Title	A critical search for the 'self' in adult education: Bourdieuian insights into transformative possibilities
Authors	Yelverton Halpin, Mary
Publication date	2016
Original Citation	Yelverton Halpin, C. 2016. A critical search for the 'self' in adult education: Bourdieuian insights into transformative possibilities. PhD Thesis, University College Cork.
Type of publication	Doctoral thesis
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Download date	2024-04-25 14:38:06
Item downloaded from	https://hdl.handle.net/10468/3259

A Critical Search for the 'Self' in Adult Education: Bourdieuian insights into transformative possibilities

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Ph.D. Doctor of Philosophy in Education

A Critical Search for the 'Self' in Adult Education: Bourdieuian insights into transformative possibilities

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(BA Early Childhood Studies, BA (Hons) in Adult Education,

MA Teaching and Learning)

A thesis document submitted in accordance with the requirements of University College Cork for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education

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7th September 2016

Declaration of Originality

I hereby certify that this material which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of Doctor of Philosophy in Education is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of this document. These details are then confirmed by a fuller reference in the bibliography section at the end of the document. I have read the sections on referencing and plagiarism in the UCC handbook.

Signed: _____

Carol Yelverton-Halpin

Date: _____

Number:_____

To my family and close friends, with love

This work is dedicated to my parents, Anne and Batty Yelverton, my husband Konor, my daughter Jacquie, my sons Keith and Conor and my daughter-in-law Angela and my sister Jean, for their constant love and encouragement. I am grateful to them for this wonderful experience.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to begin with the deepest thank you to my supervisor, Dr Stephen O Brien, for his wonderful insight, knowledge, guidance, acute attention to detail and commitment and wholehearted support shown to me throughout this research journey. I would also like to thank my second supervisor, Dr Alicia Curtin, for her generosity, encouragement and belief in me.

I am indebted to the women who participated in this research. I acknowledge their bravery and courage and for opening up their world and allowing me participate in it.

I am grateful to the wonderful people in UCC and the friends I made on this lifelong journey, for their invaluable guidance, support and encouragement.

Words can hardly express the gratitude I have for my immediate family for their encouragement during this time. I thank my husband, Konor, for assuring me that he was there on the sidelines, and I was not alone. I truly appreciate that he remained empathetic in my quest for this degree. To my children Keith, Jacquie and Conor, and my new daughter Angela for their patience and support. I also thank my parents for giving me the strength and motivation to believe that 'anything is possible if you put your mind to it'. Likewise to my three sisters, Jean, Maura and Toni for their girl power and confidence in me, and my four brothers for their genuine pride in me. We shared a lot of crazy 'childhood memories' in our small family home that was filled with big personalities.

I am also gracious to Dr Paul Conway and Dr Karl Kitching for interviewing me and believing that I was good enough to do a Ph.D. I would also like to thank Professor Kathy Hall, Dr Siobhan Dowling, Dr Maura Cunneen and Dr Venessa Rutherford for their professional advice throughout the journey.

Finally, to my close friends I offer my gratitude for years of patience and understanding, and their constant belief in my ability to achieve. Thank you. It has taken a substantial amount of time and determination to produce this piece of work that has finally come together as a piece of research that bears a message that is very close to my heart. The field of adult education is my life's passion and it is embedded in who I am as a person.

Abstract

This study investigates the 'self' of six Irish working-class women, all parenting alone and all returned to the field of adult education. Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field and capital are the backdrop for the study of the 'self', which is viewed through his lens. This study commenced in September 2012 and concluded in August 2014, in a small urban educational setting in an Irish city. All of the women in the study are single parents, most of them did not complete second level education, and none of them had experienced adult or third level education. Their ages vary from 30 to 55 years. The study pursues the women's motivations for returning to education, the challenges they faced throughout the journey, and their experiences, views and perspectives of Adult Education. The methodology chosen for this research is critical eethnography, and as an emerging ethnographer, I was able to view the phenomena from both an *emic* (inside) and an *etic* (outside) perspective. The critically oriented approach is a branch of qualitative research. It is a holistic and humanistic approach that is cyclical and reflective. The critical ethnographic case studies that developed are theoretically framed in critical theory and critical pedagogy. The data is collected from classroom observations (recorded in a journal) and interviews (both individual and group). The women's life experiences inform their sense of self and their capital reserves derive from their experience of habitus. It also attempts to understand the delivery of the programmes and how it can impact the journey of the adult learners. The analysis of the interviews, observations, field notes and reflective journals demonstrate what the women have to say about their new journey in adult education. This crucial information informs best practice for adult education programmes. This study also considers the complexity of habitus and the many forms of capital. The theme of adults returning to education and their disposition to this is one of the major themes of this study. Findings reflect this uncertainty but also underline how the women unshackled themselves of some of the constraints of a restricted view of self. Witnessing this new habitus forming was the core of their transformational possibility becoming real. The study provides a unique contribution to knowledge as it utilises Bourdieuian concepts and theories, not only as theoretical tools but as conceptual tools for analysis. The study examined transformative pedagogy in the field of adult education and it offers important recommendations for future policy and practice.

