the relationship between the researcher and the research participants. As Mason contends, “the researcher has to live through and manage these relationships and situations in a process which is simultaneously personal, emotional, physical and intellectual” (2005 p95).

Relationship with the research site

Cicourel’s concern is that, “research analysts seldom acknowledge the way in which their knowledge about the world and the environments they study interacts with research sources that can influence claims about findings” (in Calhoun et al. 1993 p112). Because of my familiarity with the research context – the School of Management Studies – “objectivity” was a potential disadvantage, yet I enjoyed “access” in a number of key ways. I always had easy access to the availability of private space to conduct interviews and data pertaining to both the School and the GCM programme were freely available to me. My presence at the School was never questioned even though I no longer worked there and more importantly, I enjoyed the support from key individuals within the environment. My familiarity with the site being researched was initially tricky to resolve both in writing about and critiquing its workings. I was, as Reay describes, “deeply imbedded in the research field I have been investigating”, and like her, found Bourdieu’s concepts, “very useful in making sense” of both my experiences and the research I was undertaking (in Grenfell and James 1998 p127). Use of Bourdieu’s notion of field has allowed a fuller, analytical picture of the context to emerge.

Mouton notes that research will be, “influenced by the prejudices, expectation, attitudes, opinions and beliefs of the researcher” (1996 p151), but “social research is never conducted in a vacuum” as Adler and Daphne argue (1998 p6). The researcher is engaged, consciously or otherwise in a relationship with those people being studied. This

introduces an element of prejudice. If we are trying to get beyond our own position to understand the world, we must acknowledge our own values and non-neutrality. I believe though, that the disadvantages of my initial contact with the students – the degree of intimacy and the potential problem of subjectivity – were far outweighed by the benefits which included high levels of trust, openness, cooperation and acceptance initiated through the brief initial formal relationship. Finally, not every researcher is suited to use a case study approach. The researcher must have, “an enormous tolerance for ambiguity, must be a good communicator, and must be highly sensitive to the context, to the data, and to personal bias” (Merriam 1988 p52). In my discussion on my relationships with both the researched and the research site, I hope to have shown elements of these sensitivities.

Ethical considerations

This study presented two ethical challenges – engaging students in an informed manner and issues of confidentiality. The research study, in terms of data collection, began with an unstructured interview after the student had been accepted for a place on the GCM programme. I contacted the applicant to ask whether s/he was willing to participate and outlined the focus and purpose of the research. This ensured that potential participants made an informed choice about their participation. Although it would have been quite simple to combine the initial questions as part of the selection interview, I did not feel this was an ethical practice and preferred to begin my work by presenting myself and the research in an open manner. This is part of what Wright and Flemons (2002) call “establishing relational integrity”.

Permission was also sought to use information from the personal dossier students supplied in their application process. Because of the nature of the research, confidentiality in terms of concealing personal identities was respected. Accordingly, pseudonyms have been used for all students and their partners. As a further step and where data was not compromised, places and locations referred to in interviews have been altered. In the event of these steps being insufficient to conceal both the actual institution and the academic programme, I have also obtained permission from the Director of the School of Management Studies to publish the research. This permission was sought, and granted, as the institution, though not the participants in the study, will probably be recognisable.

Limitations of the study

Rowley points to challenges with using the case study approach indicating that, “the most challenging aspect of the application of case study research in [a] context is to lift the investigation from a descriptive account of “what happens” to a piece of research that can lay claim to being a worthwhile, if modest addition to knowledge” (2002 p16). Researchers studying a small number of individuals, “rarely make explicit claims about the generalizability of their accounts [although] internal generalizability is clearly an issue for qualitative case studies” says Maxwell (2005 p115). In other words, the researcher could make conclusions *within* the setting or group being studied. Struwig and Stead state that, “the emphasis is on arriving at a complete description and understanding of the constructs being studied, despite the small numbers of persons involved” (2001 p8). My conclusions regarding class, gender, race, and age arise as a result of purposeful selection of a group of students matching this profile. I provide an account of student experiences within a particular higher education setting through “thick description” but make no claim of external generalisability, that is, that the conclusions of the study are representative of a larger population.

This study did not draw on established frameworks already tested in a higher education setting. Its analytical framework, drawn from Bourdieu’s concepts and the work of Reay, evolved as the study progressed. I concluded my analytical work by developing a proposed analytical model that provides a lens for viewing mature student experience in a higher education setting. As this was an evolving process, it was, at times, difficult to present the analytical findings in a completely consistent manner. Particular incongruities may well have emerged as a result. Stake says, “we do not choose case study designs to optimize production of generalizations ... the real business of case study is particularization [where] we take a particular case and come to know it well” (1995 p8). The “test” therefore is whether the use of a case study has allowed me to extend my understanding both theoretically and methodologically as both have implications for analytical generalisability. As Yin explains, “survey research relies on *statistical* generalization, whereas case studies (as with experiments) rely on *analytical* generalizability. In analytical generalization, the investigator is striving to generalize a particular set of results to some broader theory” (2003 p37 original emphasis). In this study I have attempted to show this generalisation through both the development of the analytical framework and the proposed analytical model.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have described the research design through elaborating its purpose and the data collection strategies used. My rationale for using a case study has been discussed including the likely drawbacks to the use of such an approach. My analytical framework along with the format for the reporting of the analysis has been presented. The development of the analytical framework using Bourdieu's conceptual toolkit of capital, habitus and field, may provide future researchers with an insight into the usefulness of the concepts. The concepts are especially helpful when viewing individual and collective experiences against a backdrop of institutional structures and personal milieu. We are able to see structure as a dynamic cause and effect, individual agency, power and practice through the practical use of Bourdieu's conceptual toolkit.

Questions relating to validity, specifically those involving my relationship with the research participants, have been answered. I believe that this case study offered, "a means of investigating complex social units consisting of multiple variables of potential importance in understanding the phenomenon. Anchored in real-life situations, the case study results in a rich and holistic account of a phenomenon" (Merriam 1988 p32). The next chapter takes us to the start of the academic journey of the mature students in the study.

CHAPTER FIVE

POSSIBILITY AND OPPORTUNITY

The students in the study arrived with a set of pre-dispositions towards the experience. These pre-dispositions, in the form of acquired behaviours, attitudes and values – the individuals' habitus – shaped the higher education experiences of these mature students in particular ways. This chapter begins by considering issues of possibility and opportunity in the past lives of the students and then moves on to the reasons why students return to study. In this first chapter of reporting the analysis, I start by describing students' familial class trajectories before viewing the student experience through the four main categories described in the analytical framework – capital acquisition; academic habitus development; habitus, capital and the field of work; and habitus, capital and the social field. I consider the students' past engagement with higher education, i.e. the initial development of their academic habitus and focus on the reasons these students return to study at this juncture in their lives. I then discuss what feelings and expectation students have at the start of their experience in the field of higher education and how these feelings might have controlled, constrained or enabled their ability to act within the environment. Finally I look at the reactions and expectations from students' significant others in both the field of work and the social milieu to explore levels of support and encouragement received. The discussions are further bound within a class framework. Where appropriate, aspects of gender and race are discussed.

Familial capital and class trajectories

The first section begins by presenting an overview of the group of mature students. It then explores the familial class positions of the student group. Throughout the study I refer to the mature students in the study as either working class or middle class. What I am actually referring to is their class background or class trajectory and I now wish to spend some time discussing how these trajectories were determined.

Family class background

As discussed in the research design chapter, I used Bourdieu's set of indicators for measuring class which included the following: parents' occupation and education, maternal and paternal grandfather's occupation and education, family's place of

residence, number of family members who have completed post-school studies and family size (Bourdieu 1989b). Familial class trajectory has been determined from the responses to these particular indicators as detailed in the analytical framework.

These class trajectories are indispensable for both locating the students in terms of their positions and establishing whether patterns and commonalities are evident within and across groups. An overview of the student group is produced below in Table 7.

Table 7: Research participants – overview of biographies

Student	Gender	Age	Race	Class Background	Employment	Years of work experience
Dee	Female	34	C	m/c	Administrator	12
Doug	Male	32	W	m/c	Manager	13
Greg	Male	35	C	m/c	Manager	14
Iris	Female	26	A	w/c	Facilitator	5
Jade	Female	26	C	w/c	Manager	9
Lisa	Female	36	C	m/c	Administrator	15
Neil	Male	30	I	w/c	Team leader	11
Nick	Male	34	C	m/c	Administrator	12
Ryan	Male	28	W	m/c	Manager	7
Sam	Male	44	A	w/c	Sales	21
Sara	Female	39	I	w/c	Administrator	23
Tina	Female	30	W	w/c	Administrator	12
Zoë	Female	41	I	m/c	Administrator	22

Locating individuals along class lines is not an easy task in South Africa where the focus has been on racial classification rather than class structure. During the apartheid years – and indeed it might be argued still very much apparent at this current time – whites were the dominant racial group, followed by coloureds and Indians and then Africans. A hierarchy of oppression therefore existed. Within these racial groupings, class stratification was and is still evident although obviously this stratification is not now legislated. Middle class Africans, coloureds and Indians were considered inferior to working class whites and therefore denied access to resources or certain forms of capital. I further argue that although the mature students selected for the research are all currently

in the middle or emerging middle class, locating the individuals in their formative childhood period – that is understanding where the student has come from – is essential in understanding the student experience throughout a year in the higher education environment. For students from a working class background, higher education is a place either thought of as unattainable or unachievable and for middle class individuals who enrol as mature students, the environment is viewed as an opportunity that has been squandered in their early adulthood.

Capital acquisition – (re)turning to study as mature adults

While it is acknowledged that students arrive at the School of Management Studies¹² with varying amounts and forms of capital – their “tokens” as Bourdieu explains (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) – their objective is to gain further amounts and forms of capital. The reasons for the return to study provided by the students in their application documents and the subsequent interview gave insight into the various forms of capital being sought by each of them. There are essentially three species of capital, according to Bourdieu (1985). These are economic capital, cultural capital and social capital. Bourdieu also notes the existence of symbolic capital, “commonly called prestige, reputation, renown etc., which is the form in which the different forms of capital are perceived and recognized as legitimate” (1985 p724).

Determining the prime reason for returning to study

Data for this purpose was gathered from two sources: firstly through written texts as part of the students’ formal application to the university and secondly through a follow-up interview with each individual. In the follow-up interview the reasons provided by each student in their formal application were confirmed and explored in depth where appropriate. Students, through the application process for the GCM, had to submit a series of short essays – essentially responses on various questions – one of which was “What motivated you to apply to this programme?”. However it is expected that when students apply to any university for acceptance into one of their academic programmes, the possibility exists that they would try to present themselves in the most favourable light (whatever they judged that to mean) and therefore this would include these students’ responses provided in the short essays. This points us to the issue of fit i.e. do students know what “appropriate” answers might be and how would this knowledge be acquired if

¹² Also referred to as “the School”

familial capital, particularly cultural capital is unevenly distributed along class lines?

In the first interview of the study with each of the students their reasons for returning to study were explored and confirmed. For purposes of analysis, the reason provided by the student in the most significant way – either as the lead-in reason or the reason discussed in most detail by the student – in the interview is presented as the prime reason for returning to study. This is highlighted in the table below.

Table 8: Summary of student reasons for return to study

REASONS	Status and prestige	Credentialism	Career development	Personal change	Skills development / application	Opportunity for further study	Networking
Dee	x	x	x	x	x		
Doug	x	x			x	x	
Greg	x	x	x				
Iris	x	x	x	x	x		x
Jade	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Lisa	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Neil	x		x	x	x	x	x
Nick	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Ryan	x	x	x		x	x	
Sam	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Sara	x	x	x	x	x		
Tina	x	x	x	x		x	
Zoë	x	x	x	x			

(Note: prime reason highlighted)

If we view the students' reasons through the various forms of capital, the following can be argued: the categories of "credentialism", "career development" and "opportunity for further study" (objectified), "skills development" and "personal change" (embodied), are all examples of students return to study to gather or increase various forms of cultural capital. The category of "status and prestige" chosen by all the students can be viewed as symbolic capital, that is the granting of a qualification from the School of Management Studies – as opposed to another institution – would ensure legitimacy to acquiring these forms of capital. Other species were found in the categories of "networking" which can be seen as social capital. The mature students' motivations for returning to study were therefore all linked to some form of capital acquisition. These motivations need to be further explored through observing trends in terms of class.

Middle class and working class accounts – similarities and differences

Table 9 represents the reasons for returning to study through a class lens.

Table 9: Class and the reason for return to study

Working class		Middle class	
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REASONS	Status and prestige	Credentialism	Career development	Personal change	Skills development / application	Opportunity for further study	Networking
Iris	x	x	x	x	x		x
Jade	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Neil	x		x	x	x	x	x
Sam	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Sara	x	x	x	x	x		
Tina	x	x	x	x		x	
Dee	x	x	x		x	x	
Doug	x	x		x	x		
Greg	x	x	x				
Lisa	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Nick	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Ryan	x	x	x	x	x		
Zoë	x	x	x			x	

(Note: prime reason highlighted)

Symbolic capital

Objectified cultural capital

Embodied cultural capital

Social capital

Status and prestige (symbolic capital)

The acquisition of symbolic capital through the status and prestige imbedded in the Bay University (BU) and the School of Management Studies appeared to have played a major role in all students' desire to return to study and applies to this particular programme. The School itself enjoys excellent international standing and is favourably ranked locally amongst its competitors. All students commented on either this reputation, the immense respect the school's graduates enjoy in the broader social milieu or how a qualification from this particular university would enhance their standing in the market place. It was significantly felt that being accepted into the programme would give added prestige to the students' achievements as working class student Sam (African working class) reported:

As I was growing up, I saw BU as an institution that's well recognised. For instance last year in terms of grading and accreditation this institution came up tops. [...] I want to attend those kind(s) of institutions [...] those are the kind of factors that push me to be here. That's why I was praying I want to be there. If I'm there I'm going to work flat out to get what I want [...] I always aspired to be here (and) fortunately GCM has given me the opportunity.

The importance of the institution's ranking within the higher education field is noted. The students' aspiration to attend an institution which has these desirable attributes plays a significant role in the decision making process.

Credentialism (objectified cultural capital)

Table 9 shows that the majority of students across all classes desired the acquisition of various forms of objectified cultural capital. It is no surprise that credentialism, seen in the acquisition of a relevant qualification from a reputable university, played the major part in the students' motivation to return to study. The state of the South African workplace, current employment uncertainties and the increasing focus on qualifications all contribute to a labour market that feels a lack of certainty and continuity. As can be seen in Table 7, the working experience of the research group ranged from five to 23 years and the average of years of experience was relatively high at almost fourteen years. In many instances the student required the formal qualification to validate the experience and skills acquired in their working lives. Coloured middle class student Greg explained:

I've come to a point in my life where I've realised that my business experience - it's fine, it's cool, I've got what I need; I think I've got enough working experience. I could get another job somewhere else – probably earn a little bit more money but at the end of the day, when people actually ask you, 'give me all your particulars', there's only a matric certificate and it means absolutely nothing [...] What people really look for, (what) they want to see (is) what have you done after school [...] tertiary education is necessary even if you have the working experience and you are good at your job.

Greg's example confirmed the assertion that academic capital was seen as validation of students' existing skills and competencies. The importance of gaining academic capital through a formal higher education qualification was seen as the means of ensuring credibility within the workplace. What Greg's extract highlights is that capital from the higher education field can be converted into credentials that the field of work values. The potential for capital conversion underpinned this middle class student's reason for returning to study.

A further source of influence regarding the importance of gaining an academic qualification came from the students' employers and presented itself in a somewhat coercive way. This could be seen through statements from the working class students such as: "[employers] are driving us to get qualified" and "my MD has always questioned me about furthering my studies." In Sara's (Indian working class) case, the expectation was made quite clear:

I was nominated by both [the Head of Department and her manager] and she [the manager] insisted that I do it [...] I've done lots of courses and that (but) I don't have any formal qualifications so it was important for me to do, to have something on paper as well as just studying further, for my own career, for my own growth, to be able to move out of where I am currently.

The somewhat prescriptive nature to these comments from students' employers speak to the necessity, in these working class students' opinions, of gaining a formal qualification. This source of "motivation" is important to note as distinct class issues were at play here.

For working class students, the working environment – primarily through management influence – appeared the motivation for their initial application to the programme. While conditions in the working environment also influenced the decision of the middle class students, the reason these students had returned to study had been motivated primarily by their peers or family. In Doug’s example, he noted that:

My dad is actually the one who said, ‘Study at one of the graduate schools ... they’re relevant to work’. He’s done his Masters through North East University.

In this middle class example, parental encouragement and familiarity of the higher education environment was evident in Doug’s decision to return to study.

Opportunity for future study (objectified cultural capital)

Eight students indicated a desire to study further (ongoing accumulation of cultural capital). The desire to study typically centred on the application to the Masters programme at the School. These eight students felt that the choice of the GCM as an entry level programme would be an appropriate way, a sort of “stepping stone” to achieving this. What can be seen in the difference between middle class and working class students - all without higher education qualifications – is how they viewed their potential in terms of further study. Contrast these comments from Ryan and Jade, both successful in their management positions:

I want to do a Masters (but) I don’t want to dive straight into the Masters and drown, so I wanted to do something which would lay the foundations for the Masters. That’s the main reason [for applying to do the GCM] and on top of it I’m getting a qualification. Ryan (white middle class)

I’m hoping that I’ll be able to do well enough to be considered for the Masters if I ever want to pursue it [...] I want to see how I can do at studying. Cause I’d like to do a Masters but I mean I don’t even know if I’m right for it. So this is a starting point, right? And if I do well on this, that sort of gives me an indication okay that you can attempt the Masters because I mean this is probably 10 times worse than the GCM I’m sure. Jade (coloured working class)

Although students indicated the desire to study further, it was the four working class students who viewed the GCM programme as a first foray into the academic world which would establish their academic potential. These students also viewed the programme as a stand-alone qualification, complete in itself. It appeared that only a positive and rewarding academic encounter would encourage the pursuit of further studies for working class students.

Networking (social capital)

None of the middle class or white students were explicitly concerned with issues of “networking” (social capital). It is argued that this was because these students either already had social capital in sufficient amounts or because they automatically considered the academic experience or environment as being one where networking was an intrinsic outcome. For working class students Neil and Jade, the potential for learning from others and getting to meet other people through the higher education experience was explicit:

I enjoy exchanging ideas and learning about new innovations in the field. I think the GCM is an excellent opportunity to establish contacts with other business women in the field. (Jade coloured working class)

[The GCM] will also provide me with an opportunity to interact with a diverse group of individuals which I hope will form a strong network. (Neil working class)

The comments from these working class students show a desire to meet with others, learn from them and share experiences. Networking with others is therefore seen as a benefit to these individuals.

Career development (objectified cultural capital)

Twelve of the thirteen students indicated “career development” as one of their reasons for returning to study. For seven of these students, this was their prime reason for returning to study. Together with the objective of achieving the qualification and linked to the broader nature of the South African workplace as described earlier, was a clear notion of the students’ progression within the workplace and opportunities outside their own jobs – both in their own organisations and opportunities in the broader job market. Students viewed the successful gaining of the qualification as, “lead(ing) to new career

opportunities”, their chances of promotion at work being enhanced and being better equipped to compete with other potential candidates in the job market. The qualification was seen as “the way forward”; a route to “open more doors ... career wise.” For many students the plan was to move up the corporate ladder and into more responsible, fulfilling and satisfying positions. Education was seen as the catalyst for making this all possible. Zoë (Indian middle class) clearly described why:

I'm quite happy with the fact that my employers see and recognise my abilities and capabilities and they give me that responsibility and they give me that accountability but at the end of the day I'm still Zoë and my highest qualification is matric (and) that might be my perception I might be quite wrong, but purely because I don't have this formal qualification behind me. I've reached the stage in my life where I need to be more than that. I need now not to have to report to a manager, but to become a manager because I know I'm capable.

There are some overlaps in Zoë's account with Greg's earlier comments regarding credentialism and its value in the field of work. What Zoë's extract does raise – beyond her eagerness to progress – is how the acquisition of academic capital has the potential to alter peoples' perceptions particularly within the working environment. This is coupled with the potential for capital conversion. The issue of skills acquisition also featured prominently as a reason for the return to study.

Skills development and application (embodied cultural capital)

The desire for improved skills related to career aspirations it was the working class students who wished to enhance their skills both to improve their own situation in terms of career development and enhance their ability to perform their jobs better. Note Iris's (African working class) comments when she said that:

I want to do better in my job that I'm doing. I want to perform well. So when I look at the content of the programme, I thought my expectations will be met here because I also need just to refresh and improve on my knowledge and my skills and to learn more and to be exposed to new things and all. Coming here and finding people from different backgrounds obviously I will be learning a lot from other people as well.

(The) qualification will help me have impact on addressing problems and goals of the department.

Neil (Indian working class) felt that the educational experience would add to existing knowledge and skills:

[The GCM will] offer me the insight necessary for me to consolidate the knowledge and experience I have and to also supplement this with knowledge and information that I might not have been exposed to. I believe that I have the ability and skills to lead and manage a group of people to achieve a particular outcome. These skills however are raw and require some development and refinement.

In both the examples the implicit understanding from the working class students was that the skills they would be acquiring through the higher education experience would be utilised by their organisations. Students' comments also indicated the existence of a prior knowledge or their understanding that they possessed some level of knowledge. This highlights the reality that mature students do not return to study with a clean slate devoid of experience. They bring existing frameworks, knowledge and understanding of the learning environment.

Summary

The reasons presented thus far – credentialism, opportunity for further study, career development and skills development – show clear differences between working class and middle class students. Working class students in the study revealed that the working environment had played a significant role in their motivation for returning to study. For middle class individuals, family and their social circle provided the encouragement to consider higher education. Although all students provided credentialism as a major reason for their return to study, for middle class students this centred on the field of work's recognition of the academic qualification and its potential for capital conversion. Further confirmation of the link between the field of work and the field of education was seen in the extract from middle class student who cited career development as her prime reason for pursuing an academic qualification.

Although several students considered the GCM programme as their first foray into higher

education, it was the middle class students who stated that the programme would lay the foundation for further study. The working class students wanted to establish their academic potential before embarking on further studies. Networking appeared as a reason only for working class students and then only black working class students. None of the middle class students or white students cited networking as a reason. The enhancement of skills and the application of these enhanced skills was noted by working class students. It was clear from their particular accounts that working class expectations were those of a conducive working environment. The commonalities across class focused on the status of the School of Management Studies which students in the study considered would give added prestige to their academic qualification.

Gendered accounts

In Table 10 below, reasons for study are grouped along gender lines.

University of Cape Town

Table 10: Gender and the return to study

Female				Male			
REASONS	Status and prestige	Credentialism	Career development	Personal change	Skills development / application	Opportunity for further study	Networking
Dee	x	x	x		x	x	
Iris	x	x	x	x	x		x
Jade	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Lisa	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Sara	x	x	x	x	x		
Tina	x	x	x	x		x	
Zoë	x	x	x			x	
Doug	x	x		x	x		
Greg	x	x	x				
Neil	x		x	x	x	x	x
Nick	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Ryan	x	x	x	x	x		
Sam	x	x	x	x	x	x	

(Note: prime reason highlighted)

Symbolic capital

Objectified cultural capital

Embodied cultural capital

Social capital

As can be seen in the table above, the seven women students in the study have four common reasons for their return to study. These are status and prestige, credentialism, career development and personal change. The reasons for returning to study of the male students show similarities in that all of them provided status and prestige as a common reason, and five of the six male students cited credentialism and skills development. As these reasons have been discussed in the preceding pages, this section concentrates on women students' desire for personal change and issues of credibility.

Personal change (embodied cultural capital)

Women students across class categories appeared hopeful of changing attitudes regarding their worth. Zoë's (Indian middle class) application information provided further insight:

Besides being a woman – which means having to prove your competence in a previously male dominated arena/environment [management] – I am also a person of colour which means really having to go out there and being able to produce the goods and more. I believe I am being realistic when I say that this qualification will give the powers that be the necessary peace of mind that I might just know what I am on about.

Jade (coloured working class) concurred:

I would like to show those that I work with in the future, that I attained the best education possible. I have to be realistic and in this often male dominated workplace, a woman needs to have proven skills and the qualifications to be taken seriously.

