Frances Elizabeth Caldwell

Student ID: 26118060

Masters of Education Dissertation

Supervisors:

Dr Taffy Davies

&

Dr Helen Hayward

'Educating 'Shelias': What are the social class issues for mature working-class women studying at contemporary New Zealand universities?'

ABSTRACT

"…And you think you're so clever and classless and free…
…But we're still fucking peasants as far as I can see.
A working-class hero is something to be…"
(Song sung by Marion Faithful, 1990*).*

The quote above illustrates the conflict highlighted by this study between working-class struggle (and possible middle-class exploitation) and working-class hopes and aspirations for a middle-class future. It also reflects the uncomfortable sense of being "between two worlds" and "belonging nowhere" that is described by the mature, working-class women university students in my study. This feeling of being not quite one thing or another is expressed in Lucey, Melody and Walkerdine's (2002) phrase "uneasy hybrids". It encapsulates the struggles, conflicts and successes faced by the four women in my study as they attempted to juggle family, study and work commitments, dealt with relationship break-ups, unexpected academic successes, and learned how to adapt to a middle-class environment. The project involved five case studies (although in the end only four were fully used) using a semi-structured interview and additional focus group discussion approach. My participants were four mature working-class women who were currently studying at a New Zealand University. Little research has been done on this demographic, particularly in New Zealand, despite interest generated by the 1980s British film *Educating Rita*. I compared my findings, in which the key themes were alienation, overwhelming struggle, strategising, and unexpected advantages and successes, with the issues raised in the film. There were some similarities in terms of relationship-break-down and not belonging being part of upward social mobility. However, it appeared the reality of changing class is less tidy, speedy and comfortable than Rita's filmic ending, where she successfully incorporated her original working-class and new middle-class identities. The literature appeared to support the experiences of my participants who, despite their academic successes, talked about an on-going, disturbing sense of feeling "like a fraud".

INTRODUCTION

There is a scene in the iconic 1983 Willy Russell film *Educating Rita,* where Rita (played by Julie Walters) sits in a pub watching her working-class family and friends drinking and singing along with the juke box and she knows that she doesn't belong in that world any more. Nor does she yet belong in the middle-class world of academia, books, plays, and intellectual conversation that she aspires to. She tells her university tutor Frank, "I can't talk to the people I live with anymore and I can't talk to the likes of them on Saturday [at Frank's party] because I can't learn the language. I'm a half-caste".

The Pygmalion-like journey of Rita from earthy, working-class British housewife and hairdresser to a successful and rounded-voweled English literature student at the Open University has almost become a late 20th Century popular culture classic. The film has spawned a play (also written by Russell and based on the film) which is still being performed around the world and, according to Google, is on-stage at Howick Little Theatre in Auckland from June to July this year. There have also been numerous studies and a number of books which attempt to attract attention by incorporating the film's title. I was almost guilty of this myself (and still half am) until, in an example of the high cultural capital worth of the Educating Rita 'brand', I faced academic competition for its use by a fellow student who wished to reserve the topic (and related title) for a potential PhD thesis.

Some of the studies which use the film title in their names have absolutely nothing to do with Rita's concerns. For example, an article titled 'Educating Rita' in a 1998 issue of the Far Eastern Economic Review critiques Hong Kong's poor level of higher education as "Hong Kong mediocrity at Harvard prices" ('Anonymous', 1998). Other studies are, more appropriately, about the education of working-class women. *Educating Rita and Her Sisters*, by Benn, Elliot and Whaley (1998) is one example. However, as I point out later, the collection of essays in the book do not really focus on the specific issues pertinent to Rita such as the sense of dislocation she experiences as she pursues her middle-class dreams of education and intelligent conversation. Nor do they look at the effect of study on the relationships of mature women who go to university. One of the hardest things for Rita is the conflict she experiences when her

husband's resentment at her newfound interest in her studies leads to a sabotage attempt in the form of him burning her books. Eventually he leaves her for a woman who is happy to get pregnant and spend nights down at the pub. Meanwhile, Rita carries on studying with her disillusioned alcoholic tutor Frank (played by Michael Caine) and gets a new job waitressing in a bistro frequented by people from university.

Rita eventually learns, not just how to deconstruct a novel or play and write an essay, but also how to fit in and pass as middle-class. In the process, she discovers that middle-class culture is not necessarily all it appears from the outside; Frank's partner is having an affair with another lecturer and Rita's new flatmate who "just loves Mahler darling" ends up in hospital after a suicide attempt. By the end of the film (and the end of her first year of study) Rita has abandoned her garish, apparently working-class outfit of pink hair, short skirt and stilettos and she has also stopped putting on a fake upper-class accent. In essence, she appears to have successfully incorporated the two different worlds of her working-class origins and her professional middle-class aspirations. In the film's final scene, she alludes to the major gain she has made by becoming educated – the power of choice. When Frank asks her what she will do next she tells him, "I dunno, I might go to France. I might go to me mother's. I might even have a baby. I dunno. I'll make a decision, I'll choose. I dunno".

Exercising choice myself, I decided to call my study *Educating Shelias*. The title is both a compromise between avoiding the competition I mentioned earlier and also a genuine attempt to position this research as a contemporary New Zealand study (rather than a 1980s or 1990s British study) investigating issues of social class and gender in relation to mature working-class women university students. As far as I can tell, there have been no other studies on this specific topic done in New Zealand. There are also relatively few that have been done in other parts of the world, in particular Britain and the United States, the countries from which most social-class research emerges. 'Shelias' is a distinctly Kiwi expression, one that was (and sometimes still is) used as an affectionate (but slightly derogatory and certainly quite working-class) term for women. It resonates with the ironic (to the middle-classes)

low-brow, working-class cultures of Fred Dagg, Lynn of Tawa and Australian television characters Kath and Kim.

It is important at this stage that I briefly address the reasons for my interest in researching the Rita area in the first place. Having been brought up in a middle-class family, I risk being seen as yet another middle-class researcher who uses, or "colonises" (Lynch and O'Neil, 1994, p.308) the experiences of the working-class to elevate my own class status and secure my future income. As I discuss in more detail in my Findings and Discussion section, I became interested in class through studying it at university and also from having a working-class partner. I also went through a period of financial hardship and came to see class analysis as a means to understanding (and perhaps addressing) issues of poverty and the myth of educational meritocracy.

While the number of women at universities has grown exponentially, women are still paid less than men in general and are under-represented in the highest paid and highest status jobs and occupations. A particular phenomenon is the increasing appearance at universities of 'non-traditional' students, ie, those who are not white, heterosexual middle-class men who have come to university straight from school.

The purpose of this research project, then, was to inquire into the social class and gender-related experiences of non-traditional students, in particular, mature working-class (or financially constrained) women who are currently or recently students at a New Zealand university. Using a qualitative approach (a case study of each of five participants, based on a semi-structured interview and a focus group discussion) I analysed the data from my participants, drew out key themes and compared them with comparable literature and with the issues explored in 1980's Britain in the film *Educating Rita*. As well as asking my participants about their experiences of being students in terms of academic success and social integration and mobility, I also asked them about their family backgrounds and occupations in order to provide validation to their self-definitions of being working-class. Four of the participants and I watched the film together, and afterwards I audio-taped a semi-structured discussion about the women's reaction to the film and its relevance or otherwise to their own experiences.

<u>Literature Review</u>

The purpose of this literature review is to provide a context for my study looking at social class issues for mature women studying at contemporary New Zealand universities and comparing them to themes from the film *Educating Rita*. It describes literature exploring social class struggle and the role of cultural capital in gaining a university education; literature examining links between social class, education and gender; and literature specifically looking at 'Ritas' - mature working-class women university students. It concludes with literature on Rita-types that actually uses the name of the film in its title.

Class Inequalities in University Education

Although this is a study about working-class students, it is first necessary to describe the professional middle-class's (pmc's) domination of access to university education. Much literature has been devoted to describing the professional middle-class' (a subset of the middle classes) reliance on education to reproduce and secure cultural and material advantages for their offspring through university access and subsequent professional qualifications.

While the very wealthy can rely upon their money to buy cultural and social advantages for themselves and their children, 'pmcs' depend mainly "upon the credentials bestowed by the education system in order to acquire or hold on to their position" (Power, 2001, p.197). Thus, the "education market has become one of the most important loci of class struggle" (Bourdieu and Boltanski, 1981, cited in Ball and Vincent, 2001, p.188) and middle-class parents staunchly defend their class interests against those who may have upwardly mobile aspirations.

Pmc students tend to take the fact that they will go to university for granted. They grow up surrounded by implicit parental assumptions and expectations of educational success, a university qualification and the generally higher pay levels and job security of a professional occupation. The cultural advantages that come from having "significantly higher levels of education and training" include the kind of "dominant culture" knowledge, values and lifestyles encapsulated in Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital (Bilton, 1996, p.174-175). According to Bowl (2005, p.128), cultural

capital can be institutionalised through qualifications - which equals well-paid work - and also objectified through cultural goods such as books, instruments and machines. As well, it can be embodied through valued individual features "such as accent and familiarity with academic discourse".

Callewaert (1999) explains how it is important to understand that a university degree confers on a student more than just certification of a learning achievement. As a form of cultural capital, it is also a personal investment. It is "…other capital (most physical resources) converted into cultural capital – but the investment takes time, effort and involvement. It cannot be transmitted instantaneously by gift, bequest, purchase or exchange. It cannot be accumulated except for the person's capacity, while it increases and dies with him" (Callewaert, 1999, p.137).

Such valuable cultural capital is apparently available to all with the ability, motivation and preparation necessary to succeed in the university system. However, meritocracy is an illusion for, as American researchers Haveman and Smeeding (2006) point out, the three qualities listed above "are all linked to the economic position of the children's families with children from well-to-do families [tending] on average, to have more of all three traits" (p.129).

What is interesting, says Callewaert, is how even "lecturers and students are seduced into believing that [educational success] is a question of intellectual excellency" (1999, p.140). This is due to the illusion of choice, meritocracy and equal competition in education. In practice, however, the middle-classes have a head start as educational institutions are structured to favour the dominant (pmc) group who conserve their privileges by teaching middle-class culture (cultural capital) that is more easily learned by those who have grown up in middle-class families. Hatcher (1998) explains Bourdieu's concept of a middle-class 'habitus', a "social universe, one of the privileges of the dominant, who move in their world as fish in water [and hence, do not have to] engage in rational computation in order to reach the goals that best suit their interests" (Bourdieu, 1990, cited in Hatcher, 1998, p.18).

For the reasons described above, most working-class people, ethnic minorities, and historically, women, are never in a position to choose whether to go to university or

not. The exceptions who are in such a position, tend to exclude themselves from choosing a university education even though they have the necessary school grades and qualifications. The small numbers of working-class people who do go on to higher education are more likely to choose to go to a polytechnic than a university. Those who do choose to go to university – will in Britain or the United States – avoid applying to high ranking universities such as Oxford or Harvard. 'Rita', for example went to the Open University, an institution set up to give non-traditional students a 'second chance'. In New Zealand, there is less status among individual universities, so choice of university is less likely to be class-driven.

However, while New Zealand may be less obviously class-based than Britain or USA, its education system is no more meritocratic. Harker (1990) describes how middle-class cultural capital reinforces existing inequalities in terms of ethnicity. Maori are disadvantaged because Maori culture is not embodied in the middle-class school system and so Maori experience a discontinuity of culture between home and school rather than a comfortable habitus where some ways of doing things are second nature. Working-class students experience a similar barrier to learning but this "need never be overtly stated since it can be quite easily maintained through hegemonic control of the curriculum, pedagogy and evaluation" (Harker, 1990, p.37). Inequality remains because those from non-dominant cultures who do succeed in the education system are acculturated into the middle-class, thus reproducing middle-class cultural capital. Lynch and O'Neil (1994) discuss how members of the working-class face the "fundamentally contradictory position" (p.318) of ceasing to be working-class to a certain extent because of the connection between higher education and social mobility.

Says Bowl (2005,p.128), it is "the hidden nature of cultural capital, particularly in its embodied form, which makes it so powerful. It can operate alongside opposing policies of inclusion and equality". Habitus, she says, operates in such a way that working-class people tend to feel excluded from certain opportunities and feel less worthy and tend to blame themselves for educational problems, in contrast to middle-class students who tend to blame the school. What seems to be an individual, cognitive decision – to not go to university or to chose a polytechnic - is actually determined by "social class in the head" (Ball, Davies, David and Reay, 2002, p.52).

Gender, Education and Social Class

Historically, women have been denied access to education, particularly higher education, both overtly and through the "hidden curriculum", the covert messages conveyed via the education system which includes the continued socialisation of children into defined gender roles (McDonald 1980, p.153).

From a Marxist view-point, social class and gender are linked by socialist feminism which sees the ideological and economic forces of, respectively, patriarchy and capitalism, reinforcing each other. The family is seen as a domestic source of oppression for women which is reinforced by sexual division of labour in the workplace. According to Waring (1988), childbirth and "all the other reproductive work that women do is widely viewed as unproductive…[and is] unacknowledged as part of the [economic] production system" (p.23).

Darwinian evolutionary theory reinforced the view that women were not suited to education (or economic production) by placing white men at the top of the natural hierarchy and women close to the bottom as "perennially underdeveloped, both a child and a savage" (Astbury, 1996, p.46). Thus Victorians believed women were biologically suited to childbirth rather than education and "a great deal of scientific energy was dedicated to proving that intellectual women became sterile" (Astbury, 1996, p.51).