List of Abbreviations

AEOA	Adult Education Officers Association
AONTAS	National Adult Education Organisation
CE	Community Education
DES	Department of Education and Skills
EAAL	European Agenda for Adult Education
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute
ETBI	Education and Training Boards Ireland
The EU	The European Union
FE	Further Education
FEC	Further Education Colleges
FETAC	Further Education and Training Awards Council
OECD	Economic Cooperation and Development
NALA	National Adult Literacy Agency
NGGE	National Centre for Guidance in Education
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
PTW	Pathways to Work
SOLAS	Seirbhísí Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna *(Educational Services and Continuing Skills)*
UNESCO	The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
VEC	Vocational Education Committee

Poem: The Road Not Taken

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveller, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same;

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves, no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back;

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in wood, and I—
I took the one less travelled by,
And that has made all the difference.

(Robert Frost, 1920)

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study is to investigate the 'self' of six Irish women who returned to the field of adult education. All of the women were parenting alone. As limited research has been conducted on this 'self' phenomenon, a qualitative and exploratory methodology was thought appropriate for the study, and the research approach to achieve this aim necessitated the use of critical ethnography. As a researcher, I was present in the field as a tutor, research investigator and observer. The interpretations ascertained and attempted to be objective and to understand the subjective perspectives of the women's social realities. However, at times, it became quite subjective, and for this reason, I write in the first person throughout this study. This chapter presents the research questions, the general background, the rationale and the aims of the research study. It also introduces the reader to my own background and educational journey. The chapter concludes with an activity that drove the literature review and finally presents an overview of the structure of the thesis.

1.1.1 Research Questions

My enquiry is hypothesised by three questions:

1. What Bourdieuian insights into transformative possibilities can be deduced from the critical search for the self?

2. What aspects of the 'self' change, evolve as adult learners return to the field of education?

3. Can we explore, to some degree of certainty, if such changes are viewed by the participants themselves as positive, negative, or both?

These questions guided the exploration of the women's experiences of 'self' on their educational journey. As they were my students, they also influenced my positioning to this study.

1.2 General Background

The vast majority of the literature on adult education in Ireland communicates the importance of self-esteem, self-motivation, self-development and self-direction, with little or no investigation into the authentic or social 'self'. This gap in the literature has led me to an inquiry of 'self'.

> The 'self' is something which has a development; it is not initially there, at birth, but arises in the process of social experience and activity, that is, develops in the given individual as a result of his relations to that process as a whole and to other individuals within that process (Mead, 1934, p.135).

A 'self' is a person, a living, breathing, thinking human being and the social 'self' is the 'self' that is portrayed in social settings. It is in essence an object in itself' a social structure that appears in and through social experiences (Mead, 1934, p.7). To understand what motivates us and what forms our thinking we must engage with the intrinsic nature of self (Gergen, 1991). How we function as social beings and what motivates our actions are also aspects of self that emerge (Benson, 2001, Ischeiser, 1949). The social self is the outward expression and the inward self is the analysing, reflection and doubting self which is constantly challenging and interpreting (Jovchelovitch, 2007). People are born into a variety of backgrounds and situations, and collectively these backgrounds and situations influence the shape and space and sequence of events that affect/effect life's course of action (Moi, 1991). Habitus is inherited as it represents the families we are born into. It influences our gender, class, social positions and our ways of understanding; we inherit the meanings associated with social positions and positions in knowledge (Skeggs, 1997, pp. 8-9). The literature specifies that the 'self' has a profound impact on the ability of adults to engage fully in learning and education, e.g., (Knowles, 1985, Bourdieu, 1986 and Reay, 2000). The economic climate and the availability of courses and programmes both at community and statutory level have influenced the numbers and types of adult learners in returning to further and higher education.