Women students in the study believed that the acquisition of academic capital would ensure their credibility or provide them with further credibility within their workplaces. From these examples it is clear that the field of work differentiates between men and women. Women are required to do more to be taken seriously. To improve their credibility, women return to study. Reasons related to the desire for change and personal development – subsumed within the personal change category – were also discussed. Mature women students showed a clear focus on accomplishing personal objectives within their workplaces. Women students showed insight into their own motivations for returning to study with a level of personal awareness being evident. Tina's (white

working class) extract referred to these aspects:

I feel that I have reached a crossroads at this stage of my life...I think my wanting to do the programme – it would be more of a personal quest than anything else... I see myself as a blank page. I've got a lot of knowledge but I need to consolidate it and I think this is what this course is going to do. It's going to point me in a direction I need to go into it. Because if you haven't studied before – like I haven't – you sort of go aimlessly. You go to the next job, to the next job, to earn an income but I think I need to start focusing my expertise a bit more. Cause I've identified what my strong points are but I don't know what it could be. It could be something totally different. And I think this course is going to offer me that.

The possibility of change as a result of the higher education experience was clearly identified by Tina. She revealed in her “personal quest” what capital acquisition might render possible. All of the seven women spoke about improving their levels of confidence through participation on the programme. Although they acknowledged their current abilities, the understanding existed that self development was an ongoing process. Where these particular feelings were expressed they linked mainly, but not exclusively, to women's views of empowering others and particularly to motivating colleagues. Students talked of fulfilling their full potential and being able to make some form of contribution to the lives of others.

Three of the seven women students in the study had also been influenced to apply to the programme by past students or alumni of the programme. These individuals had been observed by the students as “changing for the better” (which the student ascribed to participation on the programme) or the alumnus had approached them “singing the praises” of the programme – this usually being someone within their work or social environment. As Dee (coloured middle class) explained of her discussion with a former student:

It was so perfect that Gloria had done it prior to me because that was even more inspiration and the excitement... She was always positive and that really makes the big difference. When you're in that position where you're thinking of doing something more, as far as this study course is

concerned, when someone close to you in the working environment or personal life, has gone through the experience and has only positive things to say. So that was a big impact, a very big impact was her enthusiasm and, and just her positivity. It's just absolutely steered me in the right direction.

In this example the achievement of others, especially others known personally by the student, was viewed as inspirational. Dee drew on the experience of a past student as encouragement to pursue her studies. The three women were clearly affected by, inspired by, and encouraged by past students who, in addition to parenthood and managing relationships, had successfully completed the GCM qualification.

Summary

What these reasons provided by the students tell us about their return to study is how issues of class, and also those of gender, reflect in the desire for capital acquisition. The acquisition of academic capital for both middle class and working class students is seen as a means to acquiring various forms of cultural capital. For middle class students, peers and family played the key role for returning to study whereas working class students were primarily influenced by the work environment. Where students indicated an interest in further study, it was the working class student who needed more confirmation regarding their academic potential. For the seven women students in the study, addressing issues of credibility through the acquisition of academic capital were paramount. Their rationale for returning to study was underpinned by a focus on personal change. The influence and encouragement of past successful GCM students, especially those known to the student played a role in the decision making of women students. I have established why students returned to study as mature adults and wish now to turn to the discussion to the development of students' academic habitus. In particular I discuss students' post-school experience, and also what expectations and reactions were forthcoming from students as mature adults in terms of encountering the field of higher education and in particular, the School of Management Studies.

Academic habitus development

As noted in the analytical framework, the development of students' academic habitus is captured from several sources – their post-school experience (as will be discussed, the students in the study have either never encountered the field of higher education or have

experienced a brief but unsuccessful previous encounter with the field as young adults); and their feelings about returning to study where I consider students' perceived mastery and expectations of the higher education environment, and in particular the School of Management Studies to which they had applied. In this section I begin by discussing students' after school experiences as young adults. I then examine their feelings about returning to study, their expectations about themselves and how adept they considered themselves with regard to the higher education field. These aspects relate to the development of an academic habitus – dispositions, feelings and attitudes developed through interaction with the higher education environment.

The post-school experience

This section starts by considering whether students had any past or prior engagement with higher education. I traced what occurred in the lives of these individuals immediately after completing their high school education. I reviewed what occurred in the lives of the students after they completed high school where two distinct paths were followed: those students who briefly entered higher education in their late teens or those who, for various reasons, did not do so. It is important to understand how and why students arrived at this current educational experience at the School of Management Studies. Where students have come from – their class trajectory – shaped the reasons these mature individuals returned to study and influenced what was likely to happen to them. In other words, the habitus and resources or capital students brought to the field moulded and influenced by their class backgrounds, ultimately shaped their higher education experience.

Students attempting higher education

Middle class and working class accounts - differences

Different stories emerged for the working class and middle class students who went on to study immediately after high school. For working class students, attempts at higher education were cut short by a lack of economic capital. Their stories were therefore about constraint and denial. The studies of middle class students were curtailed because of a lack of personal focus and interest. The middle class stories of Ryan, Greg and Dee were remarkably similar in that all of these students went on to Technikon¹³ or college as this was expected from their families and social circle. As Ryan explained, “everyone tells

¹³ Now known as Universities of Technology.

you, you have to study something or you're dead in the water." All three were unsuccessful in their first year because, by their own admission, they either "fooled around" or had not enjoyed the chosen course. Greg's story is illustrative:

[I went to] Tech for a year; stuffed it up completely, you know your normal...spent my time in the cafeteria or else not at Tech and then second year – obviously didn't make it the first year – I was going to go back and I thought to myself 'Mmm..no, not really'. In hindsight I must admit, I regret it. I think what more I could have been at this age now if I actually did it, but it's water under the bridge; it's decisions which you have to live with and that was that. I started working. I got a job that year, so I worked in the bank. I think at that time in my life, I just wanted to party. That was it. That was the bottom line actually.

As with Greg, the two other students then all sought employment even though they weren't certain about their choice of career. The general reaction from their parents was one of deep, unexpressed disappointment. Greg recalled that, "it was not an issue we discussed around the table." This parental reaction points to how familial expectations were not realised. As previously alluded to, those in the middle class students' family environment both encouraged and expected their children to pursue higher education studies. Ball contends that for middle class students, "the decision to go to university is a non-decision. To not go is virtually inconceivable as it is part of a normal biography" (2003 p65).

For the two working class young adults going on to study directly after high school, the experience was also an unsuccessful one. However the explanations for these individuals not completing their diplomas and degrees differed from the middle class reasons. Sam's mother died and he had to assume both financial and emotional responsibility for his family. For Iris, the finances ran out in her final year and she was compelled to look for employment:

I applied to BU but unfortunately I never made it and then I went to Millers College to do my Business Information Diploma but I never finished that course, I only did two years. I couldn't do my third year, we didn't have money [...] I first worked at the coffee shop here in town for a

year and then I worked for Clicks in Pinelands and I got two jobs that year 2001/2002. I worked at two places, Clicks and Edgars.

Iris's story of ending up as a sales assistant after initially setting out to gain an academic qualification to start her career in business showed, like Sam's, a lack of resentment towards this state of affairs and merely a resignation to the financial realities of their family situation.

Students' intentions regarding study

Middle class and working class accounts - differences

At the end of their formal schooling, four of the working class students had aspirations regarding further study even having applied to do their chosen courses. For these students, it was simply that, as Sam and Iris's stories illustrated, their family's financial resources could not stretch to allow them to go – that is, the family could not afford to have them not earning additional money for the family. Yet even employment held its own pitfalls as Neil explained:

When I matriculated in the early 1990s it was during a period of uncertainty and rife unemployment. At the time, the attitude of youth in my community [Indian working class] was one of 'take what you can get'. We did not have the luxury of finding work in vocations that we actually wanted to pursue or of being placed in positions that we may have been best suited to.

In this extract, the student is referring to a particular time period where punitive apartheid legislation restricted blacks from being employed in certain jobs. Coupled with class imbalances, an even more dire situation existed for working class blacks. For middle class students Zoë and Lisa, however, it was an express parental intervention that ensured they did not go to university. Zoë (Indian middle class) had applied to BU for a social science degree:

When I finished matric, I applied at BU to do my degree in social work but I have a very strong father and my dad is a businessman and he said to me 'No, no, no. You are not going to go work for somebody else. You are going to run your own business'. And he plain and simply just – I mean I

got as far as my student number honest – but he plain and simply refused for me to go. Wouldn't sign forms etc. etc. [...] He wanted me to join the family business. I tried it for a while but it's not quite what I wanted to do. And I actually think I would have gone far. I don't regret it, I don't really regret it, I just cannot help but wonder, I wonder where I would have ended up now if I did that and where I would have been today. But I don't regret the experiences I've had through my life or in the various places of work and where I'm at today. I regret the fact that I have not risen, or that I'm not at least in a management position by now [...] So I've had that slight disadvantage but maybe it was learning curve that I had to go through for me to be who I am today. So I don't negate what my life has been. I really don't.

As Zoë's extract explains, her parent intervened with the express notion of empowering her in a different way – through hands-on business acumen. When asked, she explained more about her father's views:

Maybe it's because of the way that he grew up. You go and you make a life for yourself, you know. Vir hom, is studies nie baie belangrik nie, snaaks genoeg¹⁴. Because even with my brothers, it was a matter of - look, I don't think any of my two brothers finished high school, but the one also has his own little welding business and the other one is a builder, also doing his own thing. And my older sister finished Std 8 and then she went out and worked.

LR: So you were the first one to finish matric in the family?

Yes, and I went no further. Well this man just didn't see the need – go out there and create your own opportunity - which is what one tries to do [laughter] but he was...

LR: Do you think he was consistent there? It wasn't because you were a girl? It was his philosophy about what you did - education was to be

¹⁴ For him, studies aren't very important, strangely enough

'gotten through' and then you go out there?

Yes and you go out there and you try not to work for someone else. You try and work for yourself. Yes – he still thinks that way.

The benefits of higher education were not identified by Zoë's father. Influenced by apartheid realities and the resultant limited opportunities for Indians, where cultural capital held less worth than economic capital, he felt that the ability to create a level of independence in the form of self-employment for his children. The middle class students who experienced parental denial of their higher education opportunity saw the situation as a temporary setback. Both students were pragmatic about the issue, certain that the opportunity would present itself again in time.

Student who did not pursue higher education for other reasons

Middle class and working class accounts - differences

For the remainder of the students, the reasons for not pursuing higher education in their early adulthood appear varied. Sara (Indian working class) did not complete high school so could not have considered higher education. Tina's (white working class) mother could not offer her the opportunity as their family situation was one of ill-health, financial and emotional struggle, including being on the move for a lot of their family's early life. Conscription to the army was still in force during Doug's (white middle class) post school years. He revealed that patriotism was the key to his joining the army, going further to add that he wasn't going to study merely to get out of going to the army (an exemption against conscription – still in force at the time – was granted to full-time students). Later in the interview he added that he was unsure about what kind of career he wanted and viewed his time in the army as time to help him mature sufficiently to make an informed decision.

Summary

Looking at past encounters with higher education, we get a glimpse into the dissimilar paths followed by the students from different class backgrounds. The working class students' stories are primarily about denial, constraint and lack of opportunity. The middle class students' accounts are of those of missed or squandered opportunities, prospects not taken up when the choice was available to them or well-meaning parental intervention. The accounts also point to issues of available resources or capital and the

relative importance of various species of capital within the family unit. This is also reflected in the reasons these students return to study as mature adults.

Students' expectations of the higher education field

Middle class and working class accounts - differences

“Excited, but apprehensive” would sum up the feelings of the majority of the students. The apprehensions and accompanying self-doubt expressed by the students stemmed primarily from concerns regarding unknown academic expectations. Motivation was reported as being high and students had clearly thought the process through for some time and considered themselves adapting to any possible challenges that might be ahead. Working class students Tina and Sara revealed their feelings:

I'm a bit apprehensive about it. It's not studying again for me – it's studying, well studying since school. I wouldn't say I was an achiever in school – I didn't see the relevance of it and if I look back at it now I sort of want to kick my butt and say 'why didn't you?' But I think I'm at a place in my life now where, I've realised look I've got a lot to offer, I'm not stupid, I'm actually quite pretty intelligent and why not? Why not stretch yourself?[...] My apprehension comes in actually producing the work because I don't know quite what's expected of me at the moment. I think once I'm in it, the first semester might be a bit of hair-raising but once again I'll adjust to it and I'll incorporate it into my life. (Tina white working class)

I am a bit nervous about it, but I think I am very motivated, because I don't know what to expect. Like I was saying to you about that [admissions] test, it was horrific. I was totally traumatised by it. But I think I am very motivated. I'm nervous. I don't know what to expect. I don't know how I am going to cope, because all I know is that it's just a big workload. Not that I don't know how I am going to cope, I know that I will cope, but it's just fear of the unknown ...but I just don't know what to expect. But I think the motivation is there, the drive to go is there, so I hope I make a success of it. (Sara Indian working class)

In these excerpts from two working class students we see the apprehension at returning to study which stemmed mainly from unknown academic expectations. Also apparent was the notion of adjustment that mature adults have to make with regard to higher education. Because these are mature individuals who had made quite conscious decisions to pursue this qualification – some at their own expense – the pressure put on the students by themselves was quite evident. Middle class students like Ryan and Dee were more positive in their expectations regarding the field. Ryan (white middle class) was particularly upbeat:

I would have anxieties if I was doing a Masters, but I've asked you a couple of questions already and from what I understand it is geared at the right level. Masters, I would be a bit worried that I don't have the necessary skills or knowledge – the mathematical skill in particular. So I'm pretty comfortable with how things are going to be.

Dee (coloured middle class) explained how her decision to return to study was made and how that contributed to her positive outlook:

I was ready - that's the most important thing. You have to be emotionally ready and I think you know that, you feel that, in your heart. When you actually say 'okay I'm going to dedicate this year completely to studies. Nothing is going to deter me. This is what I want to do' and I felt it. I don't know if I can put it in another way for you, but it was the right thing to do and that's why I'm doing it.

For these two middle class students, clarity regarding their reasons for returning to study contributed to their lack of discomfort and tension. Positive and optimistic expectations were held by these mature individuals of themselves as students.

Summary

Contrasting these working class and middle class accounts we get a glimpse into aspects of the developing academic habitus. The expected academic dispositions, behaviours and attitudes appeared to hold no trepidation for middle class students whereas for working class students the academic challenges represent the unknown and they are uncertain of their ability to handle those challenges.

Encountering the higher education field

Middle class and working class accounts – similarities and differences

Beyond merely the academic requirements, how skilled did students consider themselves at handling this (new) higher education environment? Jade, Greg, Doug and Ryan – all holding management positions within their organisations – were quite confident and comfortable about “fitting in”. As Jade, a working class student, explained:

Yes, I’m scared [about matters academic], but I’m up for the challenge [...] I’m not scared about the dynamics and I’m not scared about the fitting in, nothing like that because I’m adaptable.

In Jade’s extract, she expresses no apprehension regarding the higher education field. This I believe was due to her familiarity with the field, since she held a senior administrative position with an academic department. Her view underpinned those of the middle class men also employed as managers. Two other middle class students held high expectations of the field. These two students were the ones who had previously been prevented from furthering their education through express parental intervention. Zoë, despite no prior higher education experience and from a middle class background, confidently proclaimed her belief in the ability of the field to deliver on its promise:

I’m very excited, I’m keen and I’m keen to get to the end of the year and I know I’m going to walk out with a decent qualification. I’m not even considering the fact that I won’t be successful. No, no, no, no. Because I think if you put your effort in and if you’re at an institution where education is sound, then you can’t other than be successful, unless you’ve really not come in with any kind of commitment. I haven’t come in to waste my money and my year.

The other student, Lisa (coloured middle class) echoed this view:

I’ve got high expectations of this place. I would like it to make me professionally the best businesswoman possible and I’d like it to give me the best possible education. First of all because just because of studying here. It’s the best institution, one of the best in the world. It’s very competitive so I know that it will open up many doors for me that is still

closed, that I might not even know of [...] And just knowing that I have walked the halls and I can experience the life and maybe tell my children someday.

Both Zoë and Lisa show an absolute belief in the field to deliver on its implicit promise of delivering both a high quality qualification. Of those who were troubled about what lay ahead, Iris's (African working class) response was possibly the most despondent when she confided that, "I might not meet the expectations." Here again we have a divide between working class and middle class expectations. Jade was the only working class student who expressed comfort with the environment, but this I attributed to her employment at a university within its management level. Middle class students showed an expectation of the higher education environment and its ability to both deliver academic capital and instil within the students the belief that success would result from this interaction. When Lisa said that higher education is going "to make me" the implication is that she has come to be transformed. Through her participation in higher education, doors would open as a result of not only acquiring academic capital but also a newly acquired academic habitus. As Bourdieu maintains, "what the new entrant must bring into the game (is) a habitus, that is practically compatible... malleable and capable of being converted to the required habitus" (2000 p100).

Summary

Expectations regarding the development of students' academic habitus – that is the expected dispositions, feelings and behaviours of a student within the School of Management Studies – were mixed with middle class students showing greater levels of confidence regarding this new role. The working class and middle class students in the study have clearly considered their return to study and it appeared that this was a planned, eagerly awaited but not a smooth or uncomplicated event. The working class students who had previously encountered the higher education environment had a premature ending to their studies due to financial constraints. The three middle class students had enjoyed brief, but unsuccessful, stints as students in higher education. The conclusion to their studies came about through personal choice. Mature students returned to study with mixed emotions but mainly with the view that the educational experience was going to change and affect their lives in a positive and meaningful way. For two working class students in the study, apprehension and nervousness were apparent despite high levels of excitement and motivation. Mature individuals returned to higher

education as students in their adult years as parents, partners and employees. All were employed in either management positions, being considered for promotion to management positions or were positioning themselves for entry into managerial posts within their organisations. This current array of roles would have been demanding in any event and the introduction of a new role as student added a further level of complexity in their busy lives.

I now consider habitus in relation to the field of work and the individual's social milieu. If we revisit the reasons students return to study and the notion of capital acquisition, we need to re-examine students' prime motivator for returning to study. In the first round of interviews with the students, there were clear prompters or triggers for the return to study – beyond merely the explanations provided. For working class students, the working environment appeared the trigger for their application to the programme. While conditions in the working environment also influenced the decision making of the middle class students, the reason these students had returned to study had been motivated primarily by their peers or family as will be seen in the section on the social milieu that concludes this chapter. This “locus of control” if you like, casts light on the conditions and circumstances of each student and control of those circumstances, that is, the assumption has always been that mature individuals return to study *willingly*. This discussion points to the relationship between habitus, capital and the field of work and habitus, capital and the social milieu.

Habitus, capital and the field of work

As noted earlier, all students – as part of the application process at the School of Management Studies – were asked to submit the names of two referees who were then asked to submit a confidential reference directly to the School. In the research sample, all of the students had requested a reference from their immediate manager. Referees were asked a number of questions:

- how long and under what circumstances the applicant was known to them;
- how they thought the educational qualification would contribute to the candidate's managerial advancement or career in the organisation;
- indications of any developmental areas they had observed in the applicant in the working environment;
- and how the applicant had attempted to improve in those specified areas.

The referee was also asked to evaluate the applicant's professionalism, creativity, maturity, empathy with others, sense of humour, ability to use his or her initiative, analytical skills, verbal skills, energy and determination, ability to work with others in teams and the ability to work alone. Where appropriate the referee would comment on particular areas in the evaluation.

Formal responses from the world of work

Middle class and working class accounts

These references were a key factor; i.e. they had a significant impact on the decision-making process in determining whether the candidate was selected into the academic programme. For example, if these references did not support the application, it would be highly unlikely that the candidate would be accepted. From another perspective, the reference also established whether the immediate manager felt that the student was capable of completing the academic programme and that both the individual manager and the organisation supported the student in this endeavour. The majority of students in the sample received a "highly recommended" endorsement from their organisations. The comments from eleven of the students' immediate managers reflected interest in the individuals' career prospects and showed that the individuals were held in some regard. The remaining two candidates received a "recommended" endorsement from their immediate managers but the managers qualified their ratings by noting in the first instance that the student had been known to them for only a relatively short time and in the second instance, that the student would be adding to her own personal growth more than the organisation's which would not be able to accommodate her proposed career path. Both of these qualifications were made known to the two students by their respective managers.

To revisit the reason students had considered application to the academic programme in the first instance, it is clear that the "triggers" for return to study of the six working class students emanated from the working environment. In all the cases, students noted that the demands from the field of work had, in one form or another, resulted in them considering further education. While therefore the students were committed to the educational element of their engagement with higher education, the pressure to succeed was often intensified for the working class students through the desire to address work-related concerns and expectations. The gaining of academic capital and the potential for conversion to other forms of useful or valued capital within the field of work is also

noted.

Initial expectations and reactions from the working environment

Middle class and working class accounts

As could be expected in light of the references, the initial reaction from the immediate manager to the news that the student had been accepted on the programme produced positive responses across all class categories. Students in their initial interviews used words like “supportive”, “encouraging”, “very positive” and “happy” to indicate management responses made to them after formal notification of their acceptance into the GCM programme. This then set the scene for an apparently supportive working environment which would aid the transfer and application of the learning for all students in the study.

Support from the work environment

Middle class and working class accounts

Ten of the students referred to the support they were expecting to receive during their year of study. Support was anticipated from several quarters: the home environment, from family and friends but also, in the case of working class students, from the field of work. Tina (white working class) was expecting her main source of support to come from her work environment. Being a relative newcomer to the city, she was away from her family and was only starting to develop and “firm up” her social circle. She was reliant on her work environment to meet many of her support needs. What was interesting to explore (and will be discussed in the next chapters) is if and how this support was maintained or shown and the reactions of peers within the environment to the newly academically empowered individual, that is how the development of the academic habitus of the student influenced and impacted on their overall habitus. This aspect is reviewed in subsequent interviews with each of the students.

Habitus, capital and the social field

With the return to study, mature students add further complexity to their busy adult lives. This section considers the reactions of significant others in the personal lives of these mature individuals to their return to study. It is acknowledged that mature students return to study as adults who have meaningful roles outside the higher education environment and that these roles should complement one another but may at times be in conflict with each other. I look particularly at expectations and reactions from partners of the students,

then at expectations and reactions from their family members and finally at friends' expectations and reactions to the students' decision to return to study.

Initial expectations and reactions from partners

Middle class and working class accounts - similarities

Posed as a question in the application process, students were required to consider how they would successfully manage family and personal commitment over the period of study. This question was further explored in the interview subsequently held as part of the selection process. Not all the students were in relationships, but the majority – nine of the thirteen – were either married or in committed relationships. Having the support of their partners was a major part of their decision making process to return to study. While all of these students reported that partners were, “very keen” (Zoë); “over the moon” (Neil); “very excited” (Sam); “very proud – I have his complete support” (Dee); “very much behind me and supportive” (Doug); “very supportive of what I want to do” (Ryan); “great, fantastic” (Jade); “very supportive (though) very surprised” (Greg); “very happy” (Nick), it remained to be seen whether the support was maintained throughout the year, given that five of the partners had not studied themselves – a detail which cut across class, race and gender.

Seven students in the research cohort referred to the sacrifices they anticipated making because of their return to study and the support they were expecting to receive during this time. In the social field, support was expected from several quarters: the home environment – from partners and children; and the wider personal environment – from family and friends. The expectation of support and the potential for personal sacrifices are perhaps not unexpected as in adult life when you take on a new challenge or role – in this case, the one of “student” – other aspects of your life will have to alter and adjust. Discussion with significant others prior to considering this step was apparent. Students spoke of making personal sacrifices together with their partners to ensure success in their studies. Middle class student Doug felt strongly that the year of study would not be possible without his partner and that, “with her support and understanding I know that I will be able to manage successfully.” Three women spoke of conversations with their partners and parents, specifically around childcare concerns. Two men spoke of consultations with partners but did not dwell on childcare issues. These concerns and discussions highlight the difference between studying after school as a young adult with relatively few responsibilities and returning to study as a mature person.