Nineteenth Century American psychologist George Stanley Hall was concerned about declining birth rates among the middle-classes and considered this due to academic women ruining "their reproductive systems, which would languish through energy starvation" (Astbury, 1996, p.51). He believed that if the educated classes had fewer children then the population would be kept up by the 'lowest'…He railed at the biological immorality and selfishness of women who sought to develop their brains at the expense of their descendents" (Astbury, 1996, p.52).

Surprisingly, Stanley Hall's eugenic views are not just a relic of a bygone era. As recently as 2007, a *Sunday Star Times* article reported Otago University emeritus professor Dr Jim Flynn expressing concern over the high proportion of poor,

uneducated New Zealand women giving birth. Regarded as an international expert on "the interaction of IQ, race and class", Flynn is concerned that IQ quality will deteriorate over time if poor, less educated women keep producing almost double the number of babies of women with a tertiary qualification. He says that in a socially mobile society such as New Zealand, "gene quality is segregated by class…[with] those who remain stuck at the bottom, uneducated, tend[ing] to have lower genetic quality in terms of IQ" (Laugesen, 2007). Flynn's recommended solution to the problem was putting contraceptives in tap water to reduce the rate of unplanned pregnancies among working-class and poor women.

While Flynn's focus is on the educational failings of working-class women and Stanley Hall was concerned with 'selfish' educated middle-class women, both men conflate gender and social class, blaming women (and not their male partners) for the supposed 'dumbing down' of the gene pool, and explicitly linking the working-class to low intellectual ability. Even contemporary feminist scholars undermine working-class women by minimising or dismissing the effects of class in their studies of women and education, say Brine and Waller (2004). In describing the additional difficulties working-class women face in terms of pursuing higher education, Brine and Waller paint a metaphorical picture of the 'class' ceiling. Unlike the invisible glass ceiling that applies to all women, the class ceiling is a thick, unbreakable structure that "obscures the light" (of education) and prevents working-class women from even "getting out of the cellar" (Brine, 1999, cited in Brine and Waller, 2004, p.99).

Ignoring class in studies of women's education is "a prerogative of those unaffected by the deprivations and exclusions it produces" (Skeggs, 1997, p.7). In Skeggs' study of 80 working-class British women at a Further Education College, she found that historic discourses of femininity, positioning middle-class women as respectable and working-class women as other or deviant, are still operating. Respectability is still "a marker and a burden of class" against which middle-class individuals can define themselves against the masses" and "the working-classes are still 'massified' and marked as others in academic and popular representations where they appear as "pathological" or represented through their deviant or vulgar sexuality, for example, the *Marie Claire* magazine headline, 'Council Estate Slags' (p.3).

Ten years later, in an era of globalisation and neo-liberalism, Archer, Halsall and Hollingworth (2007) found that working-class women continue to be 'othered' as "both overtly and overly sexual and [thus] positioned as antithetical to educational engagement and success" (p.170) due to the Cartesian dualism of the academic, middle-class mind as separate from the non-academic female working-class body. This positioning works against the accumulation of economic and educational cultural capital. Archer et al describe the situation as "a tyranny of conformity to both the patriarchal regulation of female (hetero)sexuality and to a fixing of the young women within disadvantaged social (class) locations" (p.171).

Luttrell (1997) describes this 'tyranny' in her study of the educational experiences and personal identity of working-class American women (rural, urban, black and white) who had returned to study in adult education programmes. She found that during their years of schooling, the women had "learned to recognize as 'intelligent' or 'valuable' only the styles, traits and knowledge possessed by the economically advantaged students. They saw those who possessed such cultural capital as "white, middle-class feminine behaviour and appearances (eg: submissiveness, obedience and attractiveness that won the pets approval from the teachers); light skin color; and urban or suburban mannerisms and styles of speech" as being "entitled to their superior positions" (p.114). They had learned these attitudes through on-going "degradation and disdain – what Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) refer to as 'symbolic violence'" – from teachers and other students for their speech, physical appearances, skin colour and clothing styles.

Literature on 'Ritas'

This part of the literature review looks at studies focused on working-class and/or mature women's experiences of university (or other higher education institutions). The majority of studies of mature working-class women returning to education are based on access (to university) courses in British or American further education colleges. There are few qualitative studies about the experiences of such women once they get to university, and even fewer that have been conducted in the past decade. Consequently, some of the literature I explore is old – from the early 1990s and even

the late 1980s. I found nothing based on New Zealand research, making this an area ripe for further study.

One of the most contemporary and expansive pieces of literature on 'Ritas' is Bowl's (2003) study of the experiences of aspiring non-traditional students (mostly women) in their attempts to access higher education. From 1997 to 2001, Bowl followed the journeys of students at the Birmingham Reachout Project where she taught a government-funded programme aimed at "increasing mature, working-class and ethnic minority entry to higher education" (p3). It was a social science-based access to higher education courses aimed at students who needed flexible study options as well as help with childcare, travel costs and finding second-hand books and computers. Most of the students were black women and/or single mothers. Of the few men on the course, nearly all had dyslexia.

The students, all of whom had not studied for at least three years, had not continued their education from school because their families felt isolated from the education system and were unable to provide support in the form of knowledge, time and the "ability to be assertive in relation to the education system" (Bowl, 2003, p.37). All but one student chose to apply to a college of higher education rather than a traditional university as they felt more comfortable with people who were more 'like them'. Subject choices were based on their career goals and desire to escape benefits, low status and poor pay, with most interested in 'people' work such as teaching or social work. Bowl theorises that the students' subject choices were based on mature women's ability to relate their life experience to academia through 'people'-type courses. Once the students began their tertiary studies, they struggled to juggle "the complex demands of family, finance, care and relationships" (p.10).

The need to juggle competing demands is reflective of Edwards' (1993) study of the experiences of 31 mature British women (of different social classes) all studying at universities or polytechnics. The women were "juggling themselves between two greedy institutions (higher education and family)" (p.105). They all talked about the need to be organised as a way of coping with "the all-consuming commitments of education and family" (p.73). All of the women had children and were in heterosexual relationships at the start of the one-year study. Nine of the 31 women – mostly

working-class and/or black women – also had to fit in part-time paid work which added to their load. By the end of the year, a third of the women (both working and middle-class) had broken up with their partners who felt threatened by their focus on study. While Edwards does not have a strong class analysis, she does say that nearly all the women in her study saw higher education as increasing knowledge and status and "conferring prestige, related to being 'intelligent people'" (p.57).

The women in Leonard's (1994) study of mature working-class women sociology students saw education as a way to "escape domesticity". However, this was often prevented "by the patriarchal attitudes of their partners, who gave conditional support of the women's decisions to return to education on the understanding that traditional domestic roles were not threatened" (p.167). In a two-year study of six mature higher education students (four men and two women) in long-term relationships, Norton, Thomas, Morgan, Tilley and Dickins (1998) found that all participants experienced high levels of stress. However, the negative effects of stress were worse for women students who felt less supported by their male partners, with support diminishing further in the second year of study. The authors interpret this in terms of what Wakeford (1994, cited in Norton et al, 1998, p.85) has described as "a 'social risk' perspective: mature women perceived the risks of being a student as potentially threatening to their domestic relationships, whereas men did not".

Karach's (1992) study was similar to mine in that it was based on the case studies of five mature women university students (including Karach herself). Four of the five women identified themselves as being working-class, although Karach only mentions this in passing and fails to examine the social-class implications of the women's experiences of dislocation and alienation. Instead, she focused on the women's identity as 'mature' students, linking invalidation of their subjective knowledge and experiences with the oppression of women "in general in most spheres of society", an "oppression [which] continues within higher education" (pp.316-317). A source of strength for all the women was their ability to support each other through the problems they encountered. They also benefited from their experiences as students by an increased ability to analyse and think critically.

American academic Kathleen Dunbar (1999) describes her own personal journey through university study from her origins as a working-class single mother who left school to become a waitress. She describes the grinding poverty and stress of working three part-time jobs to make ends meet while studying university courses at night school. She points out that her experience is not unique as – at the time she was writing – "only 2% of the [US] working-class hold M.A.s and Ph.D.s" (p.30). Dealing with "the ramifications of [her] working-class background was also a constant struggle" in terms of her lack of middle-class cultural capital (p.35). Initially she mispronounced words and felt more comfortable with the secretaries and cafeteria staff. Eventually she learned to keep quiet when people complained about "the bums on the street who beg for money" and "learned not to be passionate about the ideas and issues that affected [her] most". She says "I learned to pass, which wasn't' very hard, since the subject of class rarely surfaced…I learned to think and write like middle-class white people" (p.35).

The psychological difficulties inherent in working-class women adapting to the middle-class intellectual domain are explored by Lucey, Melody and Walkerdine (2003) in an article based on a longitudinal study of middle-class and working-class girls growing up. The authors focus on "those few working-class young women who managed to get to university" (p.285) and in doing so, face deep psychosocial conflict. Using the concept of 'uneasy hybrids', Lucey et al describe how social mobility involves "the difficulties of negotiating the emotions…that are aroused when aspiration and success mean becoming and being profoundly different to your family and peer group" (p.286).

Hybridisation is explored in terms of the process of individualisation ("putting the ego at the centre" (p.306)) in Raey's (2003) narrative study of 12 working-class mature women students on an access to university course in London. She compared their stories with those of middle-class male and female students and found that the costs and risks of individualisation (a process Beck (1992, cited in Raey, 2003, p.306) identified as necessary to achieve academic success) were much greater for the working-class women. They were all time-poor and exhausted as they juggled intensive study with paid work or childcare and domestic commitments. For all the

working-class women, "the costs and risks of 'reinventing the self' compete[d] with, and at times, overwhelm[ed] the advantages" (p.314)

.

Brine and Waller (2004) in a similar study - of eight mature women on a British access course - discuss the risks to working-class women in constructing a learner identity. While the risks of academic failure and financial stress are mostly anticipated, risks to personal relationships and class identity are less likely to be foreseen. Working-class women often face the assumption that being educated means being middle-class. This correlates with the assumption, discussed earlier, that "to be working-class you must be un- or less-educated, an almost biological reading of 'intelligence' that would be rightly contested if applied to other social groups" (p.110).

Lynch and O'Neil (1994) critiqued colonisation of class issues by middle-class academics and the consequent lack of input by working-class academics on class analysis. They believe this has led to a focus on cultural issues of class as opposed to "poverty-related barriers to equality in education" (p.308). This appears to be the case in studies of 'Ritas', with student financial hardship generally seen as an expected (but temporary) price to pay for future financial security. However, there has been more focus on student poverty in general (in most Anglo-American countries, including New Zealand) in the past decade since the neo-liberal introduction of the user pays system in university education. Researchers such as Willets (2006) and Bosanquet, Gibbs, Cuming and Haldenby (2006) show how loss of government subsidies on fee payments, the introduction of student loans, and a corresponding rise in house prices and relative reduction in wages for graduates has severely impacted all students in terms of the financial pay-offs of getting a degree.

While all current students are impacted by this generational change (in contrast to the financial benefits enjoyed by middle-class Baby Boomers) the educational participation rates of low income groups are especially affected. The high cost of study "can generate high levels of indebtedness, with regressive impacts especially for women" (Boston, 1999, p.207). Brine and Waller (2004) point out that the economic costs of investing in a course are compounded by loss of fulltime earnings. This is particularly the case for working-class women without middle-class partners who are

"trebly disadvantaged" financially because, on leaving university, "no matter what their occupation [they] earn less than men…[and] as mature students they have less time to pay back the loan" (p.107).

<u>*Educating Rita* Literature</u>

Willy Russell's film title *Educating Rita* has been consistently used as a catch-phrase since the film was released in 1983. A cull of literature data bases brings up a swag of articles with the phrase in the title, most of them having little to do with the key theme of a mature, working-class woman's experience of university. Of the handful of titles that are relevant, the most interesting and recent was found not in a data base but reported on the website of British newspaper *The Independent*. According to Garner (2002) researcher Kathryn James found a thriving "*Educating Rita* syndrome" of marriage breakdown among UK women returning to further and higher education. The women and their tutors told James that as the women gained confidence as learners, their relationships often broke down because their partners felt threatened. Only a few women gave up study to save their marriages. Most saw such traumatic events as separation as "a route to a more fulfilling life". James told Garner she was unaware of any cases of men "being told they were ruining the marriage by returning to college".

The promising-sounding study 'Educating Rita: An examination of the female life course and its influence on women's participation in higher education' (Bates and Norton, 2002) is disappointing in that it has no analysis of social class. Taking a human developmental approach, the authors use "a narrative format" to investigate the motivations for returning to study of 62 women aged 20-60 who were studying at two Kansas universities. Nearly 70% of the women said they wanted to improve their career and financial status and 30% said they were going to university for reasons of self-esteem and fulfilment. For the 10 women in the study who were divorced in the two years prior to beginning their university studies, their divorces were strong motivating factors for deciding to go to university.

The most interesting part of the study is Bates and Norton's review of the literature on adult education which shows that the main barriers to participation by women in adult education are insufficient time and lack of money. It also points to a lack of research

on "ethnic women or women of poverty" as learners (Tennant and Pogson, 1995, cited in Bates and Norton, 2002, p.5). Unfortunately, the authors make no attempt to fill this gap in their own study. The demographics of their participants are based only on age and whether or not they have children.