The adults who return to education may wish to broaden their career prospects and obtain a qualification for their efforts. A central theme in the *White Paper on Adult Education* (2000) is the theory of 'lifelong learning' (p.54). This concept promotes a return to education and training for adults and mature students from a variety of backgrounds, with a multitude of

life experiences. Traditional static education is no longer a valid way to deliver training and education, as it is inadequate for the needs of adult learners (*White Paper on Adult Education*, 2000, p.76). However, the modern view of education fosters a whole host of learning opportunities both in and out of the workforce. In recent years, the Further Education and Training Authority (SOLAS) and the Vocational Education Committee (VEC) have developed courses and training that are consistent with the *White Paper on Adult Education* (2000). These courses are flexible in their delivery and support the 'market' demand. A vital element of lifelong learning is that the knowledge, skills and competence achieved from these programmes will be recognised through the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) (*White Paper on Adult Education*, 2000, pp. 57-58). Furthermore, these courses project the global market work trends and encourage adult learners on a 'transparent ladder of progression' into higher and mainstream education. They also provide credit accumulation, diversification of provision, and flexible route ways between home, work, and education. Adult education "It is lifelong, life-wide, voluntary, and self-motivated" (*White Paper on Adult Education*, 2000, p.58).

Although there is a push to educate people to create a knowledge economy, a lack of financial and cultural capital may put numerous adult learners at a disadvantage. The absence of economic, childcare and family support can make the journey difficult. The cohort of women I focused on in this study were all single parents from disadvantaged and lower socioeconomic backgrounds and all in receipt of a 'single parent allowance'. Changes to the single parent allowance were introduced on a phased basis in 2012, and on 2 July 2015, parents in receipt of lone parent allowance, whose youngest child had reached the age of seven or older, were moved on to the Jobseeker's allowance (a lower financial weekly payment). Single parents are now expected to be available for and seeking work (Citizens Information, 2015). This new legislation creates a stark loss of finances for people parenting alone. Instead of actually encouraging this cohort back into the workforce, the government slashed Community Employment (CE) Schemes which are crucial for single parents to make that re-adjustment back into the labour market. Access to education has not improved, as educational grants have been cut and altered giving little support to adult learners. A further hindrance to the adult learner is the lack of childcare provisions, and Ireland is one of the worst countries in the developed world in this respect. Childcare for children under three years is expensive and parents from low-income, and low- educated backgrounds are more

likely to use relative care, or no non-parental care at all (McGinnity, Murray and McNally, 2013, p.15). High childcare costs can frequently act as a disincentive to those who wish to gain employment, and the high-cost implications can regularly create income poverty. Affordable and quality childcare would also promote women's continuity in the labour market.

All of these issues affect the individual 'self'. Instead of making education and work readily available and coherent, the ineffective policies and laws often make life miserable for people that are long-term unemployed or want to return to education. This can place them on the peripheries of society. The gap between the rich and the poor has continued to widen, and instead of creating inclusion, these new stringent laws are generating more exclusion (O'Toole, 2014). Returning to learning as an adult is not an easy task, and inadequate support and guidance plus the lack of social, cultural and economic capital can often impede the 'self' (Bourdieu, 1997). The six women in this study returned to education in 2012 and received payment from SOLAS (using this as a lone parent allowance). This economic incentive assisted them with childcare costs and also supported them to cover the extra costs of travelling to and from the college. In 2013, the payment was cut. At that stage the women had settled into as a learning community; they had developed kinship and confidence in their abilities, and they were determined to develop and get their FETAC level 5 qualification.

1.3 My Chosen Area of Research in Adult Education

I began my teaching journey as a one-to-one adult literacy tutor, and over time was contracted to deliver childcare, care support, communications and personal development programmes for organisations such as FÁS, (now SOLAS), Further Education colleges, the VEC, and more recently a Higher Education College (HEC). All the courses are monitored under the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) (1999), whose duty it is to determine the standard of knowledge, skills and competence acquired by the learners. Many of the adults who attend these courses come from diverse, multicultural, mixed gender and socioeconomic backgrounds, with ages on average varying from 23 to 60. I have noticed that adults returning to Further Education face a big transition in their lives, as they have to balance study with work, life and family commitments. They are also seeking to have more autonomy and independence, and at the early stage of any course the experience can be daunting, and issues

around the 'self' have arisen in the classroom. As an adult educator/facilitator, I discovered that using critical thinking teaching techniques creates a positive, creative atmosphere and promotes autonomy in the learner. My ethos as a facilitator is to support students to adjust and adapt to the new and challenging environment of education. I have been in their shoes so often, in my lifetime and know well those feelings of insecurity and awkwardness. I believe if I can help the learners to consider their achievements, and to recognise their accomplishments, I will also help them to see themselves as people who have the power to create success. I too have been lucky to have had this kind of support from some of my third-level lecturers, as well as from my supervisors in UCC. However, I believe that this success can only be achieved if the educator takes more responsibility for the learning environment (Rogers, 1983). As a facilitator of learning, I need to be aware of the learners' attitudes, experiences, habits, opinions and culture. Also, it is important to understand their perspectives as far as possible and to assist them in the discovery of multiple behavioural perspectives, and this was emphasised on the introduction day of the course in 2012 before I began my research.