Initial expectations and reactions from family members

Middle class and working class accounts - differences

Although only one of these students still lived at home with his parents, the support, positive response and approval from their parents still meant a great deal to them. In response to the question of how their family had reacted to the news of their acceptance to the programme, eight of the students led with their parents' reaction, before giving their partners' views. If we return to the reasons for returning to study, it must be stressed that for middle class students, the "trigger" to return to study stemmed from family members or was peer oriented. The educational foray was therefore seen as means to gain other legitimate forms of cultural capital, given that middle class individuals in the study already have accumulated other existing forms of capital. The response from family members for middle class students was very positive. Dee (coloured middle class) reported that:

Obviously my parents are over the moon. It's been the topic of conversation this Christmas [...] My mom and dad couldn't stop talking about their daughter going back to studying and they can't wait for me to graduate [...] The family's excited. They're very, very proud and that makes my heart very happy.

Ryan (white middle class) also revealed that his:

Parents were quite positive [...] They believe it's something that definitely going to help in the future.

For working class students however, all was not as rosy. Iris (African working class) received a different reaction when she told her parents – who lived in another part of the country – about her decision. Her father's immediate question was, "Will you be able to cope, my child?" Her family expected ongoing financial support from her and her return to study was seen as a diversion from this purpose. Four of the six working class students were disturbed by low level responses but indicated that these had made them more determined to be successful. Family members were however, in the main, pleased with the news of the return to study and particularly impressed by the student's initiative to (re)enter the higher education environment.

Initial expectations and reactions from friends

Middle class and working class accounts - similarities

Positive reactions were received from friends of all thirteen students in the study. As Neil (Indian working class) reported about a friend's reaction:

He was overjoyed when I e-mailed him about the acceptance cause he knew it was one my ambitions. [...] He knows that it is in the direction that I wanted to go years ago and that I'm finally getting down to it.

Jade (coloured working class) noted that, "I've got a huge support base in terms of people just wanting me to go forward." Her friends clearly felt that gaining the academic qualification was a step towards "going forward". Doug (white middle class), in stating how his social circle had responded, noted that:

Friends were very impressed and said, 'Well done and everything. It's not something just anyone can do'.

In his extract Doug indicated, through his friends' reaction, that his standing within his social circle had been elevated since the acceptance into the GCM programme at the School of Management Studies. The notion that "not everyone" gets into higher education was made clear through the friends' response. What was apparent from students' answers to the question of initial responses from their social circle was that the social milieu of all thirteen students in the study was a supportive, positive one. Students' friends were very proud of their initiative to return to study and encouraged them to make a success of it.

Summary

The initial reactions from the social milieu boded well for the students' support base during their academic experience. It was clear that encouragement and goodwill were present in their relationships with significant others and that the decision to return to study had been taken with forethought and discussion.

Conclusion

In this chapter the class trajectories of the students have been established as an essential

component to understanding their experiences. I have then presented students' reasons for return to study and viewed these through primarily a class lens, but there are also aspects of gender and race. I looked at how the desire for capital in its cultural form – as a higher education qualification – motivated students to return to study. The reasons students return to study have everything to do with capital, but what happens to them as a result of this experience relates to their habitus. What happens through capital acquisition is that some form of transformation of the habitus takes place. If we accept Bourdieu's view that habitus is structured and restructured by subsequent experience, the higher education experience would directly affect the habitus of these mature students.

The development of students' academic habitus was traced from their post-school experiences to their more recent feelings and expectations about this particular engagement, through the GCM programme with the field of higher education. The role of significant others in the lives of the students was explored through the two categories of habitus, capital and the world of work and habitus, capital and the social milieu. What was apparent, even at the start of the academic year, was that there were similar and different experiences and expectations from working class and middle class students. There were also differences along gender lines but less concrete trends across racial lines. How the acquisition of academic capital – together with students' habitus and existing levels of capital – affected the strategies employed by these mature students within the academic game during the year of study will be explored in the next chapter.

CHAPTER SIX

STRATEGY

This chapter examines how mature students in the study played the academic “game” both inside and outside the classroom at the School of Management Studies. The analytical framework used in the previous chapter provides the lens through which the students’ strategies of aspects are viewed. I therefore look at capital acquisition in terms of how students acknowledged and understood the academic game; academic habitus development is seen in how students played the academic game; habitus, capital and the field of work are viewed through students’ changing relationships in the working environment and finally, habitus, capital and the social field looks at shifts in students’ relationships with significant others in their personal lives.

Capital acquisition

Mature students in the study have arrived at the higher education environment with clear objectives in mind. Students’ reasons for their return to study linked to capital acquisition as an avenue to acquire other forms of capital, mainly cultural capital. The potential for capital conversion, through attaining the GCM qualification, was possible through the field of work’s acknowledgement of the status of the academic capital. However the motivators for mature students’ return to study differed in that peers and family members provided the encouragement for middle class students and the field of work influenced the decision-making of working class students. The acquisition of academic capital was seen by women students as addressing their credibility in the workplace. I now explore the understanding students had of the higher education field’s ability to deliver on their expectations and students’ investment in the academic game.

Acknowledging the “game”

Bourdieu uses the analogy of a “game” to explain the concept of field. The game, he says, follows rules that are not explicit or codified. The game is devoid of inventor and is fluid and complex. It defines itself by – amongst other things – defining specific stakes and interests. In the case of the School of Management Studies, these stakes are the certificates and degrees awarded to successful students. What constitutes the game is important here, including the criteria for success, who gets there and why, and what

ultimately gets rewarded. Theoretically, “in order for a field to function, there have to be stakes” and more importantly, says Bourdieu, there needs to be an investment by players in the game which endows it with a sense of worth, including a tacit recognition of the rules of the game – which he refers to as *illusio* (1993 p72). This *illusio* or interest, which is dependent on the students’ participation in the game, also “differentiates itself according to the position occupied in the game and with the trajectory that leads each participant to this position” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992 p117). Therefore, the various capitals or resources that each student brought to the higher education environment affected both their position in the game, their understanding of the nature of the academic game and their ability to play it. Examples of this are seen later in the chapter.

Before any contemplation of strategy can begin, in other words before the student could “work out” how they were going to cope with the academic environment and experience, s/he must have acknowledged that a “game” was taking place. Acknowledging the game also considers that the student endowed the academic environment and experience with a sense of worth; i.e. the game was worth playing, worth the effort and potential sacrifice of time, money and commitment. In this first section of the strategy chapter I consider to what degree students invested in the academic game.

Investment in the game

Through their very application to the higher education programme, students were aware that they were investing in the process and showed belief in the process and institution. In other words, forms of *illusio* were evident. Investment in the academic game took a number of forms. These were primarily financial but also included potential personal sacrifices that had been identified by the students themselves.

Financial investment

Middle class and working class accounts – similarities

Four of the students in the study – two men and two women – were funding the programme themselves or had made an arrangement where their companies had paid for the course and if unsuccessful, these students were required to pay back the full amount to their organisations. This placed additional pressure on the individual to succeed and was very evident in the women’s accounts. Lisa’s (coloured middle class) comment regarding this had a desperate feel about it: “I can’t fail. I can’t fail. I must pass.” Iris (African working class) had also paid for the programme herself:

I have to do this sacrifice [forgoing other aspects of her life] because I just cannot afford to lose such a lot of money.

All four students identified that the personal financial investment had caused them to feel an additional level of stress during the academic year.

Personal investment

Middle class and working class accounts - similarities

The other form of investment in the game prior to the start of the academic year came from the personal sacrifices students anticipated because of their return to study. This was not unexpected as in adult life when you are taking on a new challenge or role – in this case, the one of “student” – other aspects of your life would have to alter and adjust. As discussed earlier, consultation with significant others prior to considering this step was apparent. In Dee’s (coloured middle class) extract, she refers to a conversation around childcare concerns:

[My mother] takes care of both my children whilst I work. I informed her of my desire to complete this course and she has agreed to support me by caring for my children whilst I attend this course.

Jade (coloured working class) revealed that, “the greatest challenge will probably be if a domestic crisis arises [but] my family members and friends have agreed to ‘stand by’ and take care of my domestic commitments.” These concerns and discussions showed similarities across class and highlighted the difference between studying after school as a young adult with relatively few responsibilities and returning to study as a mature person. Support was expected by all thirteen students from several quarters: the home environment – from partners and children; the work environment – from subordinates, colleagues and boss; wider personal environment – from family and friends and the academic environment itself through support and encouragement from other students. Nine of the thirteen students expressed the view that some sort of personal sacrifice was expected. The issue of support will be discussed in further detail in the habitus, capital and the field of work and habitus, capital and the social field sections.

Summary

These aspects of the academic game – acknowledgement and investment in the game –

show that the pursuit of academic capital put other aspects of students' lives at risk. The similarities across class included the personal and financial investments made by these mature students in their return to study. Other examples of *illusio* – or investment in the game – were revealed as the academic year progressed and are dealt with later in this chapter and the next. In the next section I will show how understanding of the game and the rules of the game affected the students' ability to develop their academic habitus.

Academic habitus development

Field is the environment where habitus and capital are “at play”. The higher education environment enables bearers of the right capital and habitus to fit easily into that environment, indeed even adapt to or change it, as opposed to those who, having fewer or none of the appropriate resources and behaviours, must adapt themselves to that environment. In this section, I discuss how mature students in the study played the academic game. As I have argued, beyond the initial acknowledgement of the game, the ability to understand the game determined the students' ability to play the academic game.

In determining how students played the game, I looked to habitus and particularly the notion of habitus as embodiment; i.e. the feel for the game. The embodiment of habitus occurs not only in the body, that is, in our behaviours of walking, speaking and standing but also in our thoughts and perceptions. Habitus shapes the way individuals take up their positions in the environment and is central to “having a feel for the game”. Within the School of Management Studies, would students know what was expected of them in the environment? And how would legitimate ways of thinking and acting be known and acquired?

Playing the game – inside the classroom

Recognition of the rules of the game determined to a large extent the student's ability to function in the environment; i.e. “their induction into the academic space” (Grenfell and James 1998 p170). If the game constituted coping with the academic demands both inside and outside the classroom, those with an inadequate or poor grasp of the rules and the game were hampered in their efforts to succeed (which may have occurred without the student even being aware of the shortcoming). I looked at particular incidents throughout the student's higher education experience which highlighted their ability to play, succeed in the game and thereby develop their academic habitus. These incidents

are grouped around lecturer-student interaction, group interaction – process and task, group interaction – leadership and capital, and assessment.

Lecturer-student interaction

Middle class and working class accounts – similarities

The establishment of an academic habitus is different for the mature student who has a significant time gap between their last interaction with formal education, typically the final year of schooling, and this higher educational experience. In several accounts, both middle class and working class students explained the difficulties in reconnecting with educational tasks and expectations in a formal environment. What students do bring to the learning environment is their experience and it is their life and working experience that provides the lens through which the learning is mediated. Students were also expecting to be engaged in a particular way, that is, they expected that any new knowledge would supplement and build on their existing knowledge. There is a vast difference between a mature learner and the typical undergraduate student. New knowledge needs to make sense as mature students have an existing and more developed frame of reference in contrast to younger students. The lecturer is therefore very necessary for providing a safe and conducive environment for knowledge acquisition.

The wide variety of lecturers who taught on the GCM programme were drawn from the School, the Bay University (the wider university within which it is located), from other local universities and experts from the field of work. Because the work experience requirement was an essential criterion sought from all students at the School, the ideal lecturer on the GCM programme was one who combined relevant work experience or a level of expert knowledge with an academic background and who had some exposure to teaching at postgraduate level or to mature adults. Sometimes the sought-after combination was not possible and lecturers were appointed having little experience teaching mature students. Students generally compared lecturing styles and subject expertise. Students' input was also sought formally through quarterly lecturer evaluations which encouraged them to critique both content and delivery style of their courses. Students – particularly mature working adults – were often able to quickly discern the quality of the lecturers as was borne out by Zoë's comments and Tina's experience:

You can, in fact, size up immediately whether you can challenge and debate with a lecturer and whether you just say ‘Okay, we’ll just give you what you want’. (Zoë Indian middle class)

The majority of our lecturers encouraged debate and they encouraged questions and just sort of hypothetical situations and then we get these two duds. They don’t want to interact with you; they just want to teach you. But that didn’t work for us because we wanted to speak to them. We wanted to question them. We wanted to challenge them. (Tina white working class)

Mature students regardless of class responded to lecturers’ lack of interaction in similar ways. Even though frustration was evident from the working class students, the result was that all students quickly learnt to play the game according to the lecturers’ rules.

Middle class and working class accounts – differences

Because of these particular lecturers’ lack of experience in teaching adults referred to above, there were many conflicting signals received by the students to which they all responded differently. Ryan (white middle class) noted that,

She’s very particular. She’s not open to your view, the way you see things [...] She’s probably the strictest as far as strict goes [...] Everything must be exact [...] but it’s fine. It’s not a problem.

While Greg (coloured middle class) felt that,

Some of the stuff we did, the link wasn’t direct so it caused a bit of a problem [...] I actually want to get to understand this. I need to sort it out because moaning and groaning is not going to help you [learn].

These responses were quite insightful around the issue of learning. The middle class students felt confident enough to challenge these lecturers where appropriate but also felt that it was primarily their responsibility to gain understanding. The working class students on the other hand felt their learning was part of the lecturer’s responsibility, as is shown in Neil’s response:

I put up my hand, regardless of how stupid my question is (because if) I miss anything then I'm not going to catch up if somebody else has to tell me and if you [the lecturer] can't explain to me then nobody's going to be able to.

Ryan (white middle class) felt that students should assume full responsibility for learning and was quite judgemental in his response:

I get the feeling some people don't apply themselves much. That's my perception. And then they say 'I don't get it, so it must be the lecturer'.

These examples point to differences around how knowledge should be acquired, but also to issues around scaffolding and academic support which are viewed differently through a class lens. In the particular instance of one of the lecturing staff, part of the problem was around applicability of the subject matter to the workplace – essential in an applied learning environment – and the other was lecturer attitude towards the students. As an example of the “attitude” issue, students reported that the lecturer's first presentation slide had said “I am not your mother” which had led Iris (African working class) to say that:

I was really hurt by Kate [the lecturer]. I felt hurt but I didn't say anything. I just said to myself, I was hurt by that woman – what she said in the class [...] I mean we are not kids. Some of us are married with kids.

Tina (white working class) interpreted the lecturer's attitude as non-supportive of students with a view to “catch them out”. She explained that:

What she says and what she does is two different things. There's a whole lot of confusion with it [...] She contradicts herself [...]. What is she going to catch us with next?

Neil (Indian working class) felt strongly that lecturers needed to be quite inventive when dealing with mature adults who had been “out of the academic loop” for some time.

I think he must have a fantastic mind but he's not a teacher and he doesn't

understand that most of the people in the class have the ability to grasp the concept. It needs to be positioned from a different angle or alternative when you see the first one does not work and you need to be flexible.

Zoë's (Indian middle class) description of two other lecturers on the programme provided further insight into what students really valued:

(He) is an absolute star. He brings so much life experience. He brings so much reality into the class. And even if you question him on something he can use what he was intending to lecture you on that evening and you can relate to his life experience. [...] He can identify if that person really is not understanding what (he's) saying but he or she doesn't want to speak up. So he'll try another method and another method and you can see he's trying to get this person to understand and his last resort would be just to come around and go to that person and then end up there and if you then don't want to speak up, then he leaves you. He does as much as he can.

Sam (African working class) was also very clear about what he valued from the lecturers which was essentially support:

Many of them have been fantastic. They've been very helpful. And I think they want to help us. You can see that – they genuinely want to help you. And they understand our environment and where we come from and they're there to help us.

Summary

Besides being shaped by class, the induction into the academy, particularly for students with little or no prior higher education experience, was rife with uncertainty and apprehension as discussed in the previous chapter. Despite high levels of motivation, the self confidence of these mature students required nurturing by the environment and particularly by those who dealt with them in an intimate manner – their lecturers. Across class, student expectations of those individuals who were lecturing them were clear. Students expected to be engaged and had clear perceptions regarding knowledge acquisition in an adult education setting. Although working class students expressed higher levels of frustration when these expectations were not met, both groups of

students engaged in playing the game according to the rules decided on by the lecturer. The other source of support and encouragement anticipated by students was from their group members.

Group interaction – processes and tasks

The GCM programme – along with the School's other academic programmes, the postgraduate diploma (PD) and the Masters degree – was structured around small group work and students were allocated to syndicate groups at the start of the year. At mid-year, students were allocated to different groups to allow for the opportunity to learn from a new set of individuals. These small groups typically met outside lecture hours. The focus on the GCM programme was on collaborative rather than individual learning and lecturers designed their curricula around this key feature. Group work however brought potential for both meaningful and uneasy interactions between students.

Middle class and working class accounts – differences

In the contrasting extracts below, students explain their frustration with the group process, each wanting something different from the process. In this first account middle class student Ryan explained his irritation with group work and in the second and third accounts, working class students Iris and Sara shared how they felt about missing out on vital learning opportunities. Ryan felt that the group process was:

.. the most frustrating part of the course [...] it really is. It's not difficult. I don't find it difficult. It tends to get done. But it's just dealing with all of it. It's just a pain in the neck. It's hard to call all the people together [...] It's hard to get a group of five to actually deliver something... to get to the nitty gritty and somebody who's going to get things done [...] It's too relaxed for me [...] I want to come here and get it done. Everyone rocks up a half hour late. They want to have a coffee. I want to get here at eight and be out of here by ten and have done this, this and this [...] The pace is too slow with the group. And you can't push it without upsetting people [...] So you can just sit back and let it take over. So it's not that it's *hard*, it's just that it's frustrating [...] It's the most tiring part of the course.

Ryan's playing of the academic game – being involved in group work – was clearly a taxing experience for him. Although the experience was also taxing for working class

student Iris, it was challenging in a completely different way. Iris found that for her, group work was an essential part of the learning process and had differing experiences in her two allocated groups. In her first group she recounted that she was able to say to her group members:

‘I don’t know anything in this course so I will need you guys [...] to take me step by step’. With the second group we would just come and sit and say, ‘Okay, you go do this part, you go do that part and that part. [I told them] I’m not learning anything from the group.

Iris who had a non-supportive work environment and was being pressured by her family to cease further study attempts and spend her resources on family-related activities, was also expecting her classmates to provide the much needed support she felt was essential for her success. In addition to the frustration of her current group’s learning methodology, Iris felt she was not being heard or supported. Another working student Sara echoed this frustration:

The way they work is that they split up the work which I don’t think it’s good. For me, it doesn’t work because I feel that if you engage one another you get many more ideas. You learn more. So somebody writes [the group] assignments. It doesn’t work, because that’s just your view, whereas if we had worked collectively, jointly [we could have improved our skills]. And I’ve voiced my opinion about it not working [...] It’s not good [...] It’s working, but it’s not... I feel that I could have learnt much more.

The middle class strategy around group work was found in a fascinating insight in further comments from Ryan:

My writing tends to be better – or the way I position things or write things – than other people, you know, their English isn’t so... they tend to state the same thing twice in one sentence [...] Like this last group assignment, I took a bit more control of things [...] I tend to be easygoing as long as I’m not failing the subject.

The needs of middle class and working class students differ around the group learning process. For Ryan the outcome of his group's work – the allocated or bounded time for group work together with the achievement of a good mark – was paramount. Ryan's playing of the game revolved around a strategy for coping with his frustration. For Iris and Sara the process of learning and support was undermined by focusing on the academic outcome. Recent findings by Du Toit (2007) expose the high degree in which sub-division of work occurs in group work within a mature student setting. The study concluded that poor group experiences often result from group tasks poorly designed by the lecturer and that these experiences negatively impact on individual learning and development. There is further insight into group processes with Ryan's reference to control and who gets to control the group and its processes.

Group interaction – leadership and capital

Middle class and working class accounts - differences

Because syndicate group composition is diverse, as previously stated, and because the focus is on developing management competencies, the leadership role within groups is typically rotated dependant on subject expertise. However leadership tussles for control of a group include other factors as well. An interesting tussle for control of a group brought students' existing capital into sharp focus. An example of how a player in the field used capital to achieve the ends they desired was seen in a member of Sam's group. She worked within the university structures, thus enabling her to have a level of social capital built up through her relationships with academics and support staff. This showed how students' relation to each other was dependant on the position in the field. Sam (African working class) explained how this became visible within his group:

She had that kind of connections (to key people), so she was the heavyweight in the group. She was a heavyweight. So it was difficult to say 'Listen, don't do this' and we tended to leave her because she was *very* helpful to the group.

Because of the access to academic faculty, the student was able to ask for feedback on assignment drafts, projects and presentations for the majority of the courses and because of access to facilities, was able to book venues where the group could practise their presentations prior to their assessment. As is evident in Sam's account, the ability to do this, to have access to a range of resources, shifted the power balance within the group.

The student's ability to play the academic game was therefore enhanced by her existing capital and showed that other students within her group were "disadvantaged" in the sense that they were dependant upon the particular student's goodwill. As Sam further revealed:

We had to dance to her music, so to say [...] As a result we suffered. We had to keep quiet. We can't sort of offend her, because of that kind of resource she is in our group.

The student referred to by Sam is the holder of what Bourdieu would class a trump card, "master cards whose force varies depending on the game" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992 p98). The student was able to exercise her power over others in the group precisely because she held a trump card – the access to key resources.

Summary

In this section on group interaction, the expectations of working class students in terms of levels of anticipated group support and collective learning processes were not realised. The middle class example shows a contrasting view and strategy both in terms of time for group work and dealing with the frustrations associated with getting a group of individuals to successfully complete a task within a specified time frame. The leadership role in groups was also highlighted in the example of the use of social capital by an individual which shifted the balance of power within a group. This example illustrates the use of capital both as a resource and as a source of power.

One of the main elements of playing the academic game is seen through assessment of student work and it is this that I turn attention to now. Assessment is where students could clearly identify whether they had the ability to play the game. It was a "test" of their academic habitus.

Assessment

Assessment is a key area where "playing the game" could really be seen taking place and where the student's ability to play the game was most exposed. I did not deem it necessary to include actual marks received by the students for their various courses as I was more intrigued by students' responses to various facets of assessment which I used as a measure of their academic habitus. These responses took on differing forms around

disclosure regarding achievements, reaction to examinations, group assessment and an incident of plagiarism.

Middle class and working class accounts - differences

After the first course had been completed, Greg (coloured middle class) announced that:

I just made pass in Socio-political studies [and that] is probably the easiest subject out of all of it that's come through [...] I probably failed that exam (and) people found it strange that I was so open about it, about the fact that I'm not passing the examination. I'm quite okay with it and I need to work, so what?

Other students, he noted, "keep as closed as possible" which he found peculiar, suggesting that:

You can't be in a box like that [...]. There'll be subjects where you're going to be weak and there are subjects where you're going to be pretty strong.

Part of this "closed off" state, he attributed to competition within the class but he acknowledged that while, "competition is good, some people take it just a little bit too serious." Sara (Indian working class), in reacting to another student who questioned her regarding the examination after it had been completed, responded:

There's the very competitive people in the class that you duck [...] You're just 'No, I wrote well' (and) just get away.

In Sara's example we see her, "trying to guard against being made to feel inferior" within a competitive higher education space (Reay 2001 p339). Sara wants to "get away" from those who might make her feel second-rate. Disclosure was given another perspective, that of separating oneself or distancing oneself from the rest of the class. Ryan (white middle class) reported he hadn't felt challenged and that, "the level (of assessment) is not what I would have hoped for me, what I need." He also questioned the use of the open-

book¹⁵ method of assessment by saying, “How much effort are you putting in if it’s an open-book?” despite all evidence regarding the level of difficulty regarding application of theories and models in an open-book examination. According to reports from other students, he was quite outspoken about the level of the programme in general, regarding it as a benchmarking exercise and preparation for his Masters which he intended to begin at the start of the following year. Jade (coloured working class) expressed dissatisfaction around his comments:

Ryan is determined to get onto the Masters next year. He’s going to (be) studying for his international test or wrote his international test or whatever and this is all like, it’s *so* not an issue for him. He’s getting like A’s for everything [...] and he’s like ‘If I don’t get 100% for this then I’m stupid’. He makes comments like that! Did he not learn anything from this you know? [...] I’m almost disappointed that he feels he didn’t [...] He says he hasn’t found *anything* challenging on this. So I said ‘Well maybe then you obviously are meant to do the Masters. So why didn’t you just do it the first time?’ He said well, he didn’t think that he could and I said, ‘There – you learnt something. This gave you the confidence to tell you that the Masters [can be achieved]’. Don’t make it [the GCM] meaningless because it’s not.