Non-traditional students, specifically "re-entry women", were asked to relate their own "educational careers and lived experience" to the film *Educating Rita* in Page's (1992) study of 'An ethnographic and textual analysis of re-entry women students' interpretations of *Educating Rita* (p.1). Interviews with 30 women showed that their "interpretive practices" reflected a lack of middle-class discursive "conditionings". Instead, they interpreted the film "in line with the circumstances of their daily lives and lived experiences, conditioned further by structures of power, resistance, institutional constraint and innovation" (Page, 1992, p.1).

In 'Beyond *Educating Rita*: mature students and Access courses', Wakeford (1993) investigated the usefulness of Access courses (in UK) as a means of fulfilling policy aims of recruiting and increasing the proportion and range of 'non-conventional' students to higher education. She studied the demographics of adults on Access courses and found the courses were not necessarily providing educational opportunities for all under-represented groups. In particular, the social class status of mature students needed to be monitored in future studies, as well as their gender and ethnicity. Data from the study suggests that "we should not assume all potential mature students doing Access courses are Rita, although the majority are women" (p.228).

In one of the first US studies based on the film, Brunner (1984) analysed *Educating Rita* in terms of women's "struggle for voice and…the historic way that women's voices and knowledge have been positioned as other than authoritative". In 1989 Benn, Elliot and Whaley produced *Educating Rita and Her Sisters,* a British anthology of essays exploring issues of continuing education for women students, teachers and researchers. Unfortunately, none of the authors make explicit or implicit connections with the film and play *Educating Rita*. They appear more interested in the educational experiences of women in general (often at pre-tertiary level) and were criticised by Stalker (1999, cited in Thomson, 2000, p.98) for being patronising and

lacking analysis of the effects of neo-liberalism in education. Thomson herself criticises the book for its implicit assumptions that education is always "a good thing" and for its "concentration on individualism" (Thomson, 2000, p.103).

Conclusion

In conclusion, this literature review shows that a reasonable amount of research has been done looking at the effects of social class on women, or rather girls, in education. However, almost all of this research has been based in countries other than New Zealand, most of it in the United States or Britain, and most of it looking at school-based education rather than tertiary education. Also, the majority of the research was done in the 1980s and early 1990s.

In the early to mid-1990s there was flurry of studies looking at the experiences of working-class people and women in higher education, for example, Edwards, 1993; Karach, 1992; Leonard, 1994 and Wakeford, 1993. There seems to have been a resurgence of interest in the topic of social class and higher or further education in the 21st Century. Bowl (2003) in particular, thoroughly investigates the experiences of 'non-traditional' students, mostly women who are working-class and/Black, on Access (to higher education) courses and follows them on their journeys to universities or polytechnics. A number of other British studies have focussed on the experiences of mature students on Access courses.

Various American academics have written about their own experiences as working-class university students, for example, Dunbar, 1999, Gammon, 1997; and Nainby and Pea (2003). Other studies look at the experiences of university students who are mature but not necessarily working-class (Norton, Thomas, Morgan, Tilley and Dickins, 1998; Walters, 2000 and Wakeling, 2005).

It is clear that only a handful of studies, some of them quite old now, specifically examine the experiences of mature, working-class women at university. Even studies incorporating the name *Educating Rita*, tend not to focus on the demographics of Rita as a mature, working-class student. What research that has been done, however, indicates that mature, working-class women students are under enormous pressure as they study at university in terms of poverty, time management, relationship stress and

coping with the pressures of becoming middle-class. It also seems that little has changed from the challenges faced by fictional Rita in 1983 to the women in Edwards' study in 1993 and even for the women in Bowl's 2003 study. Thus, the field seems ripe for further exploration of the class issues of mature working-class women at universities, particularly in New Zealand.

METHODOLOGY

As mentioned in my introduction, I undertook five case studies that focussed on the in-depth investigation of social class issues for mature, working-class women currently studying at a New Zealand university. A major tool of my method was semi-structured interviews with each of the participants. The interviews sought to elicit information on the women's backgrounds, experiences of university – both academically and socially – their motivations for returning to study and the effects of their study on their personal lives. All but one of the interviews was conducted face-to-face while the fifth interview was done by phone due to the participant living in another city. All interviews took between approximately one and two hours. Further discussion by email ensued between me and two of the participants following questions that arose out of the initial interviews.

Once individual interviews were completed, I followed up with an hour-long focus group interview involving four of the participants after we had all, as a group, watched the film *Educating Rita*. The purpose of the focus group was to identify and discuss the film's main themes and their relevance (or otherwise) to the women's own experiences of education as mature working-class women. All interviews were audio-taped, then transcribed at a later date with identifying details changed or deleted and participants given pseudonyms of their own choosing. The participants then had the opportunity to read their own transcriptions and make changes, if they wished. Data collection took place between August and December, 2007. Analysis and writing of the report was carried out from January to May, 2008.

I consider the use of five case studies appropriate for my research, given the resources and time-frame of the project and the fact that I wished to do a comprehensive exploration of the experiences of contemporary working-class, mature women students and compare them to the experiences of 'Rita' in 1980s Britain. The case study method offers a practical way to obtain rich, descriptive data quickly but thoroughly. Thus, it is "particularly appropriate for individual researchers" (Bell, 1993, p.10). Also, Leonard (1994) considers a qualitative study useful for "exploring

women's lived-in experiences of being mature students and the effects returning to education has on their personal relationships" (p.165).

There is a long history of case study research and semi-structured interviews being successful methods in qualitative research. Bell (1993, p.11) says one of the greatest strengths of the case study is the opportunity it provides to identify crucial interactive processes, "processes that may remain hidden in a large-scale survey". A case study is, then, an efficient way of identifying and representing a complex situation through an in-depth examination of a 'real' situation or person in a particular context. It attempts to portray the reality (or realities) of a situation, including the participants' thoughts and feelings about it. It provides "a rich and vivid description of events relevant to the case" (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000, p.182). In the case of this research, the cases are the university experiences of mature, working-class women, who were current students at a New Zealand university at the time of data collection.

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000, p.267) regard the research interview – one of the most common tools of the case study - as being an interchange of "interpretations of the world" between interviewer and interviewee. They see it as a move away from the positivist view of "seeing human subjects as simply manipulable and data as somehow external to individuals". Unstructured interviews are the most likely type of interview to produce "a wealth of valuable data, but such interviews require a great deal of expertise to control and a great deal of time to analyse" (Bell, 1993, p.138). Fully structured interviews, on the other hand, are simpler to harvest data from but leave little leeway for unexpected or rich data. Bell advises beginner researchers to take the middle route of the semi-structured interview – a semi-open discussion on a topic, but with prompts - to get the best of both tools. Later in this section I discuss my reasons and process for keeping my semi-structured interviews as 'naturally' conversational as possible while still covering specific questions and topics. The interview schedule used with my participants is included as an appendix at the end of this report.

A focus group interview should also be semi-structured, with pre-determined questions and room for negotiation of responses, according to Mutch (2005, p.128). She describes the focus group as "a useful tool for busy practitioners as it can

combine the best of surveys (a broader sample) and interviews (an in-depth response)". However, she warns that skill is required to conduct the group interview – something I discovered in my focus group when trying to encourage quieter participants to speak and more vocal participants to keep on track with the topic.

Conducting five individual interviews and a focus group gave me the opportunity to broaden the scope of my research through triangulation, a way of providing internal validity and credibility to a study by using a number of case studies and more than one method of data collection. The focus group gave me the opportunity to build on rapport already built during the initial interviews, gave the participants an opportunity to bounce ideas off each other, and enabled me to compare and contrast data from all the interviews. I later made a decision to fully analyse the data from only four of the interviews for reasons that I outline in the findings later. I was also able to compare the data from the interviews with that from the focus group, thus adding extra depth to the findings. Another method of triangulation that I use is that of comparing the data collected from the interviews with relevant literature. I also add in my own reflections throughout the process of writing, a process encouraged by feminist and post-structural researchers, for example, Griffiths (1998). She urges the use of reflective practice and researcher positionality to challenge the hegemonic bias that often hides the needs of marginalised students, in this case, mature, working-class women.

One of the common limitations ascribed to the case study and interview approach is that most of the data gathered is descriptive and based on the participants' own viewpoints. There is also the potential 'distortion' of a single researcher choosing which material to present in the final report. Thus, the case study could be said to be "selective, biased, personal and subjective" (Nisbet and Wat, 1984, cited in Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000, p.184) and cannot be considered (from a quantitative standpoint) to be 'objectively' reliable. Bell (1993) warns that participants may wish to please the interviewer and/or the interviewer will tend to look for answers which support her preconceptions. It is impossible to eliminate bias, she says, but important for the researcher to be aware of any strongly held opinions and to aim for "complete objectivity" (p.140).

From post-structural and feminist viewpoints, however, objectivity is a myth and all research is subject to bias. From this standpoint, researchers should aim, not for objectivity, but for self-reflection about their own biases. This is an approach that I take in this research while also acknowledging that the data generated from my study cannot be generalised to a broader population. Thus, when choosing participants for my study, I made no attempt to find a random sample of people as is done with quantitative research. According to Mutch (2005, p.49-50) it is "not possible – or even desirable" to generalise about a 'non-probability' sample (the kind used in qualitative studies) as it is chosen "to expand our understanding of the phenomena and not to make broad claims". My selection of participants was mostly made on the basis of what Mutch would call 'convenience' sampling and what Edwards (1993) in her study of 31 mature women social science degree students, called an "opportunistic case study sample"(p.8). This means that, rather than searching for perfect replicas of 'Rita', I included more easily accessible volunteers who defined themselves as fitting the educational and social-class criteria but who were not necessarily in a relationship (as Rita was) when they started university. Several of the participants were already known to me and others were approached through people I knew via word of mouth.

While I cannot generalise from my findings – in terms of consensus of opinions and core themes - in a way that could be used to influence policy, I note that it is possible for even one case study to act as a platform for future, more extensive studies. As Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2002, p.184) explain, a case study can be "a step to action" with the insights gained from the study able to be "directly interpreted and put to use…in educational policy making".

Feminist methodology, says Leonard (1994, p.166) "places great value on women-to-women research," and makes use of reciprocity, mutual interaction and self-disclosure by the researcher "as a mechanism to produce more meaningful and insightful research". Thus, following Leonard's example - in her research into the university experiences of 23 mature working-class Irish women studying sociology – I attempted to make my interviews as non-hierarchical and conversational as possible. Like Leonard, I let the women begin where they wished and then let them talk as uninterruptedly as possible about their topics of concern in relation to their study and backgrounds while ensuring they also covered specific topic areas that I had identified

as being important to my research. The aim was to "allow the women's own experiences and perceptions to emerge" rather than to let my own assumptions dominate the interview data. (Leonard, 1994, p.166). To some extent then, I employed a form of narrative inquiry and this led, in some cases, to what might be seen as off-topic rambling and in other cases, I was forced – by lack of participant interaction – to follow more of a question and answer format. I also respected participants' right to not answer a question if they felt uncomfortable about it. Despite the extra time and effort involved in gathering useable data, I feel my strategy was ethically appropriate as it gave participants a genuine opportunity to share power and influence the direction of the interview.

Ashcroft, Bigger and Coates, 1996, (p.60), stress that research should be a partnership and warn that "whether the research is about race, class, gender or special needs, there are acute dangers when there is a power relationship between the researcher and the researched". I attempted to avoid power imbalance and aim for partnership by following Leonard's example of sharing my own experiences of being a mature student with the interviewees. Says Leonard (1994, p.166): "I felt that this was essential in order to reduce the exploitative power balance between researcher and subject". This was problematic, however, in that while I openly discussed being a mature student, I did not disclose my status as being middle-class. Nor did I discuss my own relationship issues or sexuality and relevant impacts on studying, despite expecting my participants to be open with me about their relationships and social class. In retrospect, I believe I made this choice subconsciously in the hope of enhancing rapport by only revealing aspects of my experiences that were similar to those of my participants. I am not sure, however, that this decision was the most appropriate one and I analyse this dilemma further in the discussion section.

While I failed to put myself fully into the interview process, I endeavour to, as Jones (1992) describes it, put the "I" in the text. A New Zealand educational researcher, Jones favours an authentic, reflexive style of writing that leaves "possibilities for others to enter the conversation". She is wary, however, of falling into the trap of reproducing the dominant authorative academic discourse by engaging "the same density of style as self-absorbed academic scholars" (p.29) albeit with content about "partiality, subjectivity and emancipation" (p.28). Her suggestions for "exposing the

constructedness of an account" (p.24) in a reader-friendly way include: using one's own language; decentring oneself as one possible voice among many; making explicit one's own assumptions and background; and exploring contradictions rather than avoiding them. Maylor (1995) and hooks (1995) are also useful in their explorations of positioning the 'self' in research by using autobiographical detail. They show that this can add rich emotional description and remove hierarchical barriers between researcher and participants (at least in the text) because the researcher is exposing herself rather than being an invisible 'objective' observer.

Key concepts used in my study include:

- **_A 'Mature' Student_** is defined according to context (Ashcroft, Bigger and Coates, 1996) and in this case is any 'adult' who did not go directly from school to university and is now at university for the first time, or else has returned to university study after a period of time.

- **_Cultural Capital_**, according to Harker (1990) is "the body of knowledge, the tacit understandings, the style of self-presentation, language usage, values etc., which are acquired from the family of primary socialisation and are embodied in the individual as 'habitus' (p.34).