This discussion links to differences between working class and middle class students about the value and meaning of the GCM qualification – essentially differences regarding what constituted the game. In the above example, as noted earlier in the analytical framework discussion in chapter four, Jade was upset and annoyed with Ryan because his interest and investment – Bourdieu’s *illusio* – was lacking. The “sense of worth” of the GCM programme between these students was markedly different. Jade, because of her heightened sense of *illusio* regarding the programme, felt challenged and betrayed by Ryan’s lack of commitment.

Issues of tension arose at times through the lack of contribution to a group project by a member of the group. Individuals handled this in different ways. As Nick (coloured middle class) reported:

¹⁵ Where students are allowed to bring textbooks, notes or any other material into the examination venue

We've got a problem (and) it's reached that point where the group member is not participating and we had to take decisions in terms of what are we going to do.

When submitting group assignments, students could elect to remove the name of any group member who had not contributed to the project. This was usually accompanied by a written explanation of the issue and how the group had attempted to resolve the problem. Typically it was a very tense time for the students in the group as it was then possible for the affected individual to fail that particular subject. Because this process was not uniform across all courses on the GCM programme, it was seldom invoked. Tina (white working class) explained about this situation cropping up in their group:

Do we give her a mark or not? Do we include her? [...] I didn't like the fact that she put me in that position that I had to make that decision.

Other students tried to remain outside the process as was illustrated in Sam's (African working class) case when he said,

I just think 'It's not my problem. I'm here to get this certificate. That's all I'm here to do [...] So please guys, don't get me involved'.

Here we see two examples, both from working class students, pointing to the uncertainty of the process and to their reluctance to "pass judgement" or to "make a stand". This I argue is because of a lack of or underdevelopment of an academic habitus. Those students who have developed an academic habitus; i.e. they know the rules of the game and how to apply them, were far more at ease performing this or any related task where judgement was called into question, as was seen in middle class student Greg's description of a similar event:

We had one person but we managed her, so it was fine. That's what it's all about and that's the problem. They [the new group to which the student had been assigned] complained about her now this semester. I looked and I said 'But you people are actually to blame because you're not managing the person properly. That's all'. We never had a problem with her because we told her what we wanted and how we wanted it and there it is. The

objectives are clear. Guess what? She made sure she gives whatever she needs done. So there you have it. Obviously I think people's circumstances change from time to time (but) at the end of the day if you manage people properly you'll get what you're looking for.

Zoë (Indian middle class) held a more pragmatic view on the varying levels of input and commitment from group members:

When I got onto GCM I participated fully. If I was in a group where there were members that were slack and they were getting the same marks, my attitude was 'Listen, I'm going to have to go and apply this outside there, so whether you help me to get the knowledge in my head, or whether you're just riding along and getting the mark, for me the point is, I'm getting it into my head, and I'm going to go and go and apply it.' So that's how it was for me. It didn't faze me that there were people that were getting the mark and not doing the work, because come the day when they have to go and apply it, then they're going to struggle to apply it and that was their choice.

In these examples we see how middle class students felt comfortable about exercising their judgement – in Greg's case, to “manage” the individual; in Zoë's case, a pragmatic take on learning versus marks – in comparison to the discomfort being experienced by working class students. The use of judgement in “playing the game” was brought into sharp focus when a significant incident occurred during the assessment of one of the course assignments.

The plagiarism incident – through a race lens

The lecturer of the course reported to GCM programme management that a number of the students had clearly plagiarised in their assignments. An email, to which the university's policy on plagiarism was attached, was then sent out by programme management to all students stating that the marks of the assignment would not be released due to the discovery of instances of plagiarism.

A number of options were presented to the students regarding the issue: a) no re-submission if students felt their assignment was an original piece of work and followed

reference guidelines; b) re-submission of their work, suitably referenced and an accompanying letter of apology – a maximum mark of 50 per cent would apply to students using this option; and c) students could opt not to re-submit, but if indeed guilty of plagiarism would receive a mark of 0 per cent. While the email gave rise to indignation, confusion, doubt and even anger among the students as the “guilty” parties had not been specifically identified, the incident put students’ own judgement to the test. Responses to the incident came from five black students from both working class and middle class backgrounds.

Jade’s (coloured working class) reaction was one of doubt: “The email scared me [...] Am I one of those people? Do I have anything to be worried about?” Iris’s (African working class) reaction was one of confusion when she described her response: “I wasn’t sure whether I copied. I wasn’t sure whether I took something straight now from whatever...” Greg (coloured middle class) explained his ignorance:

I think I must have used referencing once or twice in my life before and there was no real structure. And now [...] you’ve got an assignment and you have to reference. Now it’s bad enough the time is running out. Now you’ve still got to reference and you don’t know how.

Sara (Indian working class) echoed this frustration:

I was never taught to reference [...]. So to put somebody who has got no damn education at all [on the spot].

Zoë (Indian middle class) was also puzzled and uncertain about the email as it failed to clarify who the “guilty” parties were. What occurred in the class confirmed this confusion:

It’s funny how the people that resubmitted were not the ones that were suspected of plagiarism and the ones that didn’t resubmit were the ones. So I said it just goes to show how confused everybody is.

Her initial reaction was one of astonishment, but it was the way the incident was handled that she really didn’t agree with. Later when she’d had a chance to reflect on the whole

situation she summed it up by saying:

I cannot help but feel that maybe because the class is predominantly black or coloured or whatever, your abilities are still questioned for what you are handing in. I really honestly feel that way and for me it's a downer because in your place of work people are like 'Wow!' when you do something, or 'Are you sure you can do that?' when you do it and I don't feel like getting that here, you know what I mean. But that's how I feel, that's actually what I feel with regards to (this)... and it may be unintentional and it may be my baggage, who knows? But that's how I feel, and speaking to others a lot of them feel that way. Many of them won't say it but they actually amongst each other [say] 'Do they think it's because we're black or coloured that we can't produce work?'

This situation developed further when, after the email to the class, the entire class was asked to come in on a Saturday and,

had a whole lecture on referencing and a whole lot was cleared up there, and it was clear for me that assumptions was made that those who didn't reference had plagiarised. (Zoë).

What this incident shows is how student's general habitus asserted itself when academic habitus issues were in play. Here we see an example of how the past – through students' own racialised experiences – meets the present and how the interplay produces a particular kind of academic habitus. We also see how the rules of the game, if they aren't known or made explicit, hamper the development of appropriate behaviours.

Summary

The formation of an academic habitus, a set of "appropriate" academic behaviour and attitudes – that is whatever the institution both deems to be so and whatever the university values – is about socialisation into the academic game, "such that habitus becomes attuned to the stakes of the relevant fields sufficiently to operate strategically" (Grenfell and James 1998 p115). This section on assessment has shown differences between working class and middle class students in terms of their responses to academic achievement – from being guarded to being open. There were varying levels of interest in

the academic game (and corresponding expressions of worth) between the two groups. Middle class students' confidence showed in using judgement in an academic setting as opposed to the hesitations of working class students. In contrast to a class habitus, allegations of plagiarism made by the school showed a racialised habitus on display. In attempting to grapple with the situation, Zoë's way of viewing the experience is through a racial lens. This incident provides an example of how the discourse of race is the default discourse in South Africa. This lens is automatically used by those who, like Zoë, have been most keenly exposed to South Africa's apartheid past. The next section pays attention to incidents related to academic habitus development outside the classroom.

Playing the game – Outside the classroom

The induction into the academic space also extended outside the classroom. These activities typically involved student interaction with each other outside the class itself and also with other students within the School of Management Studies.

Social, community events and networking

The GCM class was expected, during their year at the School, to be engaging in various social, fundraising and social responsive activities. The focus and depth of involvement was left to the students to determine. Typically there was really a core of about seven to ten students who drove the process in each of the academic programmes.

Differences through a race lens

Although students had all enrolled on the GCM for academic purposes, several students provided insight into their understanding of the programme's intention. For black students Greg and Nick, the GCM programme encompassed more than just an academic experience. As Greg understood it:

This whole thing is about building bridges, getting connected with basically different people from different aspects of business etc. (This is) what the GCM programme is all about.

The view was supported by Nick:

Everything in the whole of the GCM [...] It's about the learning curve, around going to lectures, but also your socials, your responsibilities, everything.

What these students referred to were aspects of networking within the programme, various initiatives outside the classroom such as social responsibility drives, for example, the painting of a community centre, fundraising for an orphanage etc. For these two black students, the GCM included more than the academic component of the programme, and therefore more than just the acquisition of an academic qualification. The GCM held the potential for access to other forms of capital, namely social capital, through networking opportunities. These beliefs in the broader aspects of the academic programme were further reinforced by the School and the GCM's programme management who also emphasised that being a student within the environment entailed becoming part of the academic community and partaking in all its functions. The common practice of a core group of individuals driving the process on the GCM programme was confirmed when Greg told me that:

Whenever we have a function or something I always call it 'the usual suspects' and its not like we keep things to ourselves, we try to involve everybody.

His view underscored his frustration at not having the backing and support of the entire class. None of the white students interviewed referred to this aspect of the programme in any of their interviews. In a follow up question to Greg, the "usual suspects" were revealed to be the black students who were both interested in meeting and saw potential value – that is the possible acquisition of further amounts of cultural capital – through the networking and social processes.

The aspect of networking was also paramount as the programme and its position within the School promoted the concept of networking, starting first with one's own class and then with the broader student body. Greg showed complete despondency with the networking aspect within the class and distanced himself somewhat from the networking and social side of the programme, reporting that:

I just backed off from that, I thought to myself you know 'Why must I make the effort cause everybody else is not making the effort?' so I come here to sit and study and that's what I'm busy doing at the moment.

The eventual distancing that Greg reported speaks to the gap that existed between his

initial conception of the kind of capital he was to acquire on the programme and what was actually available. He then reverted to focusing on the acquisition of the academic knowledge offered by the GCM programme.

Interaction with other students in the School

As previously alluded to, the concept of networking within the School is promoted both explicitly and is also commonly understood to be a key feature of being a student at the School of Management Studies. Several past students have gone into business together and these success stories were frequently publicised, receiving prominence both within the School and externally. However because of the stratification of the School's programmes, a clear distinction is drawn between the Masters, the PD and the GCM. The area of interaction was an important one and linked to students who, as GCM graduates, aspired to move into the other programmes. The majority of the students in the research study interviewed expressed the desire to study further at the School on either the PD or Masters programmes. What then were their experiences of interaction with the other students at the School?

Middle class and working class accounts - similarities

Across all class groupings, the feeling of disconnect was apparent. Tina (white working class) explained that, from her perspective:

The GCM class is still sort of treated as the orphans of the School and I find that very sad because people who start there are the future Masters (students).

The interaction between the various classes was limited, even on days when all students were there.

There was one Saturday morning when everybody was here. GCM was here. PD was here, the Masters were here. Now the Masters stand that side, PD sits that side and GCM sits this side. You know we're at the same varsity. You could climb the ladder to go to the various levels, so why not mix already? (Lisa coloured middle class)

Greg (coloured middle class) interpreted this division as almost being invisible and

described a scene in the student common room:

We're here but we're not here. Our lecturer is this side, their lecturer is that side. If you can understand, our table is there and so therefore that from the one door to the other door – that seems to be the divider and you dare not go over the boundaries.

Even Ryan (white middle class) – on his way to register for a Masters for the next year – found that, “we stick to ourselves. We go into our corner with GCM.” Another word on the differentiation came from Neil (Indian working class) who recounted his experience in the first few weeks of orientation:

On that first day we sat outside and listened to these Masters guys. Initially I thought ‘Masters – these guys must be very smart and then when I heard the conversation about BEE¹⁶ going on between the white and black students and then I thought these guys are probably dumber than we are. I'm not going have any distinction made between us on who's clever because they have a different course.

What is clear from these accounts is that beyond a clear hierarchy that exists within the School's programmes, stratification between the various students was also visible. The GCM students saw themselves as “orphans”, “here, but not here”. The issue raised is whether these students were valued as students within the higher education field and specifically, within the School of Management Studies.

As noted earlier in the analytical framework discussion in chapter four, the most expressive incident of difference came from Zoë (Indian middle class) who reported an incident when she attended a presentation at the School and was the only GCM student at the daytime event:

If I take that occasion – if you're not a person and I won't say [with] confidence, because you can have confidence [...] But if you're not a person that has a certain amount of inner security, that inner peace with

¹⁶ Black Economic Empowerment

who you are, you can easily get disillusioned at that sessions like that where you go for a bit of empowerment, a bit of self knowledge or whatever and you're faced with people where you can almost sense they can sense that you, that it's your first time at an event like this – when you can sit back and where they can pick up – or are they trained to pick up? – whether you belong or you don't belong ... I wasn't conscious of the fact that I don't belong – I didn't feel that I didn't belong ... I'm wondering whether they're conscious of it....So even on that day, I was quite happy to sit there - because I'm comfortable in myself. Although on a conscious level I'm not quite... for me, I thought gosh you're not quite there on an academic level - but not that they intimidated me. [It's just that] you can just....you can...sense it in their whole posture. And even for those that do look at you, you can sense the question behind their eyes when they look at you ... what are you doing here? Almost like ... because everyone seems to know everyone else, but if you don't know at least one person, you're on our own completely, there's nobody that tries to draw you in and ...and I wonder what I would be like, I wonder about myself. When I've done my GCM and when I've done my Masters, will I move around like these people? Will I move the way they move?

This poignant expression of habitus at play revealed Zoë's insight that, despite having developed an academic habitus, she did not quite have the set of required behaviours, the desired or legitimate ways of acting as a student. Her habitus did not enable her to fit in with the dominant habitus with the School of Management Studies. In using that phrase “Will I move around like these people?”, Zoë showed an implicit understanding that the acquisition of a particular kind of embodied capital enables the individual to enjoy a comfortable stance, the effortless “fitting in” with others of the same social space.

Summary

I have viewed the development of academic habitus through incidents of students playing the academic game which have taken place both inside and outside the classroom. Several accounts clearly showed the differences between working and middle class experiences. In two instances, these were viewed through a race lens. These particular racialised experiences were recounted through a plagiarism incident and the social, community events and networking activities that took place outside the classroom. Both

the concepts of habitus and capital have been useful in illustrating differences. In summary, those students from working class backgrounds showed through a lack of understanding of the rules – some of which were implicit – that their ability to play the academic game was hindered and that where their judgment was required, an avoidance or discomfort was apparent. There were similarities across both middle class and working class groups which included students' understanding of "their place" within the School of Management Studies. The legitimacy of academic habitus developed through the GCM programme is called into question through distinction between students on the various academic programmes at the School. The next section looks at students' habitus and capital and its interaction with the field of work.

Habitus, capital and the field of work

I also examined the shifts in reactions and expectations students encountered in their working environment from managers and peers as the year progressed. I paid particular attention to these reactions and attitudes because, as previously discussed, for working class students the impetus to return to study came predominately as a result of the pressure exerted by the field of work as opposed to middle class students' motivation which came from their social milieu. For working class and women students, experiences in the field of work as a result of their return to study were characterised by feelings of discomfort and a sense of not being valued.

Middle class women and working class students' accounts - similarities

The return to study as a mature adult is not undertaken lightly. Given the focus on updating skills and qualifications in the workplace, it might be expected that approval would easily be given to those individuals pursuing part-time studies in addition to their jobs. Working class student Sam however revealed a different picture:

Certain people within the organisation are asking me, 'Why, at your age, are you only realising to go back to school? Yet you've been working for more than twenty years and never realised it?' Then I ask the question, 'Why not?' ...there's nothing wrong with it. One of the BComm's, and they've come from various universities [...] they feel uncomfortable and as a result, it made me uncomfortable [...] I find myself in a situation where what I'm putting in (to the discussion) is questioned, and to a certain extent, my qualification is ridiculed [...] My boss doesn't have

anything against me in terms of my work. But I don't think I'm adding any value, I'm just doing what I'm supposed to be doing.

For Sam the non-acceptance in his workplace regarding his return to study had a demoralising effect. He felt a sense of not “adding any value” which opposed his early intention of using his skills to improve his organisation. The expected acceptance within their work environments was also not forthcoming for three women from both working class and middle class groups.

For Iris (African working class), the lack of acceptance was seen in interactions with her peers:

The way they (my colleagues) think, it's like I'm undermining them, or I'm now studying at BU, I think I'm smart and [...] I know this and that. But I've just refrained from coming forward to [...] giving ideas, sitting down and saying stuff [...] I don't go that extra mile anymore [...] It's just [...] a pity that within my work situation it was not conducive for me to apply it [my new knowledge] and be able to see that I've gained. If the environment for me was conducive I would say I've gained a lot [...] I have that feeling though [...] I don't want to go back to my work anymore. I need something more. I need to be somewhere else. I definitely don't need to be there.

Iris's story and its underlying message of a lack of acceptance found an echo in Zoë's (Indian middle class) experience:

Before I embarked on this course of study there was a lot of support and yes there was a sense of 'Why do you want to do it? You're quite capable, why do you want to bother? But go for it'. They're giving me this interest free loan [...] but it is so weird how, now that I'm into it [...] it's almost as if 'we didn't expect you to be (successful)'. It's not as supportive an environment anymore [...] But I think it's the fact that you now go to the financial director and you just check and say, 'Is this so and so?' and they actually realise you can see more than what the others can see now [...] It's had a strange kind of an effect (and) the only reason I am doing this is

to get a piece of paper. I made it clear to them ‘It’s for you that I’m getting this piece of paper’ because you won’t put me in a management position until somebody tells you, ‘Yes, she is capable’. Although you’re giving me the odd little projects and you can see I am capable, you still need a BU or a whatever to tell you, ‘You see, she is capable’ [...] I stopped coming up with my ideas because when I did, it was, ‘Oh, so you’re at the School of Management Studies now, so you know better?’ [...] The environment at work – it’s not somewhere where I’ll stay long. I’ll probably leave.

Sam, Zoë and Iris had decided at this point – about midway through the programme – that their work environment did not and perhaps would never provide the space for them to be the kind of committed, value-adding employees all clearly desired to be. The possibility of their leaving their organisations was unmistakable.

A further disturbing incident related to the field of work was reported by Lisa. Her feedback to me after a few months on the programme indicated how pleased senior management had become with her ability to contribute in the organisation. Subsequently she was asked by her immediate manager to produce an in-depth report on the department. Using her newly gained skills, Lisa undertook a ten-page critique of the company’s practices and processes within the Human Resources (HR) department which was not well received. Lisa (coloured middle class) recounted the situation with her manager:

It was terrible. It was absolutely terrible. It was awful I tell you. That man [the HR manager], he really... I couldn’t believe that he took such a turn for the worse after he asked me to analyse the HR department. Because you must remember the business was growing very fast. He was the only one in HR. And then he needed an assistant and then I came onboard and then just to smooth out... but obviously there were still loopholes. So I was afraid that he might give the wrong information to them [the HR administrators] and then I would be saddled with it and I would have to rectify all of them. I spoke to him and I said ‘Dawid, you know, this was what you asked me to do. I came to you and I showed you what I’m doing. But I was very happy to share it with you because I thought, okay,

fine. Now we can smooth out all the errors here and we can rectify and tighten up the loopholes'. So I decided, no man. I've had enough of this. Besides I have a hectic course coming up now (and) then it happened that he didn't want me to come to classes. So I missed four classes [...] I suffered from stress. I can't handle this and still do the course as well (and) then I resigned. I just left.

Lisa felt that by this time – which was about two-thirds of the way through the programme – that she had invested too much in the programme to have wasted a year. She was visibly upset and also confused about the reason the organisation had been less than supportive. This subsequently led to the student becoming less confident in her own abilities. What these stories illustrate is how students' changed behaviour and attitudes – a result of acquiring an academic habitus – caused a change in their general habitus. As a result of their return to study and participation on the GCM programme, their working lives were affected.

The lack of support and the discomfort felt by other individuals in the workplace was shown in Sam, Iris, Zoë and Lisa's experiences. What these incidents also revealed was a lack of what Bourdieu refers to as "capital conversion". As Webb et al. explain, forms of capital, in this case academic capital, are, "recognised as having value and they can be traded or exchanged for desired outcomes within their own field or with others" (2002 p109-110). The conversion is by no means straightforward or automatic. As can be seen in these working class men and women students' accounts, the process of conversion did not occur within the field of work.

Middle class men's accounts

Moves towards successful capital conversion were however seen in the middle class male students' accounts. Many managers continued to support these student through the academic year and in some cases became more aware of the student's potential. Greg (coloured middle class) received a positive response through being drawn into other aspects of the business:

I have been taken a little bit more seriously now, actually a lot more seriously. I understand what, I understand better what they talk about, you know, just a little bit ... It's more in depth now, let's put it that way.

Ryan (white middle class) recounted a similar situation:

When I sat in the Ops meeting today [...] with principal officers, trustees, execs, finance guys, people from every single aspect of the business [...] it gives you a lot more confidence. I mean, for the first time I was able to look at the income statement and actually see ‘Wow. I did that last week’ [...] and it actually means something and its fantastic [...] It’s made me more confident on a business level all round, in general.

Both Greg and Ryan had been drawn further into their organisations by their immediate managers. Through this involvement and the valuing of their input, these students showed signs of more self assurance and confidence. Through recently acquired skills and the accompanying level of confidence gained through the application of those skills, change was seen in these middle class men’s behaviour and attitudes in the field of work.

Summary

Where students were able to influence their immediate environment, it was clear that they fitted better within that environment as well. There was a further advantage to this situation in that it meant that the learning was being directly applied and both student and organisation were benefiting. The utilisation of skills and the acknowledged value of the individual were seen in the middle class men’s accounts. On the other hand, lack of support at work – from peers and managers and for whatever reason – was seen to result in reactions which were ultimately detrimental to both organisation and individual as is confirmed in the working class men and women’s stories.

The working environment proved a challenging one for working class men and women students. The middle class men’s accounts of inclusion are at odds with the examples of exclusion in the lives of the working class men and women students in the study. These experiences and their subsequent responses highlighted the need for and importance of support from all facets of the mature students’ lives. This is particularly important for working class students who have been primarily motivated to return to study through working environment influences. I now discuss the major aspect of the return to study on students’ lives through examining responses and reactions from significant others in students’ personal lives.

Habitus, capital and the social field

I present the reactions and shifts in expectations students encountered in their personal lives, from partners, family and their social circle and discuss what occurred in these relationships as the year progressed. At the start of the academic year students had anticipated some level of personal sacrifice due to their return to study. These concerns highlighted the difference between studying after school as a young adult with relatively few responsibilities and returning to study as a mature person. Many students had discussed with their partners what was required from the relationship in terms of support to ensure success in their studies. In general, support was expected from several quarters: the home environment – from partners and children; the work environment – from colleagues and management; and the wider personal environment – from family and friends.

Reactions and responses from partners

The return to study and its accompanying role of student created an additional role in the already busy lives of these working students. This played itself out in various ways in the close relationships nine students had with their foremost significant other – their partners. The reactions and expectations expressed by partners were solicited in interviews during the academic year. These reactions ranged from ongoing support which led to improved relationships and reduced support leading to tensions arising in the relationship as a direct result of the student not being available or behaving differently. The notion of emotional capital is useful to the discussion at this point. Even though the majority of the research where the concept is used has focused on mothers and their children, I believe it can be applied to this scenario. Drawing on Nowotny (1981), Reay explains that emotional capital, “is generally confined within the bounds of affective relationships of family and friends and encompasses the emotional resources you hand on to those you care about” (2005 p60). Essentially what those students in relationships sought from their significant other, their partner, was emotional capital. This resource, as outlined by Allatt (1993) consists of, “emotionally valued assets and skills, love and affection, expenditure of time, attention, care and concern” (Reay 2005 p61).

Middle class and working class accounts - differences

For middle class women, Dee and Zoë, the support from their partners was shown in their ongoing concern and interest:

I would come home after 10 o'clock and we would chat about what I did in the lecture because he just started his own business. So it's been brilliant to have a little feedback session (when) I get home [...] You're not going to enjoy this course because it's too difficult to not have the support [...] If you don't have those support systems, don't even attempt doing this. You are going to become frustrated and you will not enjoy this experience and that's not what it's about. It's about learning, but also enjoying the experience. (Dee)

For Zoë, the level of support and encouragement received from her husband was beyond her expectations.

Before I write a test, there's a little text message that comes through – just encouragement, really solid support. That surprised me somewhat. It really surprised me. I knew he would be supportive but not to the extent that he remembers when I'm doing what I'm doing [...] I must take my hat off to him, I really must [...] He's totally there and aware of what and when and so on. He gets on well with the group. He met the group (who say) 'He's one of us. He's one of the students'.

Both middle class women reported that their partners had made an additional effort in becoming involved during their year of study. Their partners had met with Zoë and Dee's group members and had participated in the social programmes organised by the class. Dee believed her partner's continuing involvement was vital to ensuring her success in the academic programme. What Dee's extract highlights is that the successful return to study as a mature adult requires a supportive environment. I would further argue that these levels of support have a positive influence on the self esteem and confidence levels of these women.

For working class students Jade and Neil, their success on the GCM programme came about at some personal cost. When Jade received several really good course results, she communicated this to her husband, Dale:

His response to me was, 'I hope they don't think that I'm going to get this kind of marks [he had applied to the School for the following year]. So don't expect this from me because I'll never be able to live up to these kinds of expectations'. Immediately that ruffled my feathers. I'm like 'Gee, thank you for the support! I'll make sure to get bad marks next time, so that you can look better'. He said to me, 'Why are you so sensitive? I was just kidding'. I knew [...] it was not a joke. It's obviously a concern of his [...] I actually had an argument with him about it because I just felt it was, it was not called for. But it was such a man and a Dale thing to do so I should have expected it...

Here, as noted earlier in the discussion on the analytical framework, we see an example of the strain the academic experience caused in Jade's personal relationship. Her hard work and commitment to achieving good results was not well received by her partner and tension was revealed in her relationship. For Neil, the time spent away from his partner also caused a problem:

We don't go out that much, it's been a big adjustment [...] All the time that I can spare in terms of between work and GCM so that means obviously the time that I spend with my fiancé is getting reduced significantly. I don't think she's entirely happy with the lack of attention. [...] We've had our arguments about other things and it all relates back to the fact that we're not spending enough time together. But we don't have relationship problems or anything. I think we're doing okay. She's very understanding and more so ever since the beginning of the second term. I think the first term was like a big shock because we thought we'd be able to fit some time in to have some fun and go out to a movie or go to a club and see some friends or have dinners at home.

Later he spoke about how pressured he felt:

Things were totally different from the last years that we had together. Nadia and myself we use to spend time out there (and) in the time that we've been together, really been together, a lot of her social life she had

to sacrifice for me to be able to be here. So I feel for her and in spite of all my protestations – go, be – she stayed. I can't imagine what it must've been like for her. Only people who go through certain things will know what that's like [...] I'd apologise to her. (It) was not the sort of relationship we ever had and I didn't want it to turn in to that. This is the reason why I felt so pressurised.

The juggling of his roles – at work, at university and at home – proved to be a challenge for this mature student. Personal relationships require time and, as is seen in Neil's case, this was something he had little of. Higher levels of stress are borne by students in relationships that are not fully functional. An occurrence in his personal life also had a tremendous impact on another working class student, Sam:

My wife has been diagnosed with cancer. I've got three kids. I had to run and everything [...] When you write a test you need to get your two leave days and everything like that [...] I could only get one because of this particular situation (and) I was trying to make myself indispensable in the whole process and it's hard. It's *hard*. And you have to contend with a sick wife who's actually diagnosed with cancer and she's actually going through hell [...]. It was a bit of a setback but she's accepted it. We've accepted it. It's just part of those things in life that we have to contend (with). She has been very supportive from the onset and I remember when I made the decision that I need to register, I need to sort of acquire more skills and a qualification. And she said 'Ja, go for it', (but) my marks as well have been dropping. All those kind of things are playing on my confidence. You start losing confidence in yourself or whatever. I said to my wife, 'You know what? This is happening. I was last in the class and I couldn't believe it'. I never thought in my life that's going to happen.

In this account, Sam showed that having little or no emotional resource to call upon to support him through his educational process, in fact having to provide an emotional resource to his wife – clearly a priority – had an immediate impact on his ability to fully engage with his studies. The eventual outcome of this lack of emotional capital was failure in some of his courses.

Summary

Differences of support and encouragement from their significant others were evident in the working class and middle class experiences. The experiences of working class students show how pursuing a higher education qualification caused tension and involved sacrifice – by themselves and, in Neil's and Sam's examples, their partners. The accounts revealed a sense of how risky and insecure working class students' lives could become as a result of the academic experience and also how the investment in the academic experience, the decision to acquire academic capital, impinged on their personal lives. For middle class students, emotional capital was easily forthcoming from their partners. The involvement and interest of their significant others had a positive impact on both their relationships and self-esteem and linked to their success within the academic environment. Other sources of emotional capital were expected from students' wider personal environment that is their immediate relatives and friends – and it is this that I turn the discussion to next.

Reactions and responses from parents

The gaining of approval from immediate relatives especially parents was evident in seven of the students' accounts. Even though the students have carved their own lives as mature adults, parental interest was relatively high. The stories of the working class students were in marked contrast to the accounts of the middle class students.

Middle class and working class accounts – differences

In the first interview, working class student Iris told me that her parents who lived in another city wanted her to stop studying and save money, essentially to contribute to the family home along with her siblings. It was clear she felt a level of resentment at having to contribute. She confided:

We have to. We feel forced to do it. There is nothing wrong with helping your parents, but it not something I want to do with my kids [...] They must help me when they can [...] I don't want a battle like that [...]. You feel so guilty that you would rather leave your own stuff...and help [...] Sometimes when you say you don't have money, they don't understand because you are in the city and you're working. How do you not have money?

Her mom on a visit told her, “You are doing a lot of things, my child and you are one and maybe (you should) not study, just work.” Later she told me: “They don’t even get excited, [...] they say, ‘You will get a better job and then you can do this and that [in the home]’.” The lack of encouragement from her parents regarding her studies was evident in Iris’s account. The absence of support from these significant others in her life caused frustration and despondency in the student. Approval from parents was also sought by other working class women in the study. For independent Tina, her mother’s opinion still mattered:

I also wanted to prove to my mom ‘Listen here, I’m not... I’m not dumb. I can actually do this [...] Even though they don’t understand the context and the set-up here [...] I said its going okay and I’m passing [...] What I saw as huge achievements they wouldn’t understand.

In Tina’s extract her parents’ unfamiliarity of the higher education field and her desire for parental approval were both strongly evident. She was not able to draw on prior experience of the field from her parents as they did not possess this particular form of cultural capital. As she was aware of this, Tina compensated for this lack of capital by providing only brief feedback to her parents in terms of her achievements. However gaining their approval was still paramount and thus presented a dilemma for her. For working class student Jade, it was her mother who expected her to excel at whatever task she undertook. She explained how pressurised she felt academically:

My brothers and sisters often say I am my mother’s favourite [...] but I don’t think it’s that. They just don’t realise how much pressure there is on me [...] I mean my mother’s definitely proud of all of us for who we are. We’re not all perfect (but) there’s something special about each one of my brothers and sisters [...] But for me, I think it’s the fact that I have to succeed and I have to be that part of what my mother wanted [in her own life]. What I am now.....

In Jade’s story we see how the aspirations of her mother, perhaps in unresolved desires, have transferred themselves to her daughter. This resulted in a tremendous amount of pressure being brought to bear on Jade throughout her life but especially during this

academic experience as she would be the first in the family to graduate from university. Here we see an example of class habitus in contradiction with itself – attaining academic capital is linked to success but also takes the person away from the familiar. No-one else in Jade’s family had ever attended university.

For middle class student Greg, the level of parental interest was also high:

From time to time I’ll hear my father say ‘He’s studying now. He’s at the School of Management Studies’ [...] I think they’re probably pretty proud. I didn’t do anything at school and now I’m actually doing something here and I’m actually doing quite well. I suppose there’s a degree of satisfaction.

Within his middle class home, the expectation had always existed that Greg and his siblings would pursue higher education. Even after his failed first attempt immediately after school, this expectation continued. Although his higher education experience had been delayed, Greg’s father’s public acknowledgment to others that his son was in the process of acquiring a form of additional capital is seen as an indicator of his pride. Although it may be argued that Jade’s mother also feels this sense of pride and satisfaction, the result is that the student felt parental pressure and sibling displeasure towards her academic achievement.

In this section on parental reactions as reported by the students, the working class and middle class experiences were markedly different. Lack of support, lack of understanding of the higher education field, and parental and familial pressure underpinned the working class accounts. For the middle class student, it was a sense of pride and satisfaction that pervaded.

Reactions and responses from the social circle

In understanding the effect the higher education experience had on the lives of these students, it was vital to uncover how their relationships with friends or their social circle had changed. Again, differences between working class and middle class students were evident.

Middle class and working class accounts – differences

For middle class students, their return to study enabled a better fit within their social milieu. Friends of the middle class students typically had prior experience of the higher education environment and were therefore familiar with all its demands. As Nick reported of his social circle:

They're all professional people, so they know what it's like [...] They will always ask 'How's the course going?', 'What are you busy with now?' – so (they are) very supportive.

Dee also reported high levels of recognition from her circle of friends:

Friends say they're excited about what I'm doing... They knew what I was going through, some of them have studied as well so to them all the excitement and the fears and the frustration – they could definitely relate to it.

Acceptance and reinforcement of the value of higher education and academic capital are found in these middle class accounts. Familiarity with the higher education field also enables friends not only to provide middle class students with adequate levels of support but also reassurance in terms of its challenges.

For working class students, the transition to a mature student identity came at some cost. Her relationships with friends had changed completely according to Iris:

It's not like I don't want to see my friends anymore or I don't want to be involved in anything else. I still want to [but I don't have the time]. It's only a year. It's just one year's sacrifice [...] My friends are complaining, 'We don't get to see you anymore because you are always at the School'.

For Neil and Sam, returning to study at a higher education institution was not something to be open about or shared with friends. As Neil reported:

I try as far as possible when I'm seeing my friends not to talk about studying too much because you can just start blurting out everything and make the conversation really boring.

Neil's words point to issues of legitimacy. It was clear he did not feel a confidence in sharing what he had learnt. An awkwardness crept into his relationship with his social circle. He was not able to disclose his academic habitus in any confident way. Instead of the experience bringing him closer to his social circle, as was found in the middle class accounts, the higher education experience appeared to be taking him further away from them. Sam, on the other hand, took this lack of disclosure to the extreme and concealed his studying from his friends. He tried explaining his feelings to me:

My friends don't even know that I'm studying. I just feel it's my own thing. I don't have to tell them. [When quizzed by friends regarding his absence, he says]: I don't go and say, 'Listen here, I'm studying man'. Sometimes I lie to them. To be honest with you [I say to them] 'You know what? There was something at work, man. I had to do this'. I don't know ... for some strange reasons, I just don't feel comfortable. Maybe it's me. I just don't feel comfortable to speak about it. I feel it's my personal thing [...] I think I will tell them one day when I pass (but) for now, I feel it's my family's thing. It's for those close around me who actually need to know.

I argue that not being vocal about their accomplishments was an attempt by Neil and Sam to create less distance between themselves and their friends. The non-disclosure of this significant experience in their lives created a disjuncture between themselves and their social circle. This is in contrast to the middle class accounts of Nick and Dee's social circle responses where recognition and support were apparent.

Summary

In this section on students' wider personal environment is where reactions and responses from both parents and the social circle were presented. The divide between working class and middle class experiences were evident. The misalignment between the field of higher education, the emergent academic habitus and the students' social milieu was seen in the working class accounts of Iris, Neil, Tina, Jade and Sam. This misalignment gave rise to feelings of distance, discomfort and awkwardness. The differences between these reactions and experiences and those of the middle class students – where interest, encouragement, acceptance and support which stemmed from familiarity with the higher education field as well, were high – point us to the sacrifice that working class students

ultimately make in their personal lives when returning to study.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have presented student experiences during the year of study, particularly how students acknowledged and played the academic game, both inside and outside the classroom. Strategy in terms of playing the game differed along class trajectory, with some aspects viewed through a racial lens. The academic experience caused changes to the student both in terms of their current level of capital and their habitus. Examples of how the “changed” student, that is, with the addition of an academic habitus, was received within their work environments showed marked contrasts between women, working class men and middle class men in the study. For middle class students the responses were positive, supportive and encouraging. For working class men and women students, discomfort, withdrawal and feelings of being pressurised were commonplace. During the year of the students’ return to study, the higher education experience was an unequal event for students across class and gender when coupled with race. Working class students had to draw upon more of their inner resources to cope with the additional challenges they experienced. For middle class students, the levels of emotional capital they received from their social milieu were high enabling them to deal confidently with the challenges of returning to study. In the next chapter I discuss the consequences and effects of the return to study on the lives of the students. I interviewed students six months after the completion of the GCM programme and discussed their reflections on the academic experience.

CHAPTER SEVEN

EFFECTS AND CONSEQUENCES

This chapter provides reflective insight into the consequences and effects of a higher educational experience on the subsequent lives of a group of non-degreed mature students. I continue to use the four main categories described in the analytical framework and look at these consequences and effects through these categories. I revisit the reasons students returned to study (capital acquisition); review how students played the academic game (academic habitus development); examine students' relationships in the working environment (habitus, capital and the field of work); and finally look at the consequences of the year of study on their personal relationships (habitus, capital and the social field).

As discussed in chapter five, the reason both working class and middle class students returned to study was to acquire academic capital, a form of cultural capital. Chapter six looked at playing the academic game and the effects of the higher education experience on the lives of students during the year of study. I provided examples of how middle class students began to increase their value in the working environment – that is they successfully began forms of capital conversion – as well as starting to improve relationships with significant others in their lives.

For working class, and particularly working class women students in the study, the process of acquiring academic capital was not as smooth. The students' experiences in the field of work were characterised by a lack of acknowledgment and typically resulted in the affected individuals' withdrawal from and reduced participation in their organisation's activities. The personal relationships of working class students were tested. Themes that emerged were those of tension, distance and discomfort.

In my final interview with each of them, six months after the conclusion of the GCM programme, I asked students about the consequences and impact of the educational experience. I begin my examination of these consequences and effects by revisiting students' reasons for returning to study.

Capital acquisition

As previously discussed, mature students in the study returned to study to acquire an academic qualification or academic capital. Identifying the reasons for their application to higher education was central to understanding the experiences of individual students and trends across class emerged. Differences showed in aspects of gender and race. Investment in the game – both financially and personally – was seen from students across both classes. Investment in the game or *illusio* is central to the sense of worth afforded to the academic experience by mature students.

I now present the effects and consequences of gaining academic capital through a class and gender lens. I show these differences through three main areas: becoming an alumnus, graduation, and *illusio*.

Becoming an alumnus

Middle class and working class accounts - differences

For both middle class and working class students, the choice of institution itself was significant across all classes. The Bay University, and in particular the reputation of its School of Management Studies, was seen by the students as an enhancement of their academic acquisition as both are holders of symbolic capital. It was significantly felt by particularly working class students that being a graduate of the institution would give added prestige to their academic achievement. This was clearly illustrated in Sam's (African working class) example:

I'm going to be an alumni of BU! You're going to get all these emails coming from BU and [be told that] this and this is happening there. I invested my money there and I'm looking forward to the graduation. [...]
]It's an exciting moment, I can tell you. It's an exciting moment.

Through Sam's comments the importance for the students of the institution itself can be gathered. His desire to show to others that he was soon to be a graduate from this particular institution was clearly apparent. This points to how academic capital or objectified cultural capital can be converted into other forms of capital, in this case, social capital.

Graduation

Middle class and working class accounts – similarities and differences

The gaining of a formal academic qualification at a higher education institution typically results in a graduation ceremony and GCM graduates are all publicly acknowledged in this way by the BU. I was interested in unpacking students' feelings towards both successful completion of the academic programme and towards the graduation ceremony itself as the entire research cohort would be graduating for the first time and for many students, they would also be the first within their families to graduate from university. Graduation was seen as a high point of the students' year as is confirmed by student comments below:

I'm quite excited to be quite honest. It might only be a certificate, but for me I mean, it's the first time [...] I didn't complete my other courses, so it's the first time (and) I like the fact that everybody's going to be there – your GCM, your PD and your Masters. So nobody's left out and I like that. (Nick coloured middle class)

This is my graduation. I worked hard. I got good marks. Let me go and enjoy this. [...] I'm excited about it. It's nearing the time, and I'm excited and I'm thinking 'You should do this. You should enjoy it. It's worth it'. (Jade coloured working class)

Nick wanted to be part of the recognition afforded to all students of the School of Management Studies and felt that graduation was a truly inclusive event in that all students regardless of the status of the academic programme were afforded an opportunity to be acknowledged on the podium at the ceremony. Jade explained how graduation represented public success of her academic year. The excitement of graduation and the value of the academic qualification were not shared by all students however.

White middle class student Doug had no intention of attending the graduation ceremony. He boldly stated:

It wasn't a course that you graduated. I feel they do it a lot for people who aren't going to study further than GCM, you see? So they get their

opportunity to graduate [...] and they actually just do it for the GCM guys because it's not an official graduation for GCM. I'm telling you now – for Masters, the family will be (there), everybody will be. Masters is big!

In Doug's view the GCM was not a "proper" academic qualification. He referred to the lack of capping students when they were awarded their certificates as an example of why he had developed this opinion. In his account he also differentiated himself from the students who were not going to study further through expressing his own desire to pursue further academic studies at the institution, even though he had not applied to either the PD or the Masters programmes at the School. Implicit in his statements was the understanding that although academic capital had been acquired, it was either not recognised appropriately by the higher education institution or that he himself did not distinguish its value. What Doug's view does raise is the value of the academic qualification, and the perceived worth of the GCM as academic capital which I will pursue in the next section on academic habitus development. However, what can also be seen in this extract is the notion of differentiation. Bourdieu notes that habitus implies a, "sense of one's place' but also a 'sense of the place of others'" (1989a p19). For Doug, the "place of others" is at the graduation ceremony. *Illusio* is also present here – what value the student himself accorded the qualification.

Illusio

When asked what he felt had been achieved from his year, Doug replied:

GCM was perfect because it's a year and it's safe. It didn't challenge me. I'll be straight. It didn't challenge me. I enjoy a challenge. But it didn't challenge me academically. [...] I didn't apply myself 100% to the academic side of it. [...] but I learnt a lot, I mean, it was my first inter-racial education, you see? So there was a lot that I learnt [...] and it definitely answered my question(s) that I wanted to number one, study further and number two, that I can do it. I do have the discipline and the ability to do it, and [three] that it's confirmed the line of work I'm in is what I want to do.

This middle class student's investment in the game is shown in how he viewed the GCM programme. What was at stake for Doug was how the academic programme could be

used as a benchmark in which to gauge whether he could study as a mature adult, that he was ready (in his opinion) to engage in more advanced study and that his chosen career path was the correct one. I would argue that *illusio*, in this instance, was shown at a very superficial level if at all. If “belief is ...an inherent part of belonging to a field”, one could make the case that while this student may feel a sense of belonging to the field, he did not feel that same sense of value towards the GCM programme (Bourdieu 1990a p67).

In contrast, working class student Sam spoke about how, as a result of successful completion of his qualification, he felt connected to the School of Management Studies – in essence he expressed both a sense of value and interest in the field and a desire for ongoing institutionalised cultural capital:

It's an achievement, ja. It is an achievement. Don't underestimate it [...] You feel very emotional. I just want to describe (it). You feel you're part of an institution now [...] People love to be in the library here. And I'm starting to get that urge to be part of the library, or to be part of doing something else [...] You just want to be part of the institution. And I've seen many people who have been around here very long and I think I spoke to one gentleman who said he started with GCM in 1982 or 83, something like that, sometime back. And he finished his Masters about three years back. And he still comes here on Saturdays just to check out the magazines. He feels that he's part of the institution [...] It's part of his connection. He doesn't want to lose his connection, which is very exciting, and something that going forward, I think I want to be part of.

Another aspect that is raised in Sam's extract is how his habitus had altered through being part of the higher education field. His statement that, “I'm starting to get that urge, to be part of the library” speaks volumes about his desire to maintain his relationship with the field.

Capital acquisition and gender

For the seven women students in the study, credibility or an increase in credibility was a prime motivator for their return to study. Women students sought to “prove” their capabilities to themselves and significant others in their lives. Increasing their levels of

confidence was another primary factor for women. While the discussion thus far has focused on capital acquisition and the potential for capital conversion, I return to Bourdieu's notion of embodied cultural capital. Sara's (Indian working class) explanation of what this means in practice is useful:

Over the years I had all the potential. I had what it took to get to where [I am now] but I had nothing on paper to say 'You know what? You've gone [to an academic institution]. You can' and that for me is like [...] it is something somebody can never take away from me. Do you know? That education thing it is something that no matter where I go in my life or whatever, you can strip me of my clothing, you can strip me of my whatever, my car, whatever. But that education you can never strip me of.

From Sara's description of what the acquisition of academic capital means for her, it is apparent that the formal qualification while important and tangible, had translated into something intangible and personal. As Bourdieu explains, embodied capital converts into an integral part of the person – their habitus. By her own admission, Sara's behaviours, attitudes and perceptions had changed during her year of study. The educational event had impacted upon her habitus.

Summary

In reviewing the reasons for mature students to return to study, I have examined the feelings regarding what students perceived to be acquired through this experience. These interpretations differed mainly across class, with aspects of gender, but evidence is presented throughout this chapter that transformation or reproduction was evident in all students' behaviour, attitudes and perceptions. The resultant changes, even the examples of reinforcement show the relationship between capital acquisition and individual habitus in that through the gaining of academic capital, students' general habitus had been affected. Later in the chapter I discuss whether many of the reasons students returned to study – career development for example – were realised and also how the changes to their habitus as a result of their higher education experience affected students' relationships in their work and social environments. I now turn to discussing how students' strategy, essentially how they understood and played the academic game, affected the development of their academic habitus.

Academic habitus development

In the previous chapters I have discussed students' feelings with regards to returning to study and highlighted the concerns and apprehension regarding academic challenges felt by working class students and the relative level of comfort and fit anticipated by middle class students. In chapter six I argued that those students with an inadequate or poor grasp of the rules of the academic game would be hampered in their efforts to succeed. I presented several examples from working class students to show how a poor grasp of the rules affected their ability to operate strategically. Together with a lack of appropriate academic habitus, this led to feelings of discomfort and uncertainty especially when judgement of a situation was required as seen in the group work decision making process. In this final section on academic habitus development, students' reflective insight is grouped around three particular areas – their induction into the higher education field; issues of mature studentship; and their views regarding further study.

Induction into the higher education field

Middle class and working class accounts - differences

The development of students' academic habitus takes place through the induction or socialisation into the higher education field. Having returned to study after a lengthy period away from the learning environment, it was pertinent to explore students' understanding of the academic induction process. Reflecting on the past year of study Sam (African working class) explained:

We're coming from diverse backgrounds [...] You tend to understand things broadly because of that – the contribution that is actually happening in class here. That was an education in itself [...] When you are in the class, you sort of get manufactured [...] You go through that process and I can tell you it's a growing process [...] It can be a very personal process as well. It can be a very ugly process as well. It has the potential of many dynamics, many things and we just have to manage ourselves in the process and just get out of there.

The change to individual perceptions and attitudes as a direct result of the education experience was evident. Besides an interesting description on the educational process by Sam, through his comment “we just have to manage ourselves in the process and just get out of there” we see how mature working class individuals make an effort – or have to

make an effort – to hold on to their sense of identity through their encounter with the higher education field. The interaction between habitus and field is also highlighted in a contrasting account for middle class student Dee. Her description of what being a student meant for her illustrates:

It gave back my identity [...] Not that I lost my identity but I was Mrs Smith and mommy and even my student number is on my maiden name [...] Because I became Dee Harvey again for here. It was me that's being judged. It's *me* studying at night. *Me* writing that exam. *Me* interacting with all these people. And I'm a *student!* It's not my company; it's not my family. It's me. And it was very nice on a completely selfish [level]. It's selfish whichever way you want to look at it. It was something for me.

In this extract we get an insight into how the development of an academic habitus enabled Dee to get a sense of independence and achievement. For Dee the return to study became a way of asserting her identity as opposed to Sam's struggle to hold onto his. Reay argues that, "while middle-class mature students can talk easily in terms of becoming "the real me" through higher education, such ways of relating to higher education are far more difficult for the working-class students" (2001 p337).