- **_Habitus_** – is "the [personal] way a culture is embodied in the individual" (Harker, 1990, p.34). It is also "habits and disposition based on personal experiences" (Ashcroft, Bigger and Coates (1996, p.48).

- **_Working-class_** When recruiting my participants, I followed Edwards' (1993) policy of class being self-defined due to there being no general consensus then (and still now) about how to classify women because of complexity of their relationship to a male partner in comparison to their family of origin. Although I asked my participants to define themselves in terms of their class, I asked them about their socio-economic status as well as the occupational roles of their partners and their families of origin. This information led to one of my participants, Mariana – who defined herself as working-class – being seen more as middle-class.

- Two formal methods of defining social class include the Register General which is based purely on occupational status (as gleaned from census data) and the Elly-Irving scale of socio-economic status which rates occupational status on a six point scale from 1: professional to 6: unskilled.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

An Overview of the Participants

The five women university students I interviewed all classified themselves as working-class and were aged from 41 to 52. They chose (or chose to be given) the pseudonyms Kate, Bridget, Jill, Mariana and Evelyn. Three women were New Zealand-born Pakeha and one of them was married to a Samoan and had Samoan children. Of the other two women, one was a British immigrant and the other an immigrant from Canada.

Three of the five women were the first in their families to go to university. One of these three had left school at 15 with no qualifications and had done no other study prior to coming to university for the first time in her forties. Several of the women were returning to university study for the second time, either to finish uncompleted degrees or to pursue post-graduate qualifications. The women's programmes of study ranged from creative arts to social sciences and their levels of study ranged from third year undergraduates to a masters and a doctorate. They were studying at one of two New Zealand universities – one in the North Island and one in the South Island. When I interviewed them, two were in their first year of being a returned student, one was in her third year and the other two had been at university for six and seven years, respectively.

Three women had children whom they were bringing up alone after breaking up with their male partners. One of the women broke up with her husband of 15 years mid-way through her first year back at university. Of the two women without children, one was heterosexual and single, the other lesbian and separated at the time of the interview. All the women, except one, were studying full-time and all, except one, did part-time work, mostly in relatively low-paid jobs such as child care and shop work. As well as doing part-time work and receiving student loans, the women variously financed their studies through such means as a scholarship, the domestic purposes benefit and financial support from former partners. Four of the women complained of health issues affecting their study.

Of the five women, four came from clearly working-class families and had either remained working-class or had become upwardly mobile at times in their lives through marriage to a middle-class partner or through education and professional status. Interestingly, the two women whose class status had most visibly increased since their childhood, had both gone through a period of status erosion following, respectively, a divorce and experience of mental illness. For both these women, their current university study was a means to try and regain lost class status. One of these women, Bridget, had experienced a dramatic class transition after being sent on a working-class scholarship to an upper-class, private British girls' school. She had then gone on to an elite British university but had never fulfilled expectations of middle-class success.

> …I went to X University (in Britain) which my parents thought would be a ticket to wealth, prestige and power and I have been, I haven't earned any more money, at the age of 41. I earn less than I did in my first year after university and I have never bettered the salary that I earned in the first year after university. So it didn't work.

One of the five women, Mariana, had ambiguous class status. She had a strong sense of working-class identity, but when interviewed, it became clear that although her family-of-origin had little money, they possessed a high degree of middle-class cultural capital. Her father was a lawyer who "represented people without much money and was paid with crayfish" and her mother was an artist. Mariana, herself, had studied at teacher's college and had a career in "the arts". When interviewed she was in her first year of a Masters degree in a practical arts subject. She was struggling financially, sometimes not having "any money so I have to eat noodles", but her interview was substantially different to the interviews of the other four participants. She interpreted most of her problematic experiences at university in terms of being a mature woman student studying alongside male and female colleagues in their early twenties. When discussing feeling socially isolated from her peers, Mariana talks about how the "young bright sparks, males, in the group are really…they're really patriarchal. That surprised me but I think that's something to do with that particular generation".

Because of Mariana's focus on issues of age as opposed to class and her lack of conflict with middle-class habitus, I decided to focus my attention on the other four women and to use Mariana's data only when examining the issue of 'being a mature student'. Mariana did not participate in the focus group discussion.

Despite growing up in a professional middle-class family (both my parents are doctors), I have decided to incorporate some of my own experiences into these findings. Firstly, I feel the need to be open about the problematic nature of being a middle-class researcher investigating the experiences of working-class women. Working-class Irish authors Lynch and O'Neil (1994) explore issues of academic 'colonisation' of the working-class by middle-class academics who dominate the study of working-class educational inequalities "for their own professional purposes" (p.308). Quoting an excerpt from a 1990 Dublin theatre performance called *Class Attack*, they add:

"We are the subject of books and papers/ Our lives recorded by the middle-class/
Who steal our stories…" (Lynch and O'Neil, 1994, p.308).

There is clearly potential for exploitation in my use of these women's stories for this dissertation which, I hope, will successfully conclude my Masters of Education and lead to an increase in pay, professional status and personal self-esteem. Indeed, one of the themes to emerge from the findings was that of middle-class exploitation. As Bridget puts it:

"It all seems to be that the middle-class or upper middle-class professionalise themselves so that they can act upon or work upon the working-classes…everybody at university seems to be training to earn a fucking fortune off the working-classes".

I will discuss this dilemma in more detail later and in the meantime I will look at ways in which I can work to reduce the possibilities for exploitation by attempting to be as transparent as my participants about my own experiences - in the text at least - since I was not overt in the interviews about my middle-class status or reasons for studying class. Although I discussed my experiences as a mature student with my

participants, I became aware during the interview process that there were substantial power imbalances between myself, as researcher, and some of my interviewees. This was particularly evident to me in my interviews with the three undergraduate women I interviewed. One in particular clearly felt apprehensive and deferred to me as both a tutor on one of her courses and as a graduate student. Similar difficulties were experienced by Leonard (1994) who, while sharing a working-class background with her interviewees, was troubled by her position as lecturer and tutor to the women in her study.

This leads me to explain now why I chose to investigate the class issues of working-class mature women university students. Partly my reasons were practical – I was looking for a dissertation topic and, of all my Masters of Education courses, had particularly enjoyed and felt challenged by the one on class issues in education. The other reasons were more personal. I had a partner with a working-class background who frequently criticised my behaviour as "so middle-class". Prior to this I had always taken my middle-class culture and status for granted. It was invisible to me, one of the privileges of what Bourdieu describes as my "social universe" (Bourdieu, 1990, cited in Hatcher, 1998, p.18) where ways of doing things are seen as second nature rather than constructed.

Becoming aware of class gave me, not just insight into my own privileges and other people's struggles, it also gave me a tool with which to analyse and understand some changes in my own life. In the past decade, for various reasons (including burn-out and stress) I had gone from being a well-regarded journalist and person who could afford to go out to dinner when I felt like it, to what felt like a 'nobody' on a benefit or in low-paid jobs, with few friends and a constant struggle to put food on the table. From a class point of view, I could now see that I had become downwardly mobile in terms of financial, professional and social status. My strong desire to gain a postgraduate qualification was fuelled by upwardly mobile class aspirations - an attempt to regain self-esteem and credentialise myself for a new, sustainable career and subsequent financial security. Thus, looking at class for my dissertation was both an attempt to understand my own journey and also a means of understanding the class differences between myself and my partner.

Key Themes

Through close readings of the interview transcripts and email follow-ups, I analysed my data, looking for key themes that are linked to my main aim of exploring social class issues for mature, working-class women studying at contemporary New Zealand universities. I was interested in my participants' family backgrounds and family knowledge of, and attitudes towards, university education; their reasons for studying and the effects of studying on their personal relationships; their experiences of being a student, both academically and socially; their hopes for the future; and the perceived similarities and/or differences between their experiences and those of 'Rita'. The following are the main findings to come out of my study.

The four key themes to emerge from the data are the women's experiences of alienation, overwhelming struggle, the need to strategise, and of unexpected successes and advantages (of being mature and working-class). Sub-themes include falling into an 'inter-class chasm' and feeling like a 'fraud', juggling lack of time and money, relationship break-down, having middle-class aspirations, and battling middle-class hypocrisy and exploitation.

Strategising

Strategising and negotiating was an important part of university study for all the women. They strategised how best to study and do assignments in ways that worked for them. They also discussed how they learned to negotiate middle-class 'rules' while remaining true to their own sense of self (or working-class identity). For example, Evelyn talks about protecting who she really is by having "those connecting relationships within your cohort where you can go to the pub or you can go to the coffee shop and talk about all that stuff but write and hand in something different". Bridget and Kate add:

> B - And you learn in the end that you're supposed to regurgitate what the lecturer says…and it's kind of like this death of the imagination…and that there's a set way to do it, there's a method.
>
> K – Because that's the system, that's what you do here.

The importance of protecting identity is highlighted by Bowl's (2003) finding that "whilst there appears to be a sense in which [many] non-traditional students do accommodate themselves [to university life, it appears] that this is frequently achieved at the expense of their personal, cultural, social and economic well-being" (p.122).

Although the women in my study were critical of the impersonal, detached, middle-class persona (in terms of writing and discussion) needed to succeed at university, they also all, expressed upwardly mobile aspirations – a desire for what they saw as the positive outcomes of a university education. Their various goals included finding a sense of belonging, having better choices for their children, and for all of them, more professional jobs and a better income.

For Bridget, severe anxiety and panic attacks and the stigma of having to go on a sickness benefit because she was too mentally unwell to work, were a major motivating factor for her enrolment at university. She also hoped to be able to credentialise herself in an area that might lead to better health and an opportunity to be able to work and earn a better income. She said:

> "I just wanted to get onto some kind of programme or other and get off the sickness benefit and it seemed better for my self-esteem - I hope to be actually able to do a job and make an income…"

A mature Access programme student in Warmington's (2003) study similarly equated higher education with status, saying "if you are on Income Support, you are a nobody…if you have a degree…you are a somebody" (p.95). The other women too, all hoped to improve their financial and occupational status. The three who were parents talked about their children getting older and this being either an opportunity for them to finally follow a dream, or to do something for themselves. As Jill describes it:

> "I got to the point 'I've waited 13 years, it's my turn'…there's an element of that, of not feeling that I was going to give this bit up for me. And I think too there was also this whole sort of issue of my last child going off to school playing in there as well".

These aims tally with the findings of Bates and Norton (2002) who found the main motivators for participation in adult education by women were "financial improvement, self-fulfilment and self-esteem, and considerations for the family" (p.9). Jill hoped her example of studying at university would rub off on her children, saying:

> "…I mean when I help them with their homework they have so much respect for
>
> what I say now…and they're not intimidated by the thought of being in a lecture
>
> or talking to a lecturer like when I was 19 the whole, everything was sort of
>
> intimidating and even when I came back, you know, at the start of this year."

Kate left school at 15 with no qualifications and worked for years in low paid food preparation work. She always hoped to return to study when her son was old enough and had assumed she would start studying again at the same point that she had left off until a teacher friend told her, "well there's really not much point in going back to school. You're better off going [straight] to university…" So, with her friend's help, Kate enrolled at university, keen to gain a qualification that would lead to "a job with higher prospects, more money". She described herself as being "sick of being paid nothing basically and doing, you know, quite hard work…It was my boy, once I had him, I thought "well, I really need to think about when he goes, what I'm going to do…I needed so (inaudible) a step up the ladder I think".

In Bates and Norton's (2002) study, divorce was one of the strongest and most common factors motivating women to return to study. This was the case for Evelyn who enrolled in a programme of study within two years of being left by her husband of 20 years. Despite being a middle-class professional with a PhD, her husband had prevented her from studying earlier by saying "that university 'was a waste on a homemaker' [Oh god.] and he wouldn't pay for it…And he was very much, 'you can do whatever you like as long as it's not more extra work for me and you get all your [house and childcare] work done'".

Interestingly, Evelyn saw her husband's attitude as one that was personal to her (and him) rather than being an overt expression of long-held misogynistic views of women

and education (as described by Astbury, 1996 and Laugesen, 2007). She says, "he wasn't against people or women or mothers getting a degree. He actually supported other people doing that. It was personal, it was about ME getting a degree". However, as I show later, in the part of the findings that focuses on relationship break-ups, Evelyn's situation – and her husband's attitude – are extremely common, and was one of the key features of Rita's experience of going to university.

Another motivating factor for Evelyn in going to university was a desire to have a job in which she would feel part of a community. She wanted "more income, yes, but what I want is less tangible. A sense of purpose, belonging, a sense of place and to build a network of people". This is similar to Rita's desire to learn how to fit in with middle-class people, to "learn the language" and "talk seriously with the rest you" (Russell, 1985, p.45). She tells Frank, "…I'm educated…I've got a room full of books. I know what clothes to wear, what wine to buy, what plays to see, what papers and books to read…" (p.68)

As well as using university itself as a strategy to increase their cultural (and economic) capital, the women all described strategies that they had borrowed or developed to assist them in learning and doing course work. Many of these strategies were based on a need for "concrete" or practical ways of understanding information or presenting assignments. Kate talked about her need to discuss and "bounce ideas around" with her fellow students and in the group discussion, the women had the following conversation:

> E - I'm not a note-taker, my notes are abysmal [I never take notes either.]…Well
> I didn't need them. You either know it or you don't know it.
> K – No it's true. I'm better at listening.
> E – I am too and I'm better going "lets have a coffee and talk about that thing"
> [Yeah.] and then I get so much out of that [Yes.].
> B – It's all about the abstract and the concrete. We seem to need to make things
> more concrete.