A reflective insight from white middle class student Ryan allowed for both acknowledgement of the value of the GCM and an understanding of the higher education induction process. He was able to articulate the specific aspects of the GCM programme he believed he had benefited from:

I felt 'Damn, I should have done Masters' And it frustrated me during the course and I got impatient and I wanted to get GCM behind me and I wanted to go onto the Masters. [...] But having started the Masters, the GCM did lay a very nice foundation in terms of lots of things. So in hindsight it was definitely worth it [...] It just lets you find your feet in terms of how to reference something, basically how to submit something. It gives you a basic, nice grounding. It allows you to feel comfortable in the academic world.

While both Sam and Ryan were anxious to finish the GCM programme, for one student it

was the opportunity to progress to a more challenging academic setting and for the other, it was an end to coping with the demands and challenges of developing an academic habitus. For Ryan, the GCM programme allowed him an opportunity to gain an academic habitus that provided a basis for success and he was able to, in his words, “hit the ground running” when he started the demanding Masters programme.

In a reflective moment Greg (coloured middle class) disclosed that:

People say I’m using very big words [...] I even thought about it. I thought after I was talking. People are just sitting there and looking at me and then I actually realised what I was doing and I thought to myself, ‘Oops, is this Greg, or is this another guy?’.

In Greg’s extract signs of a change in habitus were evident and he was beginning to be taken more seriously by others. As a result of feedback, he was also able to notice that these changes to his habitus as a result of the higher education experience are taking place. However there were also other aspects to the interaction between the higher education and the development of an academic habitus. It was a challenge to interpret Tina’s (white working class) view on this interaction:

It was a completely superficial life that we led last year. It was completely superficial. It was your little world that you lived in. Everything surrounding was has about your studies and about this and about that and exams and assignments and as soon as that superficial was taken away, your *real* life actually emerged again.

Bourdieu notes that, “one only has to suspend the commitment to the game that is implied in the feel for the game in order to reduce the world, and the actions performed in it, to absurdity, and to bring up questions about the meaning of the world” (1990a p66-67). This appears to have happened in Tina’s case where she interpreted the higher education experience as fake or not real and as a part of her life that was separate to the rest of her life. What this view also raises is the lack of an internalised set of behaviours. It appears that Tina’s overall habitus had not been affected by the higher education experience. Acquiring academic habitus appeared to be temporary in her case.

Summary

The transformational power of the educational process was evident in the majority of these student experiences, but particularly for middle class students. When contrasting Sam's account with Ryan's, we see Ryan was able "to feel comfortable" in the academic setting while for the working class student, there was talk of "being manufactured" with Sam alluding to the potential for both good and bad outcomes in the experience. When contrasting Sam's "holding onto to his sense of identity" with Dee's perceived "return to her identity", a stark contrast is shown between working class and middle class experiences. Through the working class examples, induction into the higher education field was viewed as "an ugly process", but also as temporary and superficial showing how, for working class students, there is no simple blending of the academic habitus with the general habitus.

Mature studentship

Middle class and working class accounts - differences

Mature students are unlike traditional students in that they bring to the learning environment a host of past experiences which they draw upon and which provides the lens for mediating their learning. This was clearly expressed in the middle class students' accounts. As Ryan (white middle class) explained:

You want people to have work experience when they come in [...] Studying when I was 20 didn't work. Now it's worked much better because [...] It's your perspective on everything really.

Zoë (Indian middle class) related how her experience had aided her learning:

It was because I had all that experience that I fared so well. (I had) gone through different kinds of scenarios at work, different workplaces, and working with different kinds of employees and colleagues. So I could bring all that experience into the class and relate to what was being said.

What these students acknowledged was how their life and work experiences had impacted positively on their learning. They were able to connect easily with the higher education environment and assimilate new concepts. This enabled particularly middle class students to feel a sense of ease within the classroom environment. But getting

started again was problematic for four women students across all classes. Dee (coloured middle class) explained the challenges of returning to study after a lengthy period away from academia:

It's tough learning to study. People don't tell you that [...] How do you start studying? I stared up at the ceiling, I went for walk and eventually I sat (and) started reading. You actually have to pull back those reins because it's difficult to start studying after a long time. I didn't know where to start. I didn't know what to do. I phoned a buddy but that didn't help. You sit there. You're on your own.

In Dee's account the reality of what it means to be a mature student starting over was revealed. Out of practice with learning, there are real challenges for mature students in reconnecting with educational demands. But although this middle class student felt out of touch with how to study, she did not experience a lack of self-belief, later adding in the interview:

I'm in that mode now, I've learned this little trick on how to concentrate and how to time out and how to come back to your work again and be able to [concentrate]. I'm going to be working very hard and make sure that I maintain my high level of achievement.

The three working class women students coped with the apprehension and concerns regarding their return to study in a number of ways as Sara, Iris and Tina explained:

Initially when I got there I was very, very apprehensive...it was always an issue for me, how I was going to cope (but) there was always somebody in the class that needed help, like I needed help...You weren't alone. (Sara)

At the beginning I wasn't really comfortable...I was thrown in the deep end here. I had to really learn to swim. That is how I felt. But as time went on...we coped. We coped. (Iris)

It was a challenge and I'm glad I stood up to the challenge. It took a lot out of me but I stood up to the challenge and I beat it down. (Tina)

These working class extracts are littered with words such as “apprehension” “coping” and “challenge”. For Sara and Iris it was apparent that they looked to other members in the class to provide them with a feeling of safety. In Tina’s account, the academic process was seen as a challenge and something she had to “beat down” or conquer and she appeared to have coped by drawing on inner reserves.

Summary

The middle class students referred to in this section focus on the importance of life and work experience in making a success of the academic experience. Their experiences aided their learning, helping them to relate to the material and assimilate new concepts. The one middle class student who discussed the challenges of returning to study quickly learnt to “get into the mode” and succeed academically. For working class women students the process of gaining an academic qualification was fraught with apprehension and discomfort. In their extracts, there is a sense of these students feeling overwhelmed. Two of them looked to other students within the GCM programme to help deal with their anxieties and provide some level of emotional capital. The other working class student saw the higher education experience as a challenge to be confronted independently.

Interaction with other students in the School

Middle class and working class accounts - similarities

As discussed in the previous chapter, issues of differentiation were seen between students on the various programmes at the School. Even the graduation ceremony had its detractions as Jade (coloured working class) observed:

I felt a real step child of the School. Because there was this Masters party and nothing for us [...] We have to pick up our gowns [at the main campus]. The Masters go pick up their gowns [at the School].

In this example GCM students observed how various groups of students were treated differently at the School. This differentiation leads to perceptions that GCM students are not equally valued by the field. Coupled with earlier comments regarding feelings of disconnect with other students – where Tina (white working class) spoke about feeling like “orphans of the School”, Greg’s (coloured middle class) reference to ‘invisible boundaries between students’ and Zoë’s (Indian middle class) sense of discomfort at a School event – it may be concluded that these observations were not merely

observations, but a reality for these students.

Further study

Middle class and working class accounts - differences

As Bourdieu notes, “the field is also a *field of struggle*” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992 p101 original emphasis). This is observed clearly in the discussion that follows. The feel for the academic game came sharply into play around the issue of further study – that is those students who considered enrolling on the postgraduate diploma or the Masters programme. Because the GCM is part of a suite of academic programmes at the School of Management Studies and it is also the entry-level programme, students often view the GCM as the start of their academic journey. Zoë (Indian middle class) recounted how this was observed amongst class members:

Whilst you’re on the GCM, it’s just an automatic thought almost that you have to do the Masters.

This statement showed how the notion of further study was ingrained in the students’ consciousness throughout their year of study. This ensured that some form of expectation arose within the student group that individuals were encouraged to study further. The expected academic progression was also visible in the School’s literature which labelled the GCM programme as the bridging course to the Masters. Five students in the research cohort had applied for acceptance into either the PD or Masters programmes. Three working class students and one middle class student that had applied to the Postgraduate programme had not been accepted. I was first made aware of the situation by the working class students. The middle class student made a brief reference to the lack of acceptance by saying, “I was just a bit upset.” The three working class students responded to the refusal in particular ways:

That selection process was badly skewed. Not one of the GCM students got into anything except Ryan. *Don’t* tell people once you’ve completed GCM you can get automatic entrance [into other academic programmes]. It’s not automatic (and) they need to say that, but that’s not what they were saying. (Sara Indian working class)

They said I will have a problem with Accounting and Quantitative Methodologies [...] I'm going to re-apply to the PD [...] I must come back for the PD. There has to be a way. (Iris African working class)

We might not have been told [explicitly] but the implication was – it's a gradual move to PD [...] Many people wrote the test and never made it. And people were questioning the whole 'marketing exercise' around GCM because it was seen as a gradual process from GCM to there. In fact somebody said irrespective of your results, you've sort of qualified and the impression was created that if you wrote those [admission] tests in GCM, then it might not be necessary for you to write the same again. Some of us wanted to go to PD, so many people said yes [to the test]. They came to GCM hoping that when they finish GCM it's a natural progression to PD. And it turned out to be a surprise. (Sam African working class)

I argue that the disjuncture between expectation and reality points to both a lack of judgement and an academic habitus that showed an inability to play the academic game. The criteria for entrance into both PD and Masters programmes are clear. Both programmes require an undergraduate degree as part of their entrance criteria and while the GCM may be used as an equivalent, this is only when the GCM graduate achieves above average academic results. While this aspect is not made explicit to students, the tacit understanding is that students would be able to gauge or judge their own level of academic competence and make the decision accordingly.

Part of the justification for this lack of articulation for GCM students wishing to progress to other programmes may be attributed to knowing the rules of the game, that is, it is assumed that students who have struggled with the academic demands of the GCM would be able recognise their inability to cope with the academic complexities on either of the more advanced programmes. Furthermore accepting academically weak students into these programmes would serve no purpose other than to set those students up for failure. As part of the application process to the PD and Masters programmes all applicants, including GCM graduates, are required to complete admissions tests for literacy and numeracy and obtain a benchmark score. Failure to do this renders the student unsuitable for either of the programmes.

What is seen in these extracts from unsuccessful GCM student applicants was that despite their acknowledged struggle to cope with the challenges of the academic demands of the GCM, they still retained an expectation of acceptance into a higher level programme. I argue that this is a result of the lack of appropriate behaviours and attitudes developed as a result of exposure to this higher education experience. Through the disjuncture between the students' academic habitus and the field, the students' ability to play the game was exposed. These students showed through their comments an inability to "read the game". In Bourdieu's terms their lack of academic tokens also directly affected their entry into the next level of the game. In Iris's extract she acknowledged the lack of appropriate tokens and spoke of addressing that gap so that she could re-apply at a later stage.

Through viewing middle class students' opinions regarding further study it was possible to get additional insight into the working class feelings: As students explained:

Whilst I was on GCM, I thought 'Okay, the next step would be [the Masters]. It was almost like you need to do Masters to get somewhere... but I've just used GCM and I just realised that what we covered in GCM works out there. You just need to go and apply. I knew what I was getting, whilst I was getting it, was solid, workable information [...] If I do the Masters (now) I don't know for what reasons it will be [...] Probably if I want to get into a really high profile position where I feel that a Masters qualification will somehow just open that door, then I will do it. But I don't think that (now). I think that GCM gave me what I needed. (Zoë Indian middle class)

I'm not done studying. I will be taking other courses – the PD – whatever I feel is going to benefit me where I currently am. (Dee coloured middle class)

I want to do my Masters. I'll probably do it next year or whatever. (Greg coloured middle class)

The opportunity [to do a Masters] will always be there. (Nick coloured middle class)

The comments from these middle class students indicate that while they could view further study as desirable; i.e. as the accumulation of further levels of capital, the GCM programme had proved useful to them in their immediate environments. The acquisition of academic capital through the gaining of the academic qualification had achieved this objective. What this discussion raises then is whether working class students' pursuit of a further qualification was because the acquisition of the academic capital via the GCM programme was insufficient or did not convert to the required form of capital in their lives. As discussed in chapter five, the underlying driver for the return to study for working class students was the working environment. If the working class students were unable to translate academic success into progress in the world of the work, it would go some way towards explaining why – despite their acknowledged struggle with academia – they wished to pursue further study. I argue that another reason underpinning the desire to study further might be to remain connected to the School as seen in Sam's example of the benefits of being an alumnus.

Summary

In this section on academic habitus development students' induction into the higher education field was explored and students' understanding of the process, required behaviours and attitudes were discussed. Middle class students showed a level of comfort in terms of expectations of the higher education field as opposed to working class expressions of apprehension and challenge. I also reviewed the notion of mature studentship and several examples were presented to illustrate the challenges of returning to study as mature adults. The value of the academic capital generated by the GCM programme was questioned when students confirmed differing behaviours and attitudes towards the various student groups within the School of Management Studies. Academic habitus was seen to be unequally distributed between working class and middle class students. The consideration of further study was discussed with students in the study. This discussion revealed differences between expectations and reality and issues of judgement between working class and middle class students. I concluded that an unequal ability was shown in how working class and middle class students understood and played the academic game. I now look at the effects and consequences of the year of study on students' lives within the field of work.

Habitus, capital and the field of work

This section examines what happened in the students' lives as a result of the higher education experience and in particular the consequences brought about in the field of work through this experience. As previously discussed, the experiences in the world of work had been mixed with a range of positive and disappointing actions and reactions for the students. In the final interview with each of them I asked about the effect of the educational experience and its outcome on their working lives. I begin by revisiting the students' original reasons for returning to study, focusing on those related to the work environment.

Reasons for return to study

The reasons students returned to study were status and prestige of the institution, the drive for credentialism, career development, personal change or self-fulfilment, skills development and application, opportunity for further study and networking. I reproduce these reasons, seen previously in Table 9, for easy reference.

University of Cape Town

Class and the reason for return to study

Working class		Middle class	
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REASONS	Status and prestige	Credentialism	Career development	Personal change	Skills development / application	Opportunity for further study	Networking
Iris	x	x	x	x	x		x
Jade	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Neil	x		x	x	x	x	x
Sam	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Sara	x	x	x	x	x		
Tina	x	x	x	x		x	
Dee	x	x	x		x	x	
Doug	x	x		x	x		
Greg	x	x	x				
Lisa	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Nick	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Ryan	x	x	x	x	x		
Zoë	x	x	x			x	

(Note: prime reason highlighted)

Symbolic capital

Objectified cultural capital

Embodied cultural capital

Social capital

The reasons for the return to study directly related to the field of work were credentialism; i.e. the achievement of the academic qualification along with the potential

to increase students' credibility in the workplace; career development, i.e. the achievement of the academic qualification and its potential to assist with students' career progression; and skills development and application, i.e. being able to perform their jobs better as a result of gaining the relevant skills and knowledge. The reason indirectly related to the field of work was the goal of personal change or self-fulfilment which included improved levels of confidence and self-esteem – clearly areas which would have the potential to impact positively in the work environment. As discussed in chapter six which focused on strategy, there were differing experiences for working class and women students compared to middle class male students. For working class and women students, lack of support from significant others in the work environment was apparent. Underlying these experiences was the lack of successful capital conversion, i.e. students were unable to trade or exchange their academic capital for the desired result within their work environment. The middle class men's accounts revealed that the fit within their work environments had been enhanced by their growing academic capital. In the final interview with students I returned to explore these outcomes.

Credibility, progression and application – working class accounts

As all the students had achieved their objective of passing the GCM programme, the drive for credentialism – the gaining of academic capital – had been satisfied. What was uncertain was whether this had resulted in increased credibility, career progression or the opportunity for skills application at the workplace for all students. Although all of the students in the study reported increased levels of confidence and self esteem due to the successful completion of the GCM programme, it was not always evident and, in some cases, expected in their work environment. When asked about the reactions from colleagues and her manager, Sara (Indian working class) replied:

No, actually ... no... I can't... offhand I can't really... Nobody's *said* anything to me as such.

Here it was obvious that Sara was perplexed by the question itself and she revealed in her response that while the work environment had not in any way acknowledged her newly acquired academic capital, she too had not expected it. The skills Sara wished to acquire through the qualification were so that she could *move away* from her current position, not apply it to her current post. Acquiring the qualification, that is, attaining the credentials confirmed her as the bearer of those skills so that she could gain entry into another area

in the field of work. She had not considered the application of those skills directly to her current job.

There were however other working class students who had expected support and approval from their work environments. Earlier in the year Sam (African working class) had reported that due to comments from his peers regarding his return to study at a mature age, he had begun to feel despondent and had started to question whether he was adding any value to his organisation. In the final interview he admitted that he had contemplated leaving his place of employment:

Somebody said to me 'No, you might want to get out here (but) you might go to a worse situation than what you are. So rather stick around. You know the environment, understand the dynamics, understand the operation of where you are. Just stick around maybe and see, things might just work into your favour'. And I'm glad I stuck to that advice. Things are beginning to work into my favour now because I've got a different boss now who actually is more receptive to me than the previous one and he actually challenges me. Every now and then I go to my GCM notes and check I've got the basics. Then I align it with what needs to be done. So in a way it's beginning to pay off.

Through a change in manager, Sam was able to apply the skills he had acquired. Doing this increased his credibility within the work environment and led to a renewed sense of self as he explained:

You participate. You feel part of the decision making. You feel that you need to contribute. You feel like you need to show him [the manager] that graduated from BU as well – you can think at a level that he thinks [...] People see you as understanding financial management [...] You can speak of the various profit ratios. You can speak of the various models of business in terms of interrelationship. They have respect for you. They will know that you know something. You're much more confident. You're much wiser. And once you're in that state you gain respect from your colleagues and your peers.

What Sam's account revealed was the importance of the opinions of the student's immediate manager and peers. In the first instance not getting approval from these significant others caused him to contemplate leaving his job. After the situation had been remedied through a new boss who showed appreciation for his contribution, a positive impact on his level of self esteem had resulted. Also apparent in this account was the need for Sam to demonstrate to his manager that, as a BU graduate, he was able to engage with more complex information. The successful integration of Sam's academic habitus into his overall habitus resulted in increased confidence levels and achievement of the desired respect from his peers.

The reaction from Jade's management and staff also produced the desired outcome:

They were all so happy and I got the response I wanted. They weren't expecting any less from me. That's the kind of feeling I got, that I could not have failed. Not that it put any more pressure on me – or maybe it did! ... At the end of the day it was so rewarding... I got the pat on the back that I wanted.

For working class Jade, this acknowledgment showed her ability to successfully convert her academic capital into a useful form of cultural capital in the work place. However we also see issues of tension in the words "they weren't expecting any less from me" and "I could not have failed" where the work environment indicated that Jade was expected to excel in the academic programme. The weight of these expectations was likely to cause the student to feel some degree of pressure and increased her desire to perform well. Jade also reported that she was able to utilise her newly acquired skills in her workplace. This was made possible because she held a management position where she was able to influence her surroundings and exercise her power:

My relationship with my staff is just so much better (because) I feel more equipped to deal with them. [The organisation] is just perfect for me. They've customised my job to suit what I wanted to be. Who's going to leave that?

Because Jade had received support, encouragement and approval from the significant others in her workplace, she experienced a better fit within her organisation, a sense of

achievement and increased levels of self confidence even with the added stress of having to excel. Not all students had this experience. Iris (African working class) reported difficulty, discomfort and discouragement within her environment. Iris's situation at work had also remained unchanged. Earlier in the academic year she had reported negative responses from her colleagues when suggesting improvements. Her colleagues' responses had caused her to refrain from further idea generation. Six months after the end of the GCM programme the situation for Iris remained static. She reflected on the purpose of an academic qualification:

You don't really come here for a piece of paper [...] You come so that you can be transformed [...] When you go out of here, at least you must have an impact, whether its in your community (or) workplace; (but) in my workplace, it's only criticism that happens.

Iris was considering leaving her job and returning to her impoverished community to assist with issues in the community, though it appeared difficult for her to do so as her family depended on her for an income. What Iris's extract also highlights is the notion of education as a transformative force and, as will be seen in Zoë and Lisa's case, where students were unable to apply new knowledge and have an impact on their own sphere of activity, this resulted in high levels of frustration and despondency.

Credibility, progression and application – middle class accounts

The differences in the middle class students' responses from their work environments were gender-based. Zoë and Lisa's non-conducive work environments had a direct impact on the self confidence of these women, causing them to withdraw and in Lisa's and later Zoë's case, to resign and find alternative employment. Lisa reflected on her earlier experience when she had produced an in-depth report on her department and been ostracised as a result:

I was in a male dominated industry. When I put my ideas forward, it was never good enough. It was 'You're female'. Its a male-dominated industry and I was trying to change it too quickly, too fast, taking the knowledge of the course and really implementing it, because that's what you get trained [to do]. You implement what you learn in class today. You try (to) implement it at work because like that you're going to see if it portable [...] Can I use it? Is it going to work? Is it going to make a difference?

In Lisa's account the importance of being able to apply new knowledge was seen. Mature students typically enrol on an academic programme as they appreciate the usefulness and relevance of new knowledge. This reason – labelled skills development and application – was presented by ten students in the sample. Being unable to apply the learning leads the student to feelings of frustration and helplessness. In Zoë's situation, she had been employed at her company for four years as a personal assistant before having a change of manager:

He didn't understand me. He saw me as a threat, as opposed to an asset.

That's all it was.

Due to a growing sense of alienation, Zoë resigned to take up an offer of a general management position within the same industry. The ability to apply her learning and the accompanying satisfaction of being appreciated restored Zoë's self esteem. She reported implementing systems and procedures within her new environment and a sense of personal fulfilment permeated her interview. In Zoë's story the gaining of academic capital resulted in career progression, increased credibility and an opportunity to apply new skills and knowledge albeit in a new environment. Despite an initial disabling work environment where a lack of support and encouragement affected her desire to do well, middle class student Zoë was able to change her own situation and get the outcome she wanted.

For the middle class men in the study, the outcomes were markedly different. The gaining of academic capital resulted in increased credibility in their work environments. Although Greg knew that his team's view of him had changed, he was surprised during a conversation with a colleague:

I won't say I'm a role model but she says I'm almost an example to her [...] She said 'You went to study and you did it and you did bloody well at it [...] You will not believe how the people actually respect you. They won't say it to you, but they respect you' [...] It's also kind of started a bit of an epidemic, because quite a few people have actually now gone to study this year. It's not necessarily what I'm doing [the GCM], but they've gone to study something [...] Maybe it is because *I* went and I've done it and now other people say 'Do you know what? I can also do that'.

What Greg's extract reveals is that through being a role model, he was able to influence other people to further their studies. He also gained respect from his team and colleagues which clearly was a positive outcome of the academic experience. For Ryan, the reality of promotion was realised. After successful completion of the GCM he was able to convert his academic capital successfully:

I'm enjoying it [the new job]. I was frustrated in that [previous] job. I think I'm on a different level to my colleagues already [...] I'm extremely confident. I have a lot more belief in myself and my ability and my thinking and my experiences. I'm a lot more sure of myself, a lot more calm, a lot more confident. My ability to handle whatever level [within the organisation] has improved because of the confidence, you see. I can sit and talk with the MD or whoever [...] Whereas before you're more tentative... gosh this guy must know things. So your attitude's different and your responses are different and the way you *feel* about yourself is different.

Here Ryan disclosed that as a result of his promotion and linked to his newly acquired academic capital, he felt confident about himself and his abilities and this affected his interactions with senior managers. These middle class men's accounts show how progression within their organisations and acceptance from their peers, as a result of the successful gaining of an academic qualification, led to increased levels of self esteem and a general sense of confidence about their abilities. Being included in more senior activities in their organisations soon after they had commenced the programme instilled this new confidence. This, in turn, resulted in other positive outcomes such as, in Greg's case, becoming a role model and in Ryan's case, receiving his promotion.

Summary

The consequences of the higher education experience on the working lives of the students highlight the effect significant others in the work environment have on the overall habitus of the mature student. Where students function in an enabling environment; i.e. where support and encouragement are high, both working class and middle class students in the study reported increased levels of credibility and confidence. For working class students however these positive changes in their work environment did not come without additional effort and pressure. Where the environment is disinterested or disempowering,

students felt a sense of alienation which resulted in withdrawal. In the case of middle class women students, this withdrawal is seen in its ultimate form, that of exiting the organisation. I would argue that when middle class students encounter a disabling environment that does not support their long-term objectives, they can draw on other resources. They are able to see options and opportunities beyond the immediate – and remove themselves from this negative situation. Employing this strategy ensures that these middle class students achieve the objectives they set for themselves at the start of the higher education experience. Clearly for working class students, there are far more uncertain rewards.

The effect of the educational experience and its outcome on the working lives of students in the study was not uniform. It is clear that middle class men in the study fared best in the overall achievement of their goals within the work environment. In Greg's and Ryan's accounts none of the anxieties expressed by the working class students or middle class women was noted. No doubts were expressed regarding their competence and there were no reports of added pressure in terms of academic expectations as was seen in Jade's extract. Middle class men were supported through organisational acceptance and real attempts were made to involve them in more complex activities. All other groups of students were made to work for this acceptance and for many, acceptance within their work environments was either not sought, expected or forthcoming.

The next section deals with student experiences in the social field, particularly the reactions from partners, family and friends to students' successful completion of the academic year.

Habitus, capital and the social field

The role played by those identified as significant others in the lives of students is a meaningful one. This is typically the major source of support and encouragement for mature students returning to study. Significant others may range from partners, to family, to close friends. At the end of the year of study, students were asked what reactions and responses had been received from the significant others in the various facets of their personal lives.

Reactions and responses from partners

Middle class and working class accounts

Prior to the start of the academic year, the nine students involved in relationships indicated that their partners were supportive of their decision to return to study. This was gleaned from discussions which had taken place between students and their partners prior to the application to higher education. As the year of study unfolded, middle class women provided examples of how supportive their husbands continued to be. The middle class men in relationships noted that their personal lives remained untroubled. These men's answers regarding their relationships were quite perfunctory and I concluded that the question puzzled them insofar that the support and backing of their partners was a clear expectation and a taken-for-granted assumption.

For working class women and men the initial excitement expressed by their partners did not continue or translate into ongoing support. As the academic year progressed tensions began arising in relationships. The working class students felt pressurised and uncomfortable in their relationships seemingly unable to address the tensions resulting from their student roles and responsibilities. As discussed, Nowotny's notion of emotional capital proved a useful tool for analysing these occurrences. In Reay's work focusing on parental involvement in their children's education, she distinguishes the use of emotional capital as a resource used by parents which results in "profit" for the child (2000, 2005). Using the concept in the higher education context I consider it a resource provided by the partner of a mature student, where the "profit" generated by this investment is both the creation of a personal environment conducive for that success and the successful accomplishment of gaining academic capital.

The consequences and effect of the year of study on personal relationships was explored six months after the completion of the GCM programme. For middle class women Zoë and Dee, their partners' level of ongoing encouragement had been welcomed. The extent of the level of support had elicited surprise and appreciation from these students. The partners had also been positive regarding their personal growth as Dee outlined:

He's feeling very chuffed. He's very proud and he tells me that often [...]
He's glad to have me back in the sense that we are together every night
(but) he's seeing me in a different light [...] He's definitely seen me grow.

For both Dee and Zoë, the level of support during their year of study meant that they could focus on the academic programme. This assisted with their learning process insofar that they were able to concentrate fully on the academic aspects of the programme. Middle class student Ryan also revealed that his partner had noticed changes in his behaviour and attitude:

My girlfriend says I've changed. I just haven't noticed it [...] I just feel I'm more mature. [Our relationship] seems to work better.

Ryan appeared to fit better within his relationship after the conclusion of the academic experience. The process seemed to have occurred almost effortlessly, that is, without a conscious effort on his part. The higher education experience had contributed to him feeling “more mature”. I would contend that he felt more complete due to the acquisition of academic capital – previously absent from his life. The common theme through these middle class student accounts were those of ongoing support, encouragement and belief which were seen in these examples. Relationships appeared to have improved as a result of the higher education experience. The provision of high levels of emotional capital had enabled the higher education experience to take place at little personal cost or sacrifice to middle class students.

Unlike the middle class experiences many challenges were faced by the working class students in their relationships. For Sam, the lack of engagement with his studies due to his partner's ill health almost proved his undoing. Having to provide an emotional resource rather than receive it had an immediate unsatisfactory impact on his academic life. While it could be argued that the ill-health of a partner would have proved daunting to any student, having no support to draw on from other sources during the higher education experience contributed significantly to Sam's feeling of “It's hard. It's *hard*.”

Other working class students also did not enjoy the same level of support as their middle class counterparts and had to really work at their personal relationships to sustain them. As Neil confided:

This last six months away from GCM has done wonders for our whole relationship. [...]There was a whole lot of turmoil towards the end. It was hectic. And I actually felt like I was behaving a little bit differently – I'm

saying these things in retrospect now – and I think she did pick up on it but Nadia is a wonderful person. She sees past all of the other crap that you bring [...] It happens to all of us, previously I mean, I'm sure you see it in the students. They come here and then suddenly it's all like 'I want to put on these rimmed glasses' and stuff like that. That happens to people, especially if you haven't been studying for a while and then suddenly you think 'Hey, you know, I'm actually involved here in academia. I'm a student now and you must respect me like this' [...] I'm just talking about the aspect of [being a student]. There's no switch to regulate how far you're going to take this thing (but) our relationship is stronger than ever.

In Neil's extract it is obvious that the development of his academic habitus and its effects on his overall habitus – "I was behaving a little bit differently" – had a negative impact on his relationship. His partner then had to "see past all of the crap that you bring", in other words, she had to see beyond the changes to Neil's habitus and reconnect with this original habitus again in order for their relationship to resume its functionality. His astute observation that the changes in his behaviour and attitudes brought about by the higher education experience were not able to be switched on and off at will speaks to a working class habitus in contradiction with itself. In this extract, issues regarding the lack of fit and disjuncture stemming directly from the higher education experience and its effect on the habitus were seen in the student's relationship with his partner.

During the year Jade revealed an incident regarding her husband's response to her academic achievements where he had not congratulated her and had made a sarcastic comment in response. In the final interview she returned to that conversation adding that, "I actually had an argument with him about it because I felt it was not called for." What the incident does reveal is the uncertainty felt by Jade's partner as a result of her unexpectedly good academic achievements. In contrast to middle class student Dee's being "seen in a different light", for Jade:

I think at home I've not changed. (I'm) always just the capable one. I do everything. I just, everything happens, even when I was doing GCM. Yes I wasn't at home as much as I am now, but everything still got done and I still organised everything and I had to manage. So not that he wasn't supportive because that he certainly was. I didn't ask him to do anymore

than he [usually does]. Maybe he had to spend more time with his daughter because I was going to classes on a Saturday, but that's his job as father! And if it was the other way round, he wouldn't have to ask. *I* would have to ask! I would have to say 'Listen, don't do anything because I'm going to go to [the School]'. He'd just [go].

In Jade's extract several issues are raised. She had taken on an additional role of student and juggling this role with her other roles was expected. With the parenting aspect Jade had to negotiate her time away from home although she was able to recognise the gender bias in her arrangements. It is clear as well that the situation caused this working class student frustration and underlying resentment.

Contrasting these accounts shows how class played itself out in the interactions between individuals and their partners. In the middle class and working class stories there were vastly differing accounts of the consequences and effects the year of study had on personal relationships. As Reay argues, "middle class emotional investments in education generate higher, more secure returns for the same level of investment compared to that of (the) working class ... for whom any level of emotional investment is relatively risky and insecure" (2005 p69). For working class students, risk, insecurity and sacrifice appeared to underpin the higher education experience. These students did not fit better within their worlds. What is observed was the disjuncture and non-alignment between high education and their personal relationships. There were also other significant relationships in the personal lives of the mature students and I now focus on reactions and responses from students' families and friends at the end of the year of study.

Reactions and responses from family members

The typical reaction from middle class family members at the start of the academic year was one of happiness. Parents of these mature students were reported to be positive and excited. The family members of working class students were reported as conveying rather low-key responses. The trends in both of these groups continued throughout the year. For working class students there was a further indication of their feeling some pressure to succeed to please their parents as well as tension regarding the appropriateness of study versus the generation of improved income. I questioned students regarding their family's reaction and responses to their successful completion of the GCM programme.

Middle class family reactions

The discussion around parents centred mainly on their attendance at the students' graduation ceremony. It was relatively easy for parents living in close proximity to the university to attend. At least one parent of each of the five middle class students who attended the graduation ceremony was present. As guest tickets were limited to two per graduate, it was often difficult for the student to decide who should attend. Dee experienced a dilemma as she had to decide between her parents and her husband:

I can't choose between my parents! So I'm just bringing both of them along [...] Because I can't just deny, I cannot deny either one of them this opportunity [...] I mean they are equally excited.

Although Dee's husband was similarly supportive of her decision to study, Dee's main concern was for her parents who she felt had been waiting for this moment since Dee had left high school. In Dee's extract, the notion of "unfinished business" was clear to observe. The focus on parental involvement linked back to the students' original trigger for returning to study. For middle class students their social milieu, that is their family and friends, was the main influencing factor in their decision to return to study as mature adults. The role played by these significant others was therefore paramount in the middle class student lives. Dee described the role of significant others very well:

It's just so gratifying knowing these people who have played a major role are actually rooting for you, that when you graduate they are all going to be graduating with you...I don't know if that's a vision you can [relate to] but that's how I feel. It's not just Dee. It's my parents. It's my husband. It's my friends who I've neglected.

In Dee's extract, the student was able to identify that the level and support and encouragement she had received throughout her academic year extended to the culmination of her academic experience. All Dee's significant others were "present" at her graduation. Citing Bourdieu (1990b p82), Reay writes that, "individuals contain within themselves their past and present position in the social structure, at all times and in all places, in the form of dispositions which are so many marks of social position" (2004 p434). The involvement of the students' families in the graduation ceremony was also observed in Zoë's comment regarding her son:

Lynn [her daughter] graduated recently. We went to her graduation, and also just two tickets, so it would just be my husband and myself. So I want Kirk [her son] to come too. I want Kirk to experience the actual graduation ceremony. He's just embarked on his studying now, so I want him to have something that he can look forward (to).

I argue that the above is an example of middle class habitus at work. Exposure to the graduation ceremony itself renders the event as the objective – the acquisition of cultural capital. Zoë wanted her son to attend so that he knows what's expected and familiarises himself with the process – to paraphrase Bourdieu, her son will know that higher education “is for people like us”. This extract also provides an example of Bourdieu's claim that women play the major role in transmitting cultural capital to their children. As Reay explains, “for many middle-class parents, the imperative to reproduce their privileged class position in their children is profound” (2001 p341).

Working class family reactions

The parents or family members of three working class students were present at the graduation ceremony but there were however three students whose parents were unable to attend. The ill-health of Neil's mother made it impossible for her to travel:

She's just over the moon [...] She wishes she could be here, but she can't [...] She told me she made space where the picture is going to go and all of those kinds of things. It's going to be something.

Clearly Neil's mother was proud of his achievement and he too was overjoyed by her reaction. The public display of his achievement – the graduation photograph – was particularly important to his parent given that he was the first in his family to graduate from university. Tina was disappointed as her parents were also not able to be present at graduation:

I think it's because my sister never went to study and neither did I. I think this is something. It's an achievement that I'd like to share with them. [My mom] sent me a long email: 'I'm so proud of you'. I'm still mommy's child. I think any child wants a mother's approval and the father's approval.

In Tina's extract we see how much the approval of parents, visible in Neil's account, meant even to mature individuals. Tina clearly identified that parental endorsement had large significance for her in the acknowledgement of her achievement. The similarity to Dee's "unfinished business" was also noted. Yet it is less a case of meeting the earlier expectations held by parents – as was clearly the case in Dee's example; for Tina it was having had the opportunity to acquire academic capital that needed acknowledgement. This acknowledgement was mirrored in Iris's situation, where another dynamic came to the fore. She too was unfortunate in not being able to have any of her family members attend:

My dad wanted to come but unfortunately he's not [well]. So he's not going to come. So my mother's also not going to come. And my sister, the one from Durban, she also cannot make it. So, I've asked my sister's child but you know, that's how his mind is ... Oh, graduation... what am I going to do? ... But BU of all places... no, no, no. No, he won't come. He told me no, he doesn't like BU because those from BU undermine other people a lot [...] I must phone my friend and see if she cannot come.

The issues raised by Iris's extract point to legitimacy of the higher education experience. Graduation for Iris was the culmination of a year of hard work and sacrifice. No one in her family was able to witness this and the extended family member she did approach questioned the legitimacy of the institution itself. In Iris's example the issues of fit between higher education and working class student experience were laid bare. In order for Iris to get some form of validation of her academic year and to get confirmation that her efforts had been successful, she had to call upon someone from her social circle.

Summary

In reviewing the reactions from family members, the role and involvement of parents featured prominently for both working class and middle class mature students. Students' expectations from parents were for approval and acknowledgment from the working class parents, and for encouragement from the middle class parents. Class habitus is also on display in these accounts. Middle class students fit better within their social worlds as a result of their higher education experience. Students from working class backgrounds experience issues of legitimacy, insecurity and inadequate levels of validation.

Interactions with the social circle

Middle class and working class accounts

The friends of students from middle class backgrounds were typically from the middle class or emerging middle class. Working class students enjoyed a wide range of friendships, but maintained closer ties with those from working class backgrounds like themselves. The friends in students' social circles were reported as being supportive of the mature students at the start of the year. However what became evident as the year progressed was that those individuals in the social circles of middle class students continued to support those students, while cracks started appearing in relationships between working class students and their friends where discomfort and issues of legitimacy were raised.

Working class student Tina indicated that her social circle had undergone some changes since her year of study:

I also realised after last year who my real friends were in my personal life because the guys who stuck around and had patience with me saying 'Okay, well. You've got exams. You've got assignments. We'll see you later' or whatever the case might be. The ones who weren't prepared to do that actually just showed their true colours. I've dwindled down my friendship circle quite a lot but it's [...] for the best.

What may be deduced from Tina's experience is that parts of her social circle had insight into the demands of higher education and there were those who did not. The friends who understood those demands supported her through the experience. Loss of friendships and resignation to this reality was also evident when she conceded "it's for the best". A further example illustrates this point. In the extract below middle class student Dee describes her experience:

When I emailed everyone, my email was 'Guess whose graduating? Me and the other smart folks! I'll be graduating!' And [the response] 'very nice'; 'Dee, we knew.' It's just the attitude is so [affirming]. Like I told you, I've always been taking it back to my friends, always chatting to them [...] and just amazed by the response. I had their support. They knew what I was going through. Some of them asked [how things were going].

(They) have studied as well, so to them all this excitement and the fears and the frustration, they could definitely relate to it. They'd been there before.

Dee's friends – through familiarity with the higher education field – were able to not only provide support but the *right sort* of support. This is also an example of emotional capital being invested by the social circle in one of their own. When contrasting these two examples, the issue of fit were visible. Dee's friends accepted the situation of her availability and her needs while in Tina's example, a clear conflict between what Tina needed as a student and the expectations of a group of her friends existed.

Sam's account of what transpired in his social circle as a result of his return to study pointed once again to the dilemma of working class students:

At a social level, I don't think my behaviour has changed that much, even in my friend circles [...] I think I mentioned this the other day. I didn't share with a lot of people that I'm doing GCM. I kept it to myself. Maybe very close people, who are very, very few close people, know that I'll be graduating now.

I argue that Sam did not trust his social circle to welcome the news of his foray into higher education. There was almost an embarrassment, an awkwardness attached to it. He explained that these feelings hinged on his own habitus:

It's just me. I'm that kind of person. I just want to ... I won't say anything... I won't go out to sell my self, but I will do certain things to sell myself, subtle things. I won't put, as I said to you, put that photograph [the graduation photo up on the wall]. I want the person [to notice]. I won't initiate and say 'Listen, I graduated with GCM at BU'. I won't go out to say that, but I'll make sure that I [do] something that will trigger some kind of thinking 'Oh, okay. Tell me about this and this...' So it's just me. It's my personality.

After initially stating at the beginning of the interview that he wanted his graduation photographs all over his home, Sam rescinded this, confiding that he wouldn't actually be

displaying any graduation photographs. There was obvious pride in his achievement yet simultaneously there was this discomfort about “showing off” to his social world. The idea that he would be “subtle” in his approach suggests that those who would notice the difference or pick up on what he says will be those with experience of or insight into higher education.

Summary

What these accounts reveal about class habitus and the social field provide further insight into the effects and consequences of the higher education experience for this group of mature students. Middle class experiences were shown to be affirmed within their social milieu by all their significant others – partner, family and friends. Acquisition of further cultural capital through the achievement of academic capital enabled middle class students to fit better with their worlds. The social milieu of these students also provided sufficient quantities of emotional capital to support students through the higher education field. Drawing on the experiences of the field from their significant others, they were able to negotiate the challenges of the academic field in a positive way.

Underpinning the working class experiences were situations of risk, tension, fragility and insecurity caused by the acquisition of an academic habitus. The academic experience for working class students is carefully negotiated territory. They enjoyed lower levels of support from partners, family and friends. Though initially desired, there was an awkwardness to the acquisition of academic capital due to the resultant changes in their habitus and its subsequent effect on relationships with their significant others. With regard to their personal relationships, the process of acquiring academic capital was decidedly more challenging for working class students.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have looked at the effects and consequences of the higher education experience on a group of mature students. In particular, I have examined its effect on the significant others in the lives of these students in the field of work and the social field. I revisited the reasons students returned to study and reviewed how students played the academic game. In presenting this information I provided an overview of why mature students in the study entered higher education, the strategies used by students to negotiate their way through the academic field and the outcomes of the experience on other facets of their lives. Class played a defining part in shaping both the higher education

experience and its effects and consequences. The result of the students return to study was an uneven experience, raising challenges and uncertainty for working class students and providing middle class students with affirmation from the significant others in their social field.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

THE ANALYTICAL MODEL AND CONCLUSIONS

The final chapter is concerned with the presentation of an analytical model and the reinterpretations of the empirical findings based on the proposed model. This model facilitates the analysis of mature student experience through a class and gender lens. Drawing on Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, capital and field and generated from the data itself, the proposed analytical model is presented. In the second part of this chapter, the relation between the model and the empirical findings will be explored. The purpose of this process is to lift the findings to a more generalised level. The chapter concludes by considering the significance of the findings.

Developing a model

Throughout the last three chapters, the analysis has drawn on Bourdieu's conceptual tools, making use of habitus, capital and field, to understand the experiences of mature students in a higher education institution through a class lens. The study has been concerned with the potential for reproduction and transformation of mature students' habitus as a result of their participation in the Graduate Certificate in Management programme. Throughout the process of analysis, I was also concerned with developing an analytical model or developing "an external language of description" (Bernstein 1996). The analytical model involved the extension of Bourdieu's conceptual toolkit and speaks directly to the analytical findings of the study.

Bourdieu and reproduction

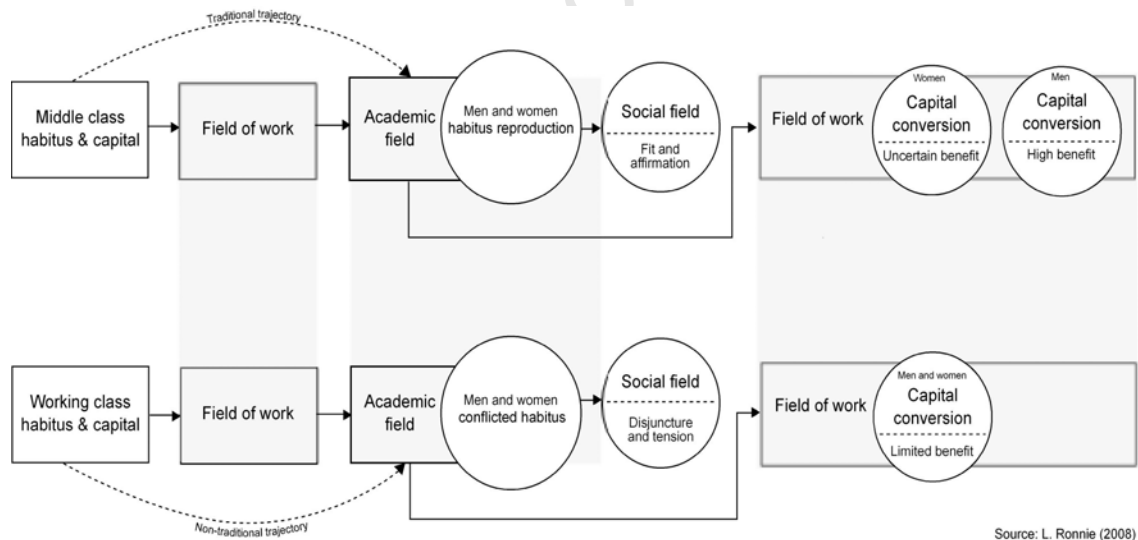
Bourdieu suggests a model intended to represent the mechanisms, "through which the structure of class relations tends to reproduce itself by reproducing those habitus which reproduce it" (in Bourdieu and Passeron 1977/2004 (np postscript). Bourdieu's reproductive model (appendix five) highlights the link between initial class position and eventual class membership through the use or attainment of an academic qualification. In this model, Bourdieu suggests that initial class membership – ascertained through place of residence, conditions of existence, and social and cultural capital and so on – determines the probability of academic success (1977/2004).

A proposed model

The analytical framework used in this study drew on Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, capital and field and Reay's use of these concepts. The framework was used to illuminate the data in the empirical chapters, thereby showing the relationship between different aspects of my interpretation. As noted in the research design chapter, because of the evolving nature of the process, particular incongruities may well have emerged as a result.

I conclude my analytical work by proposing a model that provides a lens for viewing mature student experience in a higher education setting and for developing a more integrated and holistic analytical account of mature student experience in higher education. The analytical model is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1: A proposed model for the analysis of mature student experience in higher education



The model explains the capital acquisition process for middle class and working class individuals. The traditional educational trajectory for middle class students is to proceed directly to higher education post-school (Ball 2003). Mature students in a management school environment are drawn from the field of work and the model shows this particular

progression. As the education process is viewed as providing cultural capital (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977/2004), the expectation exists that some improvement or value is expected at the end of the academic process. The analysis of student experience through the lens of habitus, capital and field provides a way to explore the effects of the academic experience on mature students' behaviour, perceptions and attitudes, and examines the value ultimately provided by the academic qualification. The model develops a vocabulary drawn from Bourdieu's concepts that describes the consequences of mature students' trajectory through higher education. The model shows the unequal process of capital conversion and habitus reproduction across class and gender.

Relation between the model and the empirical findings

The model allows the empirical findings to be reinterpreted in relation to mature student experience at a more general level. As the findings of the study indicate differences and similarities across class and gender, with less significant findings across race, the discussion will focus on middle class men, middle class women, working class men, and working class women. The discussion is framed by the three moments-in-time of the study and is presented in the four tables that follow.

Table 11: The experience of middle class men in the study

Category	Possibility & opportunity	Strategy	Effects and consequences
	(Before)	(During)	(After)
Capital acquisition	<p>Influence to return to study primarily from the personal milieu.</p> <p>Capital conversion is key focus.</p>	<p>Personal investment is evident.</p> <p>Consultation with partners.</p> <p>Support is expected from both home and work environment.</p>	<p>Value of the field or <i>illusio</i> is acknowledged.</p> <p>[For other effects and consequences, see field of work and social field.]</p>
Academic habitus development	<p>Family expectation of further study after school.</p> <p>Further studies directly after school unsuccessful due to lack of personal focus and interest.</p> <p>Feelings of comfort and ease expected within the higher education environment.</p>	<p>Immediate recognition of the rules and “feel for the game”.</p> <p>Academic judgement easily exercised.</p> <p>Comfort within academic setting.</p> <p>Learning felt to be own responsibility.</p>	<p>Embedded academic habitus.</p> <p>Judgement and ability to play the game seen through realistic assessment of own ability to study further.</p>
Habitus, capital and the field of work	<p>Highly recommended endorsement from immediate managers.</p> <p>Field of work provides some impetus to pursue further study.</p> <p>Expectation of supportive work environment during studies.</p>	<p>Ability to influence activities within the work environment.</p> <p>Valuing and acknowledgment in the workplace.</p> <p>Moves towards successful capital conversion.</p>	<p>Academic habitus perceived and valued by others.</p> <p>Increase in credibility and confidence in the workplace through career mobility and role modelling for others.</p>
Habitus, capital and the social field	<p>Partners, family members and wider social circle express support and encouragement.</p>	<p>Emotional capital readily forthcoming from significant others.</p> <p>Those in social field show familiarity with the higher education field and express support and interest.</p>	<p>Improvement in personal relationships.</p> <p>“Sense of place” enhanced.</p>

Summary of middle class men's higher education experience

- Capital conversion provides the basis for the return to study
- The acquisition of new knowledge (learning) is seen as an individual responsibility
- Middle class men immediately recognise the rules within the academy, are therefore able to play the academic game, and feel comfortable within the higher education field
- At the end of the engagement with the higher education field, academic habitus integrates with middle class men's general habitus
- Middle class men are able to successfully convert their academic capital into enhanced positions within their work environment
- The acquisition of academic capital is valued by significant others in both the field of work and the social field. This improves relationships and "fit" within both milieu and confirms the "place" of middle class men within these fields

In summary, the educational experience of middle class men re-affirms their place, or class position, within their social field. Their place within the field of work is also confirmed as a result of this process.