These issues are mirrored by Bowl (2003) who found that students with lower social status, such as mature, working-class women, were more likely to be drawn to (and to

achieve in) subject areas that are less abstract in that they are based on people and life experience, for example, psychology, social work, sociology and education. She also found a disinclination to read academic texts among the non-traditional students in her study. This was most often because of time pressures and difficulties finding a quiet place to read. Her students also found writing and structuring essays difficult as they had not been given explicit advice on how to do this. The students needed to work out for themselves, what parts of the lectures and readings were most important

Alienation

All the women expressed feeling a sense of alienation or not belonging at university that came from factors including being of a different age, ethnicity and class background from other students. The majority of the women were the first in their family to go to university and lacked the kind of cultural capital possessed by middle-class students that would have give them a sense of familiarity and ease. Professional middle-class parents understand that university qualifications are the key to a permanent career and secure income. They understand that, as Bowl (2003) puts it, there are "social and cultural forms of capital which can indirectly be exchanged for economic advancement" (p.127). They also understand the strategies needed to access education and harness its potential for success, and they are increasingly eager for their children to have a university education.

Bridget, who has been trying to adjust to middle- and upper-middle-class educational environments since she was 11, still felt unfamiliar with an academic institution when she started at studying at the New Zealand university where she is currently a student:

> "[E]veryone seemed to know what they were doing and how to deal with things.
> I remember having a terrible time trying to enrol and not understanding, I just
> didn't understand anything. I didn't have anyone in my family who'd done it
> before…"

The women's sense of not belonging amounted to what could be described as cultural capital intimidation, a fear of unfamiliar middle-class customs and 'habitus'. As Jill describes it, "the whole idea of academia was so outside my whole frame of reference. It was very foreign, like to talk to lecturers was a bit kind of scary. It wasn't a

comfortable thing…" And for Kate it is "a bit like, I still don't feel like I fit and I don't know if I ever will".

That same sense of not belonging is expressed by Nainby and Pea (2003) who use their own experiences as working-class academics to describe the self-doubt, grief and sense of social alienation that frequently besets working-class people who succeed in the middle-class education system. It is also echoed by Bowl (2003) who found that students in her study who went on to higher education experienced "an assault on their identity" in their first year in terms of continuous struggle, high levels of anxiety and a sense of exclusion, feelings of discomfort and feeling different in tutorial groups (p.69). Bridget describes having "real status anxiety because now you've got the status of one culture or class and you've also still got your belonging to the other cultural classes, internal architecture from one and then this new stuff from the other and I think there's a huge amount status anxiety that comes with it".

Lucey, Melody and Walkerdine (2002) talk about working-class women at university feeling like "uneasy hybrids" (p.286) while Karach (1992) observes that "social mobility carries with it a sense of loss" (p.35). She adds that "intellectually competent mature women" have sometimes assumed this sense of alienation was their own personal fault and have either left university without completing or have had nervous breakdowns. Others have accepted and internalised "the values and power relations of the institution…and go on to emulate these hierarchical relations and values and to dismiss, oppress and silence other women" (p.317).

For Lynch and O'Neil (1994) the need for working-class people to abandon their class roots and internalise middle-class values in order to succeed academically is another form of class colonisation. Controversially they believe this is an even more insidious form of colonisation that that of race, saying that, other minority groups [for example, middle-class women or people who are gay, disabled or of non-white ethnicity] do not "lose their defining minority identity or status by being educated" (p.308). It is true that educational qualifications are primarily a way of categorising class differences as opposed to categorising, for example, ethnic and gender differences. However, Lynch and O'Neill fail to account for the fact that class is often economically conflated with being a member of a minority group in an education/occupational/economic system

that favours and rewards white, middle-class, heterosexual, non-disabled males. As Bowl (2003) explains, all her non-traditional students felt "powerless to challenge the prevailing white hegemony of the institution, or to question judgements made about their work which confused and alienated them" (p.138).

Age is another potential source of discrimination and alienation, with most of the women describing some sense of social isolation from their younger peers. Bridget got "so sick and tired of the young sort of 18-year-old girls going 'hee hee hee' at anything any of the older male lecturers would say" and Kate described how she would "sort of gravitate towards people more my own age in the lecture rooms". Bowl (2003) writes about her mature participants feeling "socially, a feeling of alienation and being 'too boring' to younger students" (p.102).

Some of the women – Bridget in particular – also experienced some benefits in being older and more experienced and I discuss this later on under the theme of unexpected advantages and successes. Mariana, however (the fifth participant in the study) strongly identified her role as a mature woman student as problematic. She saw herself as "pretty much invisible to most people as an older woman" and she related her experience of student poverty to not being able to work part-time while studying as she is "too tired to do that anymore at 52". Mariana's focus on her age (as opposed to class) may be related to her not being working-class in terms of middle-class cultural capital. It may also be that she is almost a decade older than some of the other participants. Her concerns are echoed by Evelyn who also saw her age, of 50, as a barrier to feeling included and being taken seriously by the other students. As Evelyn said:

> "They look at me as just taking these courses out of interest and not that I need to
> do a degree. That it is more of a lark for me whereas they are doing it as a career
> choice. A lot of time I feel like I am not valued by my student cohort because I
> am older than most of their parents…All in all, I think it is the isolation that I
> feel that has been an overriding burden in going to uni at my age."

Evelyn also saw her age as an issue in terms of her future job prospects and the need to be strategic about choosing a placement for her final year of study.

"I think I need a more calculated strategy than the younger people who are just
kind of 'I'll see where they send me'… it could all go to hell in a hand basket
pretty quick I think and having come across people in their late forties, early
fifties who've been through trouble finding new jobs…"

As my participants are predominantly Pakeha, it is difficult to link class and ethnicity
in this study. However, there are several exceptions, one of whom is Jill who says her
children identify as being Samoan and she experiences discrimination and
assumptions on their behalf. For example, someone recently asked if her son was her
"homestay student" and lecturers sometimes assume she must be Samoan.

"They suddenly have these expectations of me, because I've said the word
Samoan, that I've grown up in the islands and I mean, in this X course, he'd say
'now you'd know all about this' (laughter) and I'd say, 'do I look like I'd
know?' People make assumptions but that's okay."

As a Canadian, Evelyn finds the experience of being a mature, working-class women
student especially isolating as she has "no extended family/whanau in New Zealand"
and "practically no social life". When talking about her university friends and
acquaintances, she says:

"…[T]hey don't come to my house and I've found that overall, most Kiwis are
like that, really friendly but not welcoming. Other than my one friend who's
Canadian, I've not been invited to anybody's house for dinner".

Bridget, from Britain, has experienced similar difficulties integrating herself socially
in New Zealand. She believes this may have something to do with a covert class
system which she says is "more hidden but it still exists. You've got an east and west
Christchurch quite clearly. University's still for the middle-class and the cultural
capital of the different classes is still quite clear here". Her view is supported by
Lauder and Hughes (1990) who write:

"New Zealand, for example, has often been seen as a classless society in contrast
to Britain which has been regarded as the epitome of a class society. In this way

a mythology of difference which sees New Zealand as classless (and good) and the metropolitan mother country as class-ridden (and bad) has developed and it is only recently [with rise of neo liberalism]…that serious questions about inequality in New Zealand have been raised" (p.43).

Despite seeing the class system as less black and white than is widely regarded, Bridget still believes that New Zealand has more porous class boundaries than Britain. She had the following discussion with Kate about the British class system:

K – its (inaudible) over there isn't is? [B - Absolutely.] People who live there
and it would be harder for you [B - It was hideous.] over there…

Bridget described how, when she went to an upper-class girl's school and elite university in Britain, her "accent actually shifted from a X (regional) accent to a Queen's English accent over the years…But they said I was, they pushed my head down the loo and called me common and things at the posh school and then they called me stuck up at home so I ended up belonging nowhere…It really fucked me up…"

Irish researchers Lynch and O'Neil (1994) observed that even when working-class people lose their class identity and learn how to 'pass' as middle-class, they experience an on-going sense of not really belonging. This is a concept I have termed an inter-class chasm. Americans, Nainby and Pea (2003) describe it in the following way:

"To be socially mobile is to move from one place, economically, culturally,
personally, to another. One consequence of that loss, sometimes, is immobility –
a paralysis brought on by the violent, forceful, uncertain rush of social mobility
itself" (p.35).

Rita expresses the feeling of fitting in nowhere in the following excerpt from the play *Educating Rita* (which is based on the film):

RITA: …[W]hen I saw those people you were with I couldn't come in. I would
have seized up. Because I'm a freak. I can't talk to the likes of them on Saturday,

or them out there, because I can't learn the language. I'm a half-caste. I went back to the pub where Denny was, an' me mother, an' our Sandra, an' her mates. I'd decided I wasn't comin' here again…An' I stood in that pub an' thought, just what the frig am I trying to do? Why don't I just pack it in an' stay with them, an' join in the singin'?

FRANK: And why don't you?

RITA: (angrily) You think I can, don't you?… (Russell, 1985, p.45).

Edwards' (1993) study found that "white working-class women especially could end up unsure of their class position and allegiances now they were educated" (p.144). This was a common feeling for all the women who discussed feeling like 'frauds' who had somehow tricked the establishment into letting them into university. They also felt as if they were somehow continuing to trick the institution when they did well academically and received good grades. This is reflected in the following focus group conversation between Evelyn, Kate and Bridget:

E - …last night I went home and there on the computer was the offer for enrolment for 2008 and you click on 'accept' and you think "oh my god, I've fooled them again" [K: There we go again.] and you get that funny feeling that you're fraudulent.

B – See that word 'fool' comes up again. You feel like you're fooling them [Yeah.]…

Overwhelming Struggle

All of the women described an almost overwhelming struggle against the odds in their attempts to juggle study with their busy lives that included family responsibilities and income-earning work. On top of this they all had to deal with health problems while studying as well as relationship conflicts with family members, work colleagues, friends and partners. Evelyn, in the focus group, vividly summed up the stress of juggling an almost impossible load. Describing a character in a film she says:

E - …he's searching for something in Hell and they have this, I thought 'that's how I feel most of the time'. It's the whole environment is orange flames and this 120 km wind and he's standing upright but everything else is swirling and whirling and all these skeletons are growling and things chasing him and that's

how it feels because you've got kids, you've got their school ringing you. They,

somebody needs a ride here, you've got an essay due, the only books are on three

hour loan [Laughter.] and it's like "how am I going to get all this stuff done?"

K – It drives you crazy.

Almost all the literature on working-class, mature and 'non-traditional' women students supports Evelyn's description of the stress involved in trying to juggle excessive demands on time, energy and resources (for example, Bowl, 2003; Raey, 2003; Brine and Waller, 2004; Dunbar, 1999; and Edwards, 1993). Interestingly, though, this is not a feature of Rita's life in *Educating Rita*. Perhaps it is because Russell, for all his ability to capture on film the dilemma of moving out of the working-class, is not a woman and perhaps, as Bridget surmises, "I do feel like it's a middle-class play written by a middle-class person".

The students in Bowl's (2003) study laboured under "gendered assumptions about the responsibility of women to be home managers and child carers as well as breadwinners". In comparison to students who fit the "norms of a university system geared towards the needs and commitments" of middle-class 18-year olds, Bowl found that non-traditional women experienced greater overall problems in terms of poverty of time, money and goods (p.84). Lack of time was particularly a problem for mature students, especially if they had children as they had to "…juggle the complex demands of family, finance, care and relationships" (p.10). Financial poverty was another major issue for students struggling with benefits and loans, timing of payments, conflicting interests of income support services and university fee payments, costs of books and computer and costs of childcare. Jill gives a sense of the complexities of finance for those in her position - a fulltime student with (a large number of) children who broke up with her husband during the middle of the study year:

"Yes and he's sort of like, well basically either you do it (commit benefit fraud)

or you're going to lose the $75 a week and I spent quite a few days just

absolutely demented because I really can't afford to lose $75 and I was very

annoyed because I really felt like I was being pressured".

The women in Bowl's study faced the dilemma that, lacking finance, "they could not buy themselves more time by investing in childcare; lacking time, they could not accrue additional money to buy books, computers or other objectified cultural capital" (p.85). However, if they did part-time work to help pay the bills, then they became even more time poor and with less time to study, they often procrastinated, skimped on their assignments and missed out non-essential reading and tutorials, which in turn, led them to feel more isolated from the other students.

The pressures of time poverty are described by Evelyn who dashes between lectures and her work in a shop on the opposite side of the city without a lunch break. She also says that she can only afford to spend two and half days working on an essay. Jill explains that she "just emailed my last assignment this morning but I've been up since midnight doing it so that's kind of been the pattern, assignment due – well no sleep for this week (laughs)".

Edwards (1993) describes the women in her study as being faced with a chronic and "inherent strain" (p.69). Many spoke of "rushing around" and yet still not meeting the requirements of both family and education (p.65). The women also "rarely seemed to feel that they were ever on top of their studies" and had difficulty switching off mentally, either about study when at home, or about home issues when studying (p.65). Jill provides insight into how difficult it can be to separate home and study when she describes how it became impossible to study in the university library at night as she would "have [her] children ringing [her] incessantly" because her husband was "yelling at them".

Eventually Jill's situation became "intolerable" for both her and the children and she and her husband broke up. Relationship break-ups are a major focus of both *Educating Rita* and of much of the literature on mature working-class who go to university or other higher education institutions. Norton, Thomas, Morgan, Tilley and Dickins (1998) found that role strain and work-overload were major sources of stress on the students in long-term relationships in their study. The effects of stress could lead to possible withdrawal from study and/or psychological and relationship stress and possible relationship breakdown. In some cases "this effect is so potentially devastating that it has been likened to one of the partners having an affair" (p.76).

Edwards (1993) found that women who attempted to juggle a connection between what she calls the "two greedy institutions (higher education and family)" ended up in a situation where their partners "felt so threatened that their relationships came to an end" (p.105). Other women, however, "moved from an initial period of trying to make connections to ending up separating the two [institutions] in order to avoid conflict" (p.106).

Leonard (1994) looked at partner support in terms of Smith's (1993, cited in Leonard, 1994, p.170) identification of three possible types of partner support – practical, for example, sharing domestic work and childcare; financial; and emotional support and encouragement. None of the women in Leonard's study received all three types of support from their husbands. She says that the men often saw university expenses as personal needs and would use "'domestic sabotage' to prevent their wives from achieving their objectives, by making them feel guilty for not fulfilling their domestic roles" (p.170). Emotional and practical support was often linked, with emotional support being dependent on the husbands not feeling like their lives were "disrupted by their wives' returning to study" (p.171). One woman said of her husband's resistance to her return to study:

> "He would say – Oh there's educating Rita, thinks she is above everybody
> else…I couldn't study at home. I always had to wait until he went out…I used to
> keep my books [hidden] under the ironing" (p.172).

This overt reference to Rita resonates with the following excerpt from the play/film. In it, Rita explains to Frank what happened after her husband found she had been avoiding getting pregnant by taking contraceptive pills which she hid under the floor boards.

> FRANK: …Where's your essay?
> RITA: It's burnt.
> FRANK: Burnt?
> RITA: So are all the Chekhov books you lent me. Denny found out I was on the
> pill again; it was my fault, I left me prescription out. He burnt all my books.
> (Russell, 1985, p.32).

There are similarities here to Jill's situation in which her husband of 15 years "sabotaged" their relationship after she went back to university fulltime to complete the degree she had started and then "pulled out [of] because I was getting married and because he was also a student it was more important that I work and I took on a second job so that he could carry on being a student". After working to support her husband she went on to do "10 years non-stop of [changing] nappies (laughter)" before deciding it was "time for a change". Jill's husband (who also comes from a working-class family) was initially "verbally very supportive" of her going to university and promised to "do this and do that…but the reality is, as time went on was that it just became more of an issue between us because he actually didn't want to do it…he didn't want to do the childcare. He didn't want to do the cooking and he didn't want to do the cleaning up and his solutions were things like that, either it wouldn't be done and I would come sort of like at one in the morning and my house would be an absolute tip and that sort of stuff". Jill says she tried to make the situation work, doing as much of the house-work and cooking as she could "so that he didn't actually have very much to do but he wasn't actually interested in cooperating". He became increasing critical "of absolutely everything" including the way Jill structured her study, although "he couldn't criticise the marks I got because I actually only had A+s all year apart from one A- I think".

Jill's experience is reflected in Edwards' (1993) study, in which all the women who broke up with their partners over the course of the study year (one quarter of the participants) felt that their partners had "been obstructive to their integrating education into their family lives" (p.134). One participant said her boyfriend had initially been supportive but towards the end of the first year felt "threatened" (p.135). Three women's partner's were threatened enough to resort to violence. Edwards says that for all of the women who split up, the threat to their relationships came not so much from the education itself, but from bringing it home and requiring private space to study and also from discussion - "the disturbing power balance effects of any attempts to share their education with their partners" (p.119). The men felt a sense of intrusion on their home life, with one woman reporting her partner as saying "I don't want any sociology talk around here" (p.112).

Four of the eight women with relationship break-ups in Edwards' study were working-class, three were middle-class and one, who was "black" and married to a restaurant owner, did not define her class. The middle-class women were in relationships with men from both middle- and working-class backgrounds, including one who had been in a relationship with a lecturer for 15 years. Thus it seems that middle-class partners can also be threatened by women's educational advancement. This was the case for Evelyn who, as I explained earlier, was 'prohibited' from going to university by her professional middle-class husband whom, it might be assumed, would be less susceptible (than Jill or Rita's partners) to feeling educationally challenged by his wife. Evelyn believes that her husband's primary objection "was about spending money…and then it was about how my going to uni was going to be a negative for him - he might have to do more than 'his fair share' of the child care, he might lose his flexibility to go back to the office in the evening if I needed time for myself to do uni work, etc. It was also a power and control issue for him…If I had a degree then what made him superior would be diminished".

Edwards proposes that the phenomenon of relationship/education breakdown is linked to 'family' being "a bounded sphere [that] calls for separation so that outside concerns do not intrude upon the minutiae of its everyday life and relationships, while higher education invites a separative approach so as to ensure objectivity and attention to abstract concepts" (p.157). In essence there is a conflict between the "masculinist institution of higher education…and the individual men with whom women have relationships" (p.158).

It is important to point out that all the studies that I have been able to find, on relationship break-ups in connection with education, are based on heterosexual relationships. Law (1998) in her discussion of the 'normalisation' of women in the education process, discusses how lesbian students are disadvantaged by the "imperative to support themselves independently of men," a factor which "may necessitate an emphasis on courses which facilitate career progression" (p.60). This may be relevant to Bridget's description of herself as "destitute and poverty-stricken as a postgraduate student" and her constant anxiety about the need to find a way to support herself financially. She says she is always thinking that she "should give this

PhD up and go and train to be a whatever it is – school teacher, vet nurse. You name it, I've thought of it". She also adds:

> "I've never just been able to just do my PhD, ever. I've always had to work to keep the roof over my head. It's not fair. I remember when one of my lecturers in the past said that doing her PhD was one of the loveliest times because she was just able to focus on one thing. But she was able to do that because she had a husband who had an income".

Waring (1988) says that lesbians are regarded as being particularly unproductive women in terms of the economic system as they (or many of them) are "not even doing what women are supposed to do" (p.183) in terms of having children or supporting men. This view can be connected to Skeggs' (1997) study showing that being a working-class woman is linked to being disrespectable or sexually deviant, or as Archer, Halsall and Hollingworth (2007) describe it:

> "Working-class women…are left with "investment in their glamorous (heterosexual) appearance [as] one of the few available sites for the generation of symbolic capital" (p.169) which, although appearing to offer agency and power, "ultimately works against the accumulation of economic and educational capital" (p.178).

Thus, working-class lesbian women bear a double economic burden, both in general, and as students. My own experience, as a mature, white middle-class, lesbian graduate student has been conflicted in terms of class in that, as I explained earlier, I encountered downward social mobility prior to returning to university. Being a student gave me back a sense of personal empowerment in terms of enhanced self-esteem about my ability to think, write and succeed, a benefit that was noted by Karach (1992) in her study of mature women students.

My almost-completed qualification has given me a new career direction and hope for a more secure income in the near future, a factor I discuss later in terms of 'credential inflation'. In the meantime, however, during my study I faced some similar hurdles to the working-class students I interviewed. Just like them my student experience involved on-going financial struggle as well as relationship conflict and break-up,

which added yet more stress to my attempts to focus on my study. The following account of the break-up is one possible interpretation of what happened:

Cracks appeared in my previously harmonious, long-term, relationship in the same year that my need to attend to my study became big enough to compete time- and energy-wise with my need to concentrate on the 'work' of my relationship. This relationship 'work' had included emotional support for my working-class partner who is also a student (at a higher level than me), housework and bringing in an income. However, as focus on my own study grew, my housekeeping skills and income-earning capacity (which was low to start with) dropped. Financial stress in the relationship became intense. We both had health issues that affected our energy levels and hindered our ability to juggle study, work and relationship all at once. In the end, the relationship could not bear the stress and my partner left me, complaining that I had not pulled my weight financially, forcing her to exhaust herself by working a lot of part-time jobs.

Unlike with heterosexual couples, there was no need for us to, as Norton et al (1998) put it "renegotiate traditional sex roles" (p.76). And both being university students, there was no "falling into the trap of 'separate worlds' – the term used by two of the women interviewees to describe the situation where their male partners refused to get involved at all with their college life and took no interest in their studying" (Norton et al, 1998, p.87). While the effects of study on our relationship are not linear, they have undoubtedly played a part in the breakdown of what was previously a strong relationship.

Before moving on to examine health issues as on-going concerns for almost all my participants, I will briefly discuss the concept of credential inflation as it is connected to my need to further credentialise myself with a Masters degree. When I graduated from university with a Batchelor of Arts in the 1980s, it was sufficient to get me a job as a journalist. But just over a decade later, when I had been out of journalism for a few years pursuing acting and travel, no publication would consider employing me unless I had an official journalism qualification. This experience ties in with Wakeling's (2005) proposal that, due to massification of education, the bachelor's degree is becoming more common and thus losing its "relative advantage in the

labour market". Thus, the postgraduate degree may be becoming "the new gatekeeper to middle-class economic capital" (506).

Gaining a Masters of Education is providing me with not just a higher qualification, but also an opportunity to work in a different area, one which I hope will offer protection from the health effects of stress and burnout. Poor health has a major impact on people's ability to earn an income. It can also be an extra source of stress to those who are studying, particularly for non-traditional students who already face numerous obstacles. Of the five women I interviewed, four had on-going health problems that affected their university study. Two suffered from chronic back pain that required heavy medication, one had a cervical smear scare, and another experienced mental illness, including panic attacks and anxiety.

Mental illness can be especially socially alienating and stressful and, is linked, by Canadian researcher Roth Edney (2004) to the 'othering' of working-class people with mental illness. He described how an analysis of Canadian newspaper articles about people with mental illness "selectively framed" people on the "basis of class and disenfranchisement", thus constructing a view of "otherness, a sense that mental illness happens to other people". This was done through emphasis being placed on the significance of poverty in the behaviour of working-class people with mental illness. Conversely, articles about middle-class people with mental illness focused predominantly on the person's "high-status occupations, their affiliations with prominent and/or influential families, and their socio-economic privilege" (Roth Edney, 2004, page number unknown).

Issues of health and disability were an extra source of struggle for Canadian working-class academic Mary Gammon (1997) who started university study as a single mother in her late twenties. She also had a specific learning disability and describes having to work "three times harder" than her classmates to keep up (p.30). Other obstacles to academic success included 'life' problems such as "harassment from her ex-husband, low self-esteem, medical and emotional problems of her children and coming to terms with a history of abuse". Gammon notes that her experience mirrors research showing that the main reasons mature students drop out of study include "lack of

money, lack of time, family responsibilities, stress caused by work loads, and failure to adjust to the school setting as a whole" (p.31).

Another source of 'overwhelming struggle' for the women in my study was something I have termed a battle against middle-class hypocrisy and exploitation. A major area of hypocrisy identified by my participants was the gap between what is taught in university courses and what actually happens in the university's own teaching practices. Evelyn and Bridget had the following discussion in the focus group:

> E - …you're supposed to be sensitive to other people's backgrounds and other
> people's perspectives. But it's really interesting how it doesn't actually work
> within the classroom but you're being taught how to do that outside.
> B – The X department's similar. It teaches…but it doesn't use the practices to
> teach.
> E – That's right. It just seems so bizarre. It's a real paradox.

Edwards (1993) addresses a similar conflict when she describes how the mature students in her study found that talking about motherhood and family life was not seen as valuable in university discussions. The students generally learned to be quiet about this aspect of their lives. Bowl (2003) point out the "big gap" between academic study of poverty and acknowledgment by students or tutors that poverty is actually a daily reality for some students. Salma, a student in Bowl's study, told her:

> "They talk about people like me in social policy – with disadvantage. I feel as if
> I'm living social policy rather than just reading it from textbooks, which other
> students are" (p.vii).

Gossip is another source of middle-class hypocrisy, identified by Bridget who describes her confusion at the covert aggressive behaviour of girls at her upper-middle-class girls' school (and at university). She was "absolutely flummoxed by bitchiness and back-biting and carry-on like that…I was used to, if you didn't like someone, you just thumped them and they thumped you back and it was all over…" Nainby and Pea (2003) describe working-class Pea's similar discovery when he first

went to university and experienced secret gossip as a middle-class code of communication. People would "vent" about friends and colleagues in private but later behave towards the person talked about as if nothing had been said. Pea would then leave gatherings wondering what was being said about him and wondering "if there is anyone who really likes anyone in middle-class culture, and quite frankly, how would you really know?" (p.31). Pea does not make the connection, but the middle-class discourse of gossip and backstabbing could be likened to Bourdieu's 'symbolic violence' – a form of social control enacted by the middle-class on those possessing less cultural capital.

As I noted earlier, Bridget is angry at what she believes is middle-class exploitation of the working-class through middle-class researchers doing class analysis on working-class people (as is potentially happening in this study). Bridget also views the way Rita is portrayed in *Educating Rita* - "with her stilettos and pink hair" and cheap Spanish wine - as "mildly insulting" and a lampooning of working-class culture. In the film, Rita herself feels she is in danger of being mocked and lampooned. She tells Frank:

> RITA: (angrily) But I don't wanna be charming and delightful: funny. What's funny? I don't wanna be funny. I wanna talk seriously with the rest of you, I don't wanna spend the night takin' the piss, comin' on with the funnies because that's the only way I can get into the conversation. I didn't want to come to your house just to play the court jester. (Russell, 1985, pp.44-45).