Table 12: The experience of middle class women in the study

Category	Possibility & opportunity	Strategy	Effects and consequences
	(Before)	(During)	(After)
Capital acquisition	<p>Influence to return to study primarily from the personal milieu.</p> <p>Capital conversion is key focus.</p> <p>A desire for personal change through capital acquisition is expressed.</p>	<p>Personal investment is evident.</p> <p>Discussion and consultation with partners.</p> <p>Support is expected from both home and work environments.</p>	<p>Value of the field or <i>illusio</i> is acknowledged.</p> <p>[For other effects and consequences, see field of work and social field.]</p>
Academic habitus development	<p>Family expectation either of further study or financial independence.</p> <p>Further studies directly after school unsuccessful due to lack of personal focus and interest.</p> <p>Feelings of comfort and ease expected within the higher education environment.</p> <p>Open to habitus shifts resulting from experience</p>	<p>Immediate recognition of the rules and “feel for the game”.</p> <p>Academic judgement easily exercised.</p> <p>Comfort within academic setting.</p> <p>Learning felt to be own responsibility.</p>	<p>Embedded academic habitus.</p> <p>Expectation of further study considered “typical”.</p> <p>Personal benefits in terms of self confidence accrued from current qualification.</p>
Habitus, capital and the field of work	<p>Highly recommended endorsement from immediate managers.</p> <p>Field of work provides some impetus to pursue further study.</p> <p>Expectation of supportive work environment during studies.</p>	<p>Lack of credibility and acknowledgement in the workplace.</p> <p>Adversarial encounters and other forms of exclusion.</p> <p>No sign of capital conversion.</p>	<p>Affects confidence levels in the short term.</p> <p>Due to growing alienation, students leave organisations to take up alternative jobs.</p>
Habitus, capital and the social field	<p>Partners, family members and wider social circle express support and encouragement.</p>	<p>Emotional capital readily forthcoming from significant others.</p> <p>Those in social field show familiarity with the higher education field and express support and interest.</p>	<p>Improvement in personal relationships.</p> <p>“Sense of place” enhanced.</p>

Summary of middle class women's higher education experience

- Capital conversion provides the basis for the return to study
- The acquisition of new knowledge (learning) is seen as an individual responsibility
- Middle class women immediately recognise the rules within the academy, are therefore able to play the academic game, and feel comfortable within the higher education field
- At the end of the engagement with the higher education field, academic habitus integrated with individuals' general habitus
- Middle class women are not able to immediately successfully convert their academic capital in their work environment.
- The acquisition of academic capital is valued by significant others in the social field. This improves relationships and "fit" within the social milieu and confirms the "place" of middle class women within their social field.

In summary, the educational experience of middle class women re-affirms their place, or class position, within their social field. Their status within the field of work is unclear as capital conversion is not an immediate or straightforward process.

Table 13: The experience of working class men in the study

Category	Possibility & opportunity	Strategy	Effects and consequences
	(Before)	(During)	(After)
Capital acquisition	<p>Influence to return to study primarily from the field of work.</p> <p>Capital conversion is key focus.</p>	<p>Personal investment is evident.</p> <p>Consultation with partners.</p> <p>Support is expected from both work and academic environments.</p>	<p>Value of the field or <i>illusio</i> is acknowledged.</p> <p>[For other effects and consequences, see field of work and social field.]</p>
Academic habitus development	<p>No particular expectation from family of higher education or encouragement to study after school.</p> <p>Unable to pursue studies due to financial constraints.</p> <p>Apprehension regarding return to study.</p>	<p>Unclear recognition of the rules and lack of “feel for the game”.</p> <p>Difficulty and uncertainty with academic judgement.</p> <p>Learning felt to be joint responsibility of student and lecturer/institution.</p>	<p>Academic habitus is perceived as temporary.</p> <p>Lack of judgement and inability to understand and play the game through unrealistic assessment of own ability to study further.</p>
Habitus, capital and the field of work	<p>Highly recommended endorsement from immediate managers.</p> <p>Field of work provides the “trigger” to pursue further study.</p> <p>Expectation of supportive work environment during studies.</p>	<p>Lack of credibility and acknowledgement in the workplace.</p> <p>Support within the work environment not provided – feelings of exclusion.</p> <p>Little, if any, sign of successful capital conversion.</p>	<p>Capital conversion limited and uncertain.</p>
Habitus, capital and the social field	<p>Partners, family members and wider social circle express varying levels of support and encouragement.</p>	<p>Emotional capital not (readily) forthcoming from significant others.</p> <p>Juggling of multiple roles found challenging.</p> <p>Those in social field show unfamiliarity with the higher education field.</p>	<p>Equilibrium restored in personal relationships.</p> <p>“Sense of place” restored.</p>

Summary of working class men's higher education experience

- Capital conversion provides the basis for the return to study
- The acquisition of new knowledge (learning) is seen as the joint responsibility between individual, lecturer and the institution
- Working class men show unclear recognition of the rules within the academy, are therefore not able to play the academic game, and do not feel comfortable within the higher education field
- Working class men are not able to successfully convert their academic capital in the field of work.
- The acquisition of academic capital is not valued by significant others in the social field. In the short-term; i.e. during the acquisition process, this causes tension in relationships.
- At the completion of the programme, balance is restored in relationships with significant others because academic habitus is experienced as temporary and has not become part of the individuals' general habitus. Working class men revert to their original habitus, to "being themselves", and thereby ensure "fit" within their social world.

In summary, the educational experience of working class men does not change their original place or class position within their social field. Their status within the field of work does not alter either.

Table 14: The experience of working class women in the study

Category	Possibility & opportunity	Strategy	Effects and consequences
	(Before)	(During)	(After)
Capital acquisition	<p>Influence to return to study primarily from the field of work.</p> <p>Capital conversion is key focus.</p> <p>A desire for personal change through capital acquisition is expressed.</p>	<p>Personal investment is evident.</p> <p>Consultation with partners.</p> <p>Support is expected from both work and academic environments.</p>	<p>Value of the field or <i>illusio</i> is acknowledged.</p> <p>[For other effects and consequences, see field of work and social field.]</p>
Academic habitus development	<p>No particular expectation from family of higher education or encouragement to study after school.</p> <p>Unable to pursue studies due to financial constraints.</p> <p>Apprehension regarding return to study.</p>	<p>Unclear recognition of the rules and lack of “feel for the game”.</p> <p>Difficulty and uncertainty with academic judgement.</p> <p>Discomfort within academic setting is evident*.</p> <p>Learning felt to be joint responsibility of student and lecturer/institution</p>	<p>Academic habitus is perceived as temporary.</p> <p>Lack of judgement and inability to understand and play the game through unrealistic assessment of own ability to study further.</p>
Habitus, capital and the field of work	<p>Highly recommended endorsement from immediate managers.</p> <p>Field of work provides the “trigger” to pursue further study.</p> <p>Expectation of supportive work environment during studies.</p>	<p>Lack of credibility and acknowledgement in the workplace.</p> <p>Support within the work environment not provided – feelings of exclusion.</p> <p>Little, if any, sign of successful capital conversion.</p>	<p>Capital conversion limited and uncertain.</p>
Habitus, capital and the social field	<p>Partners, family members and wider social circle express varying levels of support and encouragement.</p>	<p>Emotional capital not (readily) forthcoming from significant others.</p> <p>Juggling of multiple roles found challenging.</p> <p>Those in social field show unfamiliarity with the higher education field.</p>	<p>Equilibrium restored in personal relationships.</p> <p>“Sense of place” restored.</p>

* If comfort is experienced, it is due to employment within, and therefore familiarity with, the field.

Summary of working class women's higher education experience

- Capital conversion provides the basis for the return to study
- The acquisition of new knowledge (learning) is seen as the joint responsibility between individual, lecturer and the institution.
- Working class women show unclear recognition of the rules within the academy, are therefore not able to play the academic game, and do not feel comfortable within the higher education field.
- Working class women are not able to successfully convert their academic capital in the field of work.
- The acquisition of academic capital is not valued by significant others in the social field. In the short-term, this causes tension in relationships.
- At the completion of the programme, balance is restored in relationships with significant others because academic habitus is experienced as temporary and has not become part of the individuals' general habitus. Working class women revert to their original habitus, to "being themselves", and thereby ensure "fit" within their social world.

In summary, the educational experience of working class women in the study does not change their original place or class position within their social field. Their status within the field of work does not alter either.

In the second part of this chapter, I consider the implications of these findings.

Significance of the findings

As noted earlier, the main contribution of the study is its theoretical contribution that gives insight into:

- how the habitus of mature students is either reproduced or conflicted as a result of a higher education experience
- the role played by significant others, in both the work and personal domains, and how these significant others enhance or undermine the academic success of mature adults
- the role played by the academic institution in enhancing or undermining the academic success of mature adults

In particular, the study establishes that class trajectory works differently for mature students, shaping both reasons for entry into higher education, the higher education

experience itself, and relationships between mature individuals and significant others in their lives. The arguments developed in this study point to the significance of the study in several inter-related areas: the field of work, the social field and the academic field.

Mature students and the field of work

According to the study, middle class men are expected to progress within the work environment. Capital acquisition, through acquiring a higher education qualification, provides external validation and ensures capital conversion in their field of work. Working class students of both genders are not valued or acknowledged by the field of work despite their acquisition of academic capital. The response by the field of work is muted and non-responsive. Capital conversion is therefore not possible for this group of students. However, in the study, middle class women students, even though they too are not valued or acknowledged by their work environments, are able to draw on other resources, ensuring that their capital acquisition can be realised in alternate work environments. They leave their disabling organisations and thereby ultimately ensure capital acquisition.

For working class students in the study, the academic capital does not convert into career mobility or indeed achieve any of the students' intended outcomes. This lack of capital conversion leads working class students to consider acquiring further cultural capital as a means to redress this continued "gap" even if their academic competency is on or below par. Refusal to consider working class students' intention to proceed along the perceived vertical academic ladder implicitly promised to them, leads to confusion and reinforces the power of the academic field in terms of gate-keeping processes.

Ongoing support and acknowledgment within the work environment is expected when mature individuals are assisted into the higher education environment (as seen through managers' reference reports). Failure of the field of work to provide this support leads to withdrawal and disenchantment with the organisation. In the case of middle class women in the study, they are able to leave their organisations to pursue more enabling environments. This means that organisations need to consider the ultimate costs of their actions – in terms of both organisational cost through losing a newly-skilled employee and the impact on the self-esteem of the individual concerned. As organisations sponsor both middle class and working class students' studies, the question raised is why do they do this if they're not going to value these individuals or their enhanced skills?

Compliance with legislation through meeting equity targets may provide an answer. Organisations cannot be seen to be supporting one group of individuals only¹⁷.

Mature students and the social field

Within the social field, class, rather than gender, remains the key differentiator. For middle class students in the study, the acquisition of additional cultural capital re-affirms the “fit” within their social milieu. The acquisition of academic capital, and its concomitant academic habitus, reproduces the general habitus of middle class students. Emotional capital and the insights gained through familiarity with the field are provided by their significant others. These factors provide middle class students with the *right* sort of support. This support contributes to middle class students’ success in the higher education environment.

According to the research, during their year of study, working class students experience disjuncture and tension within their personal and wider social relationships. This is due to the effect that their academic habitus has on their social field. A further contributory factor to this disjuncture is that those within their social field lack familiarity with the academic field and cannot fully understand their experiences within this environment and therefore cannot provide the appropriate support. Where academic habitus is on display, working class students experience discomfort and issues of legitimacy. This leads working class students to hiding or denying their academic habitus. At the end of the year of study, working class students return to “being themselves” in their personal and wider social relationships. Academic habitus is seen as temporary and superficial. In the study, working class students’ “sense of place” is evident in the social field and is, in a sense, also re-affirmed as working class. The anticipated jump in class due to the educational experience is uneasy and in this case, does not take place.

Mature students and the higher education context

Through legislation, the South African government has sought to address issues of inequality in the workplace, in particular addressing skills gap and its link to the lack of career mobility for those (previously) disadvantaged individuals. Credentialism has therefore become one way of individuals addressing both skills acquisition and career

¹⁷ As noted, race is intimately connected with class in South Africa. Therefore equity targets focus on women and blacks, the overwhelming numbers of which are working class.

development opportunities. What the study does highlight is that enabling access is insufficient in addressing both these issues. If the field of work does not provide a supportive and enabling environment, skills, though acquired, are not applied and a higher education qualification is no guarantee of career development. Credentialism by itself then does not ensure improved skills or career mobility as intended by policy makers.

Contrary to the intentions of the academic programme and education in general, experiences of the mature students in this study confirm a particular set of social relations in society and challenges the view that education frees individuals from their class and gendered positions. The transformative power of education and its potential as a vehicle for social mobility is called into question. The implicit rules of the academic game present far more challenges for working class students – both inside the classroom and in the broader environment. But while working class students find difficulties in coping with the academy, it is even more challenging for the academy to deal with them. As Reay argues, “the constraints lie not only in the circumstances of non-traditional applicants but also in the ethos and culture of higher education institutions [...] It is higher education’s inability to deal with difference, in particular, class difference, that is problematic” (2003 p311-312). Without some acknowledgement and change to the way educators do things, working class students will continue to be challenged and their learning affected. Working class students must be provided with support within the higher education environment beyond traditional academic support if they are to achieve an improved sense of ease. Mentoring at an individual level by lecturers might help make the rules of the academic game explicit to ensure that these often implicit rules governing student behaviour and learning are visible and understood by all. Rule clarity directly affects issues of judgement within moments of students’ decision making. The lack of knowledge regarding the rules of the game also affects the development of appropriate student behaviours, furthering hindering academic habitus development.

Through the mentoring process, students could be encouraged to take more responsibility for their own learning because management education practices reward this behaviour. The value of group work, the cornerstone of the management education learning process, needs to be reconsidered in light of the finding that certain groups of students pursue individual learning pathways and other groups prefer a cooperative, collective process. As group work is seen as a site of potential personal support, a resolution regarding its

ongoing usefulness in this regard needs to be considered. It is not sufficient that the School of Management Studies gives working class students access to its environment and its academic programmes. The School needs to work harder at providing guidelines on improving academic judgement and ultimately impact more positively on the learning of its students. At the same time working class students should not be positioned as being deficient in any way. To do so would perpetuate the inequalities already present. The role of the academy should be to ensure that, within its milieu, resources related to learning are provided to all students but should acknowledge the challenges facing working class students in their work and personal lives.

There are insights for those of us who teach within the higher education environment, and especially for those who interact with mature individuals. The life and work experiences of students shape their learning and their interaction with others. Their needs are different within and outside the classroom and we should be aware that mature students are not merely students. They have a multiplicity of roles outside the academy which have the potential to either support or undermine their learning. Mature student need engagement, acknowledgement and valuing in ways that are different from younger tertiary education learners. Thus appreciation of and adjustment to these differences must be part of our role as educators.

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Appendix one: Graduate Certificate in Management - Course Overviews

1. Financial and Management Accounting

The course is aimed at providing financial and management accounting skills to participants who have had minimal previous exposure to the financial activities of a business. In this course, you will learn the principles and practices of accounting to enable you to understand and analyse financial reports. The course aims to develop skills that will enable participants to:

- understand fundamental accounting principles
- apply the principles in a practical business context
- explain the components of financial reports

2. Socio-political context of business

The course introduces delegates to some basic socio-political trends on the international, African and South African levels and assists delegates in evaluating South Africa's progress in building a non-racial and non-sexist democracy. The learning outcomes encompass being able to understand and analyse socio-political processes and developing cognisance of political structures and their dynamics. The key themes are:

- Transitions to democracy
- International trends
- Africa's socio-political challenges
- South Africa's transition to democracy

3. Management Communication

On completion of this course students will:

- Develop the ability to think and write critically
- Develop the confidence necessary for successful presentation
- Know how to make effective use of information and reference correctly
- Write coherent and comprehensive proposals and management reports

4. Introduction to Economics

The objectives of the course are to clarify key economic concepts and issues and to use economic tools to analyse key policy challenges facing the South African economy. The key themes of this course are:

- The Economic Problem: scarcity and choice
- Markets and how they work
- Linkages and relationships in the macro-economy
- The role of government in the economy: policy and intervention in economic activity
- Economic Challenges: globalisation, regionalism, strong currency, employment creation and more

5. Information Systems

The objectives of this course are to provide delegates with a foundation of basic concepts relevant to using and managing information in business, enabling them to participate in information systems decisions. This course is designed to give you an introduction to key IS concepts such as:

- Introduction to Management Information Systems
- Organisational and work impacts of Information Systems
- IT architecture and infrastructure
- Business process transformation
- The Internet and E-Business and developing and supporting IS systems

6. Human Resources

To develop independent thinking and practical knowledge about human resource management, achieving competitive edge, through people and the line manager's role in managing people equitably and fairly. The key themes are:

- how organisational goals and people management are integrated
- corporate culture and leadership
- performance management
- developing, motivating and rewarding people to achieve customer service and quality
- affirmative action and employment equity
- industrial relations: South African developments

7. Strategy

The objective of the Strategy course is to introduce a few of the theoretical classroom concepts of strategy and to relate these concepts to the world around us in such a way as to give each student a feel for

- what the subject can encompass – what is strategic thinking?
- an understanding of the types of issues which would be appropriate to examine under this banner
- how to address complex issues in a constructive way.

8. Marketing

The marketing perspective is that customers get to make the rules of the game and companies choose to play the game to create value for their stakeholders. Consumers decide what they will buy and what they won't and the rules they will use to make those decisions. Companies that acknowledge the importance of integrating this customer perspective into their business planning often deliver spectacular results to their shareholders.

The skill of marketing is the skill to monitor customers, competitors, and collaborators, and to find in each domain a better way to design and deploy the firm's capabilities to serve the customers at a profit. This course will focus on the philosophy and necessity of marketing in the modern business environment. The course will be informal and interactive with the primary objective being to familiarise students with the core concepts involved in marketing and to facilitate the application of marketing in the development of strategy.

9. Business Numeracy

Many of the students who register for this programme of study have had schooling experiences that have left them with an inadequate preparation for the mathematical demands which will later be placed upon them. In many cases students lack the necessary self-confidence to carry out some basic mathematical calculations. This course has been specifically designed to give participants the opportunity to revisit their schooling experience and re-script their mathematical ability. The course runs over 12 two-hour sessions, and is divided into two sections.

The first section of the course runs over 6 of the 12 sessions and will focus on the many sources out of which a poor relationship with one's mathematical ability can be generated at school. The sessions in this section will set up a classroom interaction that differs considerably from that which is normally encountered in schools. Students will be encouraged to tackle their fears through working in a co-operative learning environment in which they use their powers of visualisation to tackle a variety of set problems.

The second section of the course will also run over 6 sessions and will build on the increased self-confidence which has been developed in the first section. Specific content topics will be covered in this section, including basic operations, ratio and proportion, simple graphs, and equations and changing the subject of a formula. The main aim of this section will be to give participants the confidence to be able to solve problems on these topics from first principles rather than through a reliance on rote-learned algorithms.

10. Entrepreneurship

As large corporations and the public sector shed jobs, the task of creating wealth and jobs will increasingly fall on the shoulders of a new generation of entrepreneurs. In this course students will learn how to prepare a business plan for launching a new business or a new innovation within an existing company. It will give you the opportunity to apply your

business education and experience to a very practical, hands-on project. This is the most effective way to understand the entrepreneurial and/or the intrapreneurial processes.

- Understanding the entrepreneurial process
- Understanding of what makes a society entrepreneurial
- Understanding what it takes to be an entrepreneur
- the discipline of thinking through all the various aspects of starting and operating a business or new innovation;
- the opportunity to identify areas in which the business or innovation has particular advantages or weaknesses;
- the opportunity to determine with a reasonable degree of certainty whether or not the business or innovation is viable - before investing (and potentially losing) money;
- the possession of a document which demonstrates to business associates - bankers, investors, and others - that you have carefully considered your options and the practicalities of the proposed undertaking.

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Appendix two: Family history questionnaire

Name: _____

Father's occupation	Paternal grand father's occupation	Paternal grand mother's occupation	Father's education	Paternal grand father's education	Paternal grand mother's education
Mother's occupation	Maternal Grand father's occupation	Maternal Grand mother's occupation	Mother's education	Maternal Grand father's education	Maternal Grand mother's education

Family Place/s of residence

Suburb, city	Rented / owned / other

Appendix three: Interview schedules

1st Interview Questions

Education - current

1. Why have you returned to study now?
2. What do you want to achieve by coming to this programme?
3. What would you like to achieve by the end of the year i.e. what does success look like/mean to you?
4. Why did you choose this university?
5. What has been your immediate family's (partner/children) response to this decision?
6. What has been your family's (parents) response to this decision?
7. What has been your friends' response to this decision?
8. What challenges do you anticipate returning to study?
9. What problems do you anticipate coming to this institution?

Education history

1. What is your educational history?
2. What are your recollections of your experiences at school?
3. Why did you not pursue a higher education qualification?
4. What did you consider studying? Why? (if applicable)

Family

1. What are/were the jobs of your parents?
2. Where did you (and your parents) live in your early years?
3. Where do your parents live now?
4. Where do you live now?

2nd Interview Questions

I'm interested in your initial impressions

1. Do you think GCM is meeting your expectations?
2. And of the class? Your group?
3. And the lecturers? Their interaction with you?

And academically?

4. How do you think you've performed thus far?
5. And your initial fears about coping? [*where appropriate*]

Experience of being an GCM student at the SMS

6. Do you feel you fit in with the other GCM students? Examples?
7. Do you feel you fit in with the rest of the SMS environment? Examples? [Do you participate in social activities, chat with other groups of students outside the programme e.g. PD and Masters?]
8. Any experiences that you've had that have been particularly meaningful /memorable?

What have been the effects of studying?

9. On your personal life? [are you still seeing a lot of your friends?]
10. And at work?
11. Are you conscious of any other changes or effects as a result of your studying?
12. Do you think you're changing? Is this course changing you in any way?

3rd Interview Questions

Experience of being a GCM student at the SMS in the 2nd semester

1. What have been the experiences in your new group?
2. How have you been dealing with them?
3. Any experiences that you've had that have been particularly meaningful /memorable?

And academically?

4. How do you think you've performed thus far? Any challenges?
5. Any plans after GCM?

How have you been dealing with the effects of studying? [group meetings, preparation etc]

6. On your personal life? [family, friends?]
7. And at work? Tell me a bit about work, your job and the relationships that exist there

Early reflection

8. Do you think GCM has met your expectations? In which ways?
9. And the lecturers in the 2nd semester? Their interaction with you?

4th Interview Questions

1. You came to the business school for a purpose and do you think that was met?
Did you get what you wanted from the course? Did it fulfil your expectations?
Have you benefited – or not – from the course, in the end?
2. If you had to describe GCM to other people what would you say?
3. When you look back on your experience last year, what stands out for you?
4. Did you fit in – feel comfortable? Did this change as the course progressed?
5. What are the main things you learnt? Acquired?
6. Did you make friends with people on the course, in the School?
7. How are you feeling about graduation?
8. Who is accompanying you? Any comments from them?
9. Comments from partners, family members (where appropriate) employers – what have been their insights /comments about you since the programme? Have your relationships with them changed?
10. Are you enrolled for further study?
11. Brief comments about that experience so far?

OR

12. Are you still considering further study?

Appendix four: The educational career and its system of determinations
(Bourdieu and Passeron 1977/2004 np postscript)