Bridget's view is supported by Lynch and O'Neil (1994) who call such exploitation class colonisation. However, University of Canterbury lecturer Taffy Davies, in his Comparative Education: Education and Social Class course, questions the notion of a dichotomy between professionals and non-professionals, between experts and non-experts as being actual exploitation. He suggests that perhaps exploitation is too strong a word to use about one class "employing unskilled people to do the work they don't want to do, for example, cleaning and childcare".

Davies' view may be technically correct but it is hard not to empathise with Bridget as she describes the pain of being "exploited" as a working-class scholarship child in

1970s Britain. She describes herself as "this little experiment. 'Let's take a working-class person with promise and if we put them in this that and the other, then they'll make something of their lives'. What a terrible experiment". A similar sense of anguish at working-class exploitation is evoked by Marian Faithful, singing *Working-class Hero*, an ironic song penned for her by John Lennon:

"As soon as you're born, they make you feel small…
…A working-class hero is something to be. A working-class hero is something to be.

They hurt you at home and they hit you at school
And they hate if you're clever
And they despise a fool
Till you're so fucking crazy, you can't follow the rules.
A working-class hero is something to be. A working-class hero is something to be.

…When they tortured you and scared you for 20 odd years
Then they expect you to pick a career,
That you really can't function, you're so full of fear…
…A working-class hero is something to be. A working-class hero is something to be.

There's room at the top,
They are telling us still
But first we must learn how to smile as we kill,
If we want to live like the folks on the hill.
A working-class hero is something to be. A working-class hero is something to be.

Unexpected Advantages and Successes

Despite the difficulties, struggles and loneliness experienced by the women in my study, they also all talked about unexpected successes and factors that had turned out to be surprisingly beneficial. Overall, their age (40s and 50s) appeared to provide them with advantages (or at least an equalling out of status) over other, younger (and mostly middle-class) students. Bridget surmises that any differences "can be perceived as difference in age group as opposed to difference in class and everyone can go 'oh you're different and you're different because you're a different age and the whole class thing starts to dissolve whereas if you're the working-class kid…"

Jill felt that she was more included by the younger students because her age made her seem "motherly" and non-threatening which led to her having "had more interactions that what I might otherwise have had". Almost all the women described how their life experiences helped them to understand and relate to the material they were learning. Evelyn found it useful to "have lots more experience in general". For Kate it was, "you sort of know a wee bit more don't you?" And Jill put it as:

"…[T]here are certain things that I was suddenly very interested in because I could either see the relevance to my children or it confirmed things that I already thought or maybe it was totally contradictory to what I thought and I thought it was a load of rubbish but I had some kind of intellectual thing going on with the material right the way through".

The women in Edwards' (1993) study similarly reported that their age and life experiences were "useful starting points for thinking about issues and wanting to learn more about them" (p.83). Mature women students in Walters' (2000) study learned the importance of making connections between their lives and their courses. He noted that such "connected knowing" required a capacity for empathy and appeared to be gender-related (p.188). Shuttleworth(1998) reflected on her own experience as a working-class woman lecturing to other working-class women. She found that the connections the women made between their lives and the subjects they studied seemed "particularly relevant in counteracting the feelings of 'personal erasure' which students from non-traditional backgrounds seem to encounter in trying to make sense of academic culture" (p.75).

In my study, the benefits of being an older student also included being more motivated and having a sense of 'it's now or never'. Kate described it as "once you get to that age where you just, you know what you want to do. You know what you have to do to do it and you're not mucking around…"

The women in Karach's (1992) study all found a source of strength in their supportive relationships with the other mature women they met through their studies. The women in my study made no mention of such collegial support, but they all reported being

supported in their studies by significant others in the form of mentor-type figures such as lecturers, friends and even children. Bridget was mentored by a lecturer who "took a shine to her", when she went to X University in Britain. She says:

"I think mentors are key people and they're hugely important…I always keep thinking of these key people along the way and how I wouldn't have made it without them and so it makes me feel like I'm (inaudible) because Rita would have been squashed by that system in five seconds flat if she'd turned up like that and [Frank] hadn't have been an old drunk who was disaffected too and found her refreshing. She would have just slid of the face of that university and disappeared and I wonder how many of us do".

Kate and Evelyn also talked about significant people who had mentored them in the journey as students. Evelyn's daughter, who was a year ahead of her at university "really kept me going…and so that's made a huge difference I think for me". As I have noted earlier, Kate says the only reason she went to university instead of back to school was the support and advice of her teacher friend:

"She gave me some guidelines on what to do. Which was really good for me. If I hadn't had anyone to give me a guideline I would have been really stuck".

Bowl (2003) says the women in her study often decided to improve their education after a chance encounter with a source of advice. She adds that "the fact that their early efforts were thwarted says more about the kinds of guidance and support they were offered and the low expectations held of ethnic minority and working class women than it says about their potential to succeed educationally" (p.58).

All the women in my study felt they were successful in their studies. As well as being unexpected, success was also seen in varied ways, ranging from top academic grades to a sense of peace and enhanced self-esteem that came from doing something perceived as worthwhile. Bridget was "a lot more at peace now that I'm doing what I want to do, a PhD" and Evelyn described "the university part" of her experience as "what's kept me sane". Jill and Bridget both talk about the success of actually surviving. Jill described the personal affirmation of "this whole element of actually

just sticking and finishing it and completing it…and the fact that I actually managed to survive the year which at times was really horrendous with all my children and assignments and…" This led to "personal differences" for Jill in terms of her "self image and just self-confidence, particularly in an academic environment".

In Edwards' (1993) study, all but one of the 31 mature women students said that their higher education had given them confidence, "the confidence to both demand equality of a relationship or to leave it, as well as the financial potential to back this up" (p.153). A woman in Thomson's (2000) study of working-class women at Ruskin College, Oxford, said her time there had been "the most transforming period of my life" (p.165). And this was despite problems being able to integrate study with her home life. She had to hide books and projects from her husband as he was threatened by her "capacity for learning" as well as by topics in her Women's Studies programme. She also struggled to juggle all her commitments – "travelling…on the bus, keeping house and kids together, finding time to read…" and was criticised by friends and parents for neglecting her family "for the sake of 'a whim'" (pp.165-166).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

When I embarked on this research, I hoped to discover the key issues facing mature working-class women when they study at contemporary New Zealand universities. I also hoped to compare their concerns, challenges and successes with those of Rita, a fictional woman who attended a British university in 1983, and in so doing, unleashed a host of studies with copy-cat names.

The women in my study have shared their interpretations of their student experience with me and I believe this has given me a clear sense of the many hurdles and struggles they face along with the major motivations that drive them. As expected – from watching *Educating Rita* and from reading the literature – the main issues appear to be class and gender-based and involve the stresses of juggling study, family and income-earning; the break-down of key relationships; and the existential angst of social mobility. There are other features also, mentioned by most of my participants, that include the need to strategise, both in terms of learning and doing assignments, and in terms of negotiating the complex process of upward social mobility.

One of the potential limitations of the case study and interview approach that I have used in my study can be that most of the data is descriptive and based on the participants' own viewpoints. However, I have addressed this limitation by comparing the findings that emerged in each of the interviews, including the focus group interview, with themes from other researchers' work. I have also included some of my own experiences and reflections, where relevant, in an attempt both to triangulate the findings further, and also to underline the feminist and post-structural view that researcher bias is impossible to eliminate and that it is therefore important to be as open as possible about the particular positions I may hold. My approach also reflects the view that there are many different interpretations of a situation and no possible way of knowing for certain if my findings are 'objectively' correct.

If I had the chance to do the study all over again, I would ideally have liked to have included more women like Kate who left school at 15 and worked in the service industry before going to university for the first time in her forties. I suspect, perhaps mistakenly, that the 'Kates' of the world can offer a particularly 'untainted' view of

what it feels like to become 'a hybrid'. On the other hand, the Bridget's of the world – those who, like Bridget, crossed the working-/middle-class divide many years ago – still seem to be stuck in that uneasy place between two worlds, but with a rich source of middle-class articulation. On my wish list I would also have liked to have had a working-class Maori woman (or two) so that I might have compared their experiences with that of working-class Pakeha. The only New Zealand research I was able to find in this area was Jones' (1992) study of a girls' high school in which she compared a group of working-class Pacific Islands girls to a group of middle-class Pakeha girls. She found that the Pacific Islands girls were penalised by their teacher in exams for the ways in which they learned and replicated information. This is reflective of the ways in which working-class women are penalised at university when they do not conform to middle-class values and expectations.

Lastly, as I have already mentioned, I wish that when I interviewed my participants, I had discussed with them the issue of my being middle-class and that I had explained to them my reasons for being interested in women who are working-class. Instead, I must accept that there was a power imbalance during my interviews, a factor which probably limited the rapport I was able to build with my interviewees, and which perhaps limited the data that I was given. That said, my participants were all willing interviewees who provided a rich source of descriptive information.

The term "uneasy hybrids" (Lucey, Melody and Walkerdine, 2002, p.286) seems to capture the uncomfortable sense of 'in-betweeness' that the women in my study described as they attempted to adapt to middle-class culture. The phrase is particularly appropriate, given Bridget's comments regarding her being a "little working-class experiment" who was sent to a "posh" school and university where, "what they did is, they made of me a hybrid that belonged in neither place. There was no place I felt comfortable…"

Lucey et al. coined the phrase 'uneasy hybrids' after studying the psychological difficulties experienced by young working-class women who "managed to get to university" and in doing so faced deep conflict (p.285). For these women, social mobility involved "the difficulties of negotiating the emotions…that are aroused when

aspiration and success mean becoming and being profoundly different to your family and peer group" (p.286).

The women in my study were older than those in Lucey et al's study, but they were no less affected by the costs incurred in crossing from what almost seems like one world – the working-class world – to another, the world dominated by middle-class cultural capital and academia. Once again, Bridget sums the situation up when she talks of being "between two worlds" and being "created in a certain mould that means I'm always going to be somewhere stuck and there's no land in the middle and there's no water. There's nothing".

Rita, in the film, went through a phase of not belonging when she and her husband were breaking up and she didn't want to sing with her family in the pub anymore, while at the same time, she was still an outsider to the middle-class as she had not yet grasped how to write essays or learned how to have intellectual conversations. But, even given the need to adapt real-life time to condensed movie-time, Rita's hybrid phase was brief in contrast to the experiences described by the women in my study. In fact, Rita's uncomfortable phase came to an end and she moved into a state of relative assurance and social ease, something most of the women in my study have not experienced. For them, the discomfort of being a hybrid continues. There is always a sense of "being a fraud", "fooling them again", "passing" as middle-class but not really feeling middle-class and, at the same time, feeling that it will never be possible to go back 'home' and be working-class again.

The theme of relationship break-down was perhaps the most pertinent to Rita's saga and was thoroughly described by Jill in ways that were strongly supported by the literature. Evelyn's experience, too, of divorce and being banned from studying by her ex-husband, also adds weight and extra colour to the findings. It could be argued that my own relationship experience was also valid to the study findings, despite me being middle-class and in a relationship with another student. There is an indication from studies on mature students by, for example, Norton et al (1998) and Edwards (1993) that class may not be the main defining feature in relationship break-ups that occur when a partner goes to university. However, the poverty and class-conflicts of being working-class are no doubt a major extra factor that adds to the stress load of

relationships already under strain. Likewise, in my situation, the extra stress of being in a lesbian relationship in an environment dominated by the hegemonic institution of heterosexuality, was perhaps sufficient to cancel out the benefits of being middle-class. In any event, there was insufficient income, a factor inextricably linked with elements of being working-class.

The strain of lack of money is not especially evident in *Educating Rita.* Her home environment appears dingy and lacking in style and she buys cheap wine and wears short skirts, but there is no sense that, when her husband leaves her, she lives in poverty. If anything, her class status rises as she moves into a middle-class area, leaves hairdressing and starts working at "a little bistro". Thus a viewing of the film gives little sense of one of the most pressing concerns of all the women in my study, and definitely the issue stressed most strongly by the literature – the almost intolerable strain of having to do too much with too little. All the women, and particularly those with children, had to learn, as Leonard (1994) puts it, an "endless juggling act of trying to balance home, family and university commitments" (p.176). And they had to somehow learn to do all of this with insufficient money and time.

All the women in my study felt they had achieved at least some success in their studies, despite the difficulties they faced. In the film, Rita's final words to Frank were about having choices. She wasn't sure what she would do next but "I'll make a decision, I'll choose" (Russell, 1985, p.73). Jill mirrored Rita's sense of power about having choices when she talked in the focus group about "an element of unexpected choice that I've now got…and hadn't actually even considered having before". One possible choice was to "go on. I don't have to stop. I could actually do post-graduate…It's actually been academically a really successful year. More successful than I had actually dreamed possible".

Jill is, from Walters' (2000) point of view, gaining a qualification, "particularly a degree" that brings "a new set of freedoms and opportunities" and probably indicates a change from working-class to middle-class status. (p.277). It is important to keep in mind though, that the women in my study may have another battle ahead of them when it comes to swapping their newly-gained cultural capital for the economic capital of a professional middle-class job.

As Wakeling (2005) has shown, the Batchelor's degree is becoming more common and is beginning to be replaced by the postgraduate degree as the new 'gatekeeper' of middle-class privilege. The postgraduate degree is likely to be an efficient gatekeeper too, for as Bowl (2003) points out, those who are less wealthy are less likely to be able to find the time and money to invest in further education. Bridget received a scholarship to do her PhD but this has not prevented her from "having to work her arse off" while she studies. She says that getting time to study is "always the poor cousin and I've often bought things at (op shops) and sold them at Cash Converters to make a profit or gone around the house and seen what there might be that could be sold at Cash Converters".

With this kind of struggle required to make ends meet, Bridget is likely to be one of only a few working-class women who are willing to take on the task of completing a PhD. Bowl calls the situation they face, middle-class elitism. Stromquist (2002) describes a similar situation in the United States where welfare has been replaced by "workfare" schemes which now make it "impossible for poor women to attend school. Even though an educational attainment gap between women and men no longer exists, in the United States, women do not have access to equivalent jobs or to well-paid jobs" (p.136). Once again, it is a similar case in Ireland where Lynch and O'Neil (1994) found that lack of a working-class perspective in academic studies of educational inequalities resulted "in policies designed to manage rather than eliminate inequality in education" (p.308). As Bowl (2003) describes it:

> "[T]he external doors of academia may have been opened, but the internal doors…its habitus appeared to have remained more or less intact" (p.139-140).

It seems then, that more research is needed, particularly in the area of working-class women's experiences of university education, in general and particularly in New Zealand where the myth of a classless society can disguise the inequalities that do exist. Until a substantial body of research is made available which highlights the financial, social and emotional and costs of non-traditional students attempting to access adequate incomes via university qualifications, it is unlikely any political changes will be made to ease their struggles.

REFERENCES

Anonymous (1998) 'Educating Rita' In *Far Eastern Economic Review* 161 (10)

Archer, L. Halsall, A. & Hollingworth, S. (2007) 'Class, Gender, (Hetero)sexuality and Schooling: Paradoxes within working-class girls' engagement with education and post-16 aspirations'. In *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 28 (2), pp.165-180

Ashcroft, K. Bigger, S. & Coates, D. (1996) *Researching into Equal Opportunities in Colleges and Universities*. London: Kogan Page

Astbury, J. (1996) *Crazy for You: The Making of Women's Madness*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press

Ball, S.J., Davies, J., David, M. & Reay, D. (2002) 'Classification and 'judgement': social class and the 'cognitive structures' of higher education'. In *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 23 (1) pp.51-72

Ball, S.J. & Vincent, C. (2001) 'New class relations in education: the strategies of the 'fearful' middle classes'. In Demaine, J. (Ed) *Sociology of Education Today*. Basingstoke: Palgrave

Bates, M.J. & Norton, S. (2002) 'Educating Rita: an examination of the female life course and its influence on women's participation in higher education'. In *New Horizons in Adult Education* 16 (3) pp.4-11

Bell, J. (1999) *Doing Your Research Project: A Guide for First-time Researcher in Education and Social Science*. (3rd Ed) Buckingham, USA: Open University Press

Benn, R., Elliot J., & Whaley, P. (Eds.) (1998) *Educating Rita and Her Sisters: Women and Continuing Education*. Leicester: NIACE: The National Organisation for Adult Learning

Bilton, T. et al (Eds) (1996) *Introductory Sociology* (3rd Ed). London: MacMillan

Boston, J. (1999) 'The Funding of Tertiary Education: Enduring Issues and Dilemmas'. In J. Boston, P. Dalziel & S. St John (Eds.) *Redesigning the Welfare State in New Zealand: Problems, Policies, Prospects*. Oxford: Oxford University Press

Bowl, M. (2003) *Non-Traditional Entrants to Higher Education: 'They talk about people like me'*. Trentham Books Ltd: London

Brine, J. & Waller, R. (2004) 'Working-class women on an Access course: risk, opportunity and (re)constructing identities'. In *Gender and Education* 16 (1) pp.98-113

Britton, C. & Baxter, A. (1999) 'Becoming a Mature Student: Gendered narratives of the self'. In *Gender and Education*, 11 (2) pp.179-193

Callewaert, S. (1999) 'Philosophy of Education, Frankfurt Critical Theory, and the Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu'. In T.S. Popkewitz & L. Fendler (Eds), *Critical Theories in Education: Changing Terrains of Knowledge and Politics*. New York: Routledge

Cohen, L. Manion, L. & Morrison, K. (2000) *Research Methods in Education* (5th Ed) London: Routledge Falmer

Dunbar, K. (1999) 'For Sale: One Phi Beta Kappa Key (a working-class woman's experience of academia)'. In *Transformations*, 10 (2) pp.30-41

Edwards, R. (1993) *Mature Women Students: Separating or Connecting Family and Education*. London: Taylor & Francis

Gammon, M. (1997) 'What Makes a Successful Mature Student?' In *Adult Learning*, 8 (4) pp. 30-31

Griffiths, M. (1998) *Educational Research for Social Justice: Getting off the Fence.* Buckingham, USA: Open University Press

Harker, R. (1990) 'Schooling and Cultural Reproduction'. In J. Codd, R. Harker & R. Nash (Eds). *Political Issues in New Zealand Education* (2nd Ed) Palmerston North: The Dunmore Press

Hatcher, R. (1998) 'Class differentiation in education: rational choices?' In *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 19 (1) pp.5-23

Haveman, R. & Smeeding, T. (2006) 'The Role of Higher Education in Social Mobility'. In *The Future of Children*, 16 (2)

hooks, b. (1995) 'Writing autobiography'. In Blair, M., Holland, J. & Sheldon, S. (Eds). *Identity and Diversity: the Experience of Education*. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters Ltd.

Jones, A. (1992) 'Writing Feminist Educational Research: Am 'I' in the text?' In S. Middleton & A. Jones (Eds) *Women and Education in Aotearoa*. Wellington: Bridget Williams Books Limited

Karach, A. (1992) 'The Politics of Dislocation: Some mature undergraduate women's experiences of higher education'. In *Women's Studies International Forum,* 15 (2) pp.309-317

Lauder, H. & Hughes, D. (1990) 'Social Origins, Destinations and Educational Inequality'. In J. Codd, R. Harker & R. Nash (Eds). *Political Issues in New Zealand Education (2nd Ed.)* Palmerston North: The Dunmore Press

Laugesen, R. (2007) 'Mind that Child'. In *Sunday Star Times* 8 July 2007 pp.9-10

Law, C. (1998) 'Accrediting Women, Normalising Women'. In R. Benn, J. Elliot & P. Whaley (Eds), *Educating Rita and Her Sisters: Women and Continuing Education*. Leicester: NIACE: The National Organisation for Adult Learning

Lennon, J. (1990) 'Working-Class Hero'. A song on Faithful, M., *Blazing Away*. New York: Island Records

Leonard, M. (1994) 'Transforming the household: mature women students and access to higher education'. In S. Davies, C. Lubelska & J. Quinn (Eds) *Changing the Subject: Women in Higher Education*. London: Taylor & Francis

Lucey, H., Melody, J. & Walkerdine, V. (2003) 'Uneasy Hybrids: psychosocial aspects of becoming educationally successful for working-class young women'. In *Gender and Education* 15 (3) pp.285-299

Luttrell, W. (1997) *School-smart and Mother-wise: Working-class Women's Identity and Schooling.* New York: Routledge

Lynch, K. and O'Neil, C. (1994) 'The Colonisation of Social Class in Education'. In *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 15 (3) pp. 307-324

McDonald, G. (1980) 'Education and the Movement towards Equality'. In P. Bunkle & B. Hughes (Eds) *Women in New Zealand Society*. George Allen & Unwin Australia Pty Ltd: Sydney

Maylor, U. (1995) 'Identity, migration and education'. In Blair, M., Holland, J. & Sheldon, S. (Eds). *Identity and Diversity: the Experience of Education*. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters Ltd.

Mutch, C. (2005) *Doing Educational Research: A Practitioner's Guide to Getting Started*. Wellington: NZCER Press

Nainby, K. & Pea, J.B. (2003) 'Immobility in Mobility: Narratives of social class, education, and paralysis'. In *Educational Foundations*, Summer 2003, pp.19-36

Norton, L.S., Thomas, S., Morgan, K., Tilley, A. & Dickins, T.E. (1998) 'Full-time Studying and Long-term Relationships: Make or break for mature students?' In *British Journal of Guidance and & Counselling*, 26 (1) pp.75-88

Power, S. (2001) 'Missing: a sociology of educating the middle class'. In Demaine, J. (Ed) *Sociology of Education Today*. Basingstoke: Palgrave

Roth Edney, D. (2004) *Media and Mental Illness: A Literature Review*. Canadian Mental Health Association; Ontario, January, 2004

Russell, W. (1985) *Educating Rita*. Harlow, UK: Longman Study Texts

Shuttleworth, S. (1998) 'Learners, Experiences and Lives in the Curriculum'. In R. Benn, J. Elliot & P. Whaley (Eds), *Educating Rita and Her Sisters: Women and Continuing Education*. Leicester: NIACE: The National Organisation for Adult Learning

Skeggs, B. (1997) *Formations of Class and Gender: Becoming Respectable*. Sage Publications: London

Stromquist, N.P. (2002) *Education in a Globalized World: The Connectivity of Economic Power, Technology, and Knowledge*. Lanham, USA: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Thomson, J. (2000) *Women, Class and Education*. London: Routledge

Wakeford, N. (1993) 'Educating Rita: Mature students and access courses'. In *Oxford Review of Education*

Wakeling, P. (2005) 'La Noblesse D'etat Anglaise? Social class and progression to postgraduate study'. In *British Journal of Sociology of Education,* 26 (4) pp.505-522

Walters, M. (2000) 'The Mature Students' Three Rs'. In *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 28 (2), pp.267-278

Waring, M. (1988) *Counting for Nothing: What Men Value and what Women are Worth*. Allen & Unwin Port Nicholson Press: Wellington

Warmington, P. (2003) ''You need a qualification for everything these days.' The impact of work, welfare and disaffection upon the aspirations of access to Higher Education students'. In *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 24 (1) pp.95-108)

Willetts, D. (2006) 'Heirs to the baby boomers: securing equity across the generations'. In Gough, R. *2056 – What Future for Maggie's Children?* London: Policy Exchange

Web-based Literature

Bosanquet, N., Gibbs, B., Cumming, S. & Haldenby, A. (2006) 'Class of 2006: a lifebelt for the IPOD generation'. In *Reform*, September 2006. Retrieved 25 May 2007 from http://www.reform.co.uk/website/publications/otherresearchreports.aspx,

Brunner, D. (1984) *Gender and Education: 'Educating Rita' and the Struggle for Voice*. Retrieved 24 May 2005 from http:www.eric.ed.gov/.ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/ content_storage_01/0000019b/80/16/1d/9d/pdf

Garner, R. (2002) *Educating Rita syndrome – alive and well*. Retrieved 24 May 2002 from http://www.independent.co.uk/news/education

Page, J.L. (1992) *The Relative Autonomy of Reading Practices by Critical, Cultural, and Social Formations: An ethnographic and textual analysis of re-entry women students' interpretations of 'Educating Rita'*. A University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign dissertation. Retrieved 25 May 2005 from http://www.proquest.umi.com.ezproxy. canterbury.ac.nz/pqdweb?did=744424791

<u>Appendix - Interview Schedule</u>

The following semi-structured interview schedule was used when I interviewed my participants. If was designed to allow them to talk freely and flexibly, in a way that most suited their particular narrative style, but which ensured specific topics were covered. The following questions/topics were included in the interviews, although not necessarily in the order shown:

1. *General Opening Question*: Please describe, in your own words, your experience of being a university student.

2. How would you describe yourself in terms of social class? For example working-class, middle-class etc?

3. Are you currently working and if so what job do you do?

4. Do you have other responsibilities, for example a family, and if so, how does this affect your study in terms of time availability?

5. How would you describe your current financial situation?

6. How would you describe your ethnicity and do you believe this has affected how you experience university?

7. What did you do before coming to university?

8. What were or are the jobs/careers of your family members, for example, parents, siblings, grandparents?

9. What were your family members' attitudes towards university education? Did any of them go to university?

10. How do you feel you are doing academically at university?

11. How do you feel you fit in socially at university?

12. Do you expect your financial and/or career situation to change after you graduate?

13. Has studying had any effect on your relationships with partner/family/friends?

14. Have you had any health issues while studying?

15: *General Closing Question*: Do you have anything else you would like to add?

Focus Group Discussion Schedule

The following topics/questions were raised in the focus group discussion. Again, they were not necessarily discussed in this order. I endeavoured to draw answers from each person on each topic, but this was not always possible:

1. Could you each say what you thought the main theme or feature of the film was that really stood out for you and explain how it is related (or not) to your own experience of being a student?

2. How do you think the issues and themes in *Educating Rita* – in Britain in the 1980s – are different to or similar to issues for yourselves in New Zealand, now? For example, at the end of the movie she said "I've got a choice, I can choose". Do you relate to that?

3. What do you think of Frank's relationship with Rita?

4. Frank implies that Rita has sold out in order to become educated and middle-class. He says she has become "shrill" and lost her freshness and originality. What do you think of that in terms of your own experiences?

5. There is a sense that Rita is on a journey, a metaphorical journey of change. Does anyone relate to that?

6. Is there anything else anyone would like to add?