On 17 September 2012, I administered a simple group activity entitled 'Fear in a Box'. The aim of the activity was to create trust, group interaction and 'self' disclosure. The procedure: each person had to write down their fear anonymously on a small blank card, fold it and place it in a box. As soon as all the cards were put in the box, the contents were shaken to mix them up. The box was handed around, and each person took a card and read the script aloud; and as they read, I transcribed the women's fears onto the whiteboard. There were significant similarities in the women's fears, all relating to the 'self'. These core issues provided me with sufficient cause to interpret what subjective perspectives make up part of their 'selves'. (See figure 1 below).The women characterised their themes of fear under 'not being good enough'; 'coming from the wrong side of town'; 'not speaking with the right accent'; 'not intelligent'; 'parenting alone'; 'poverty' 'teachers using big words'; and 'employment'. The 'self' is entirely related to living conditions, culture and habitus (Bourdieu, 1986). Habitus can be defined as an individual's personality and the structure of their lifestyle, values, dispositions, and expectations associated with particular social groups that are acquired through the activities and experiences of everyday life (Bourdieu, 1986).The literature informs us that the core of 'self' is the authentic 'self'; the part that is not defined by what we do (gender, culture, ethnicity or job role). Instead, it is the combination of all the

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skills, talents and wisdom you have, and acquire, that are uniquely an expression of you (James, 1890; (1981); Freud, 1923; Mead, 1934; Goffman, 1959; Erickson, 1995; Taylor, 1991).

Taylor (1991), however, focuses on the features of culture that are relevant to 'self', such as social conditions, the connection between society and the individual that shapes the authentic 'self'. Similarly, Bourdieu (1986) focuses on the notion of habitus, which again deals with the social 'self', but places emphasis on field , culture and capital, as key influential elements of 'self'. The field represents capital and Bourdieu (1986) established that social conventions, social norms and practices, as well as structural practices and positions, influence our feelings and emotions, leading to an expression of the true 'self' and shaping who we are, through our experiences and perceptions (Rudd, 2003). The study is set in an educational site, and Bourdieu's (1985) concept of habitus fits aptly into the theory of 'self', as it conveys the subjective and social aspect of 'self' (Grenfell and James, 1998). The six women in the present study encountered an unfamiliar field when they returned to education. Some had pre-conceptions and negative reactions to the field of adult education. I sought to discover if the experience of adult education would generate transformation, confidence and certainty, or further self-doubt and uncertainty (Reay, 2005).

> Social capital is the sum of resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition. (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 119)

Adult education has no specific definition, owing to the fact that education can be assumed in outcomes such as skills or may have a core purpose (human and/ or scholarly) which may be achieved through a more balanced holistic curriculum. However, little attention is placed on the learning process itself, although it is presumed to be ongoing (OECD, 2003). 'Lifelong learning' is seen (officially) as a means to safeguard employment, to encourage people to retrain and upskill to remain employable. On the other hand, adult education is defined as in specific terms, taking place as it does in a multitude of settings formal, informal and non-formal (The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) (OECD) (1997). The literature also reports that lifelong learning is broad as it encompasses 'second-chance' education and training as well as conscious and unconscious learning (OECD, 2003, p. 21). The whole premise of adult education (as is officially

presented) is that it is based on the view that all adults should be motivated to learn throughout life, and that it should support the social and individual development of its students (e.g. OECD, 1997). A wide range of documents have been published on lifelong learning, and all have neglected to define clearly what it actually means: it is understood as all learning that happens from the 'cradle to the grave'; as well as being aimed at improving, knowledge, skills and competences within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective (DES, 2000, p. 58). Learning is experienced by everyone in a unique way: it is a continuous cycle resulting from reflective engagement with changing circumstances and life experiences. As a facilitator, tutor and lecturer in adult education, I believe that the learner is central to my teaching methodology and that a student-centred approach has a significant part to play in the development of adult education. Furthermore, as a supporter of a particular form of lifelong learning, I think that facilitators of learning should employ specific strategies to assist people on their educational journey.

The transitions in the form of adult learning have changed dramatically over the past 20 years, and adult education in Ireland has been influenced by multiple theories and theorists. Knowles (1984) popularised the term 'andragogy'. He defined it as, "the art and science of helping adults to learn, in contrast with pedagogy, which concerns helping children to learn" (1984, p.43). He also proposed that when adults return to learning, they bring a wealth of life experience (1984, p.77). His andragogical model states that the learners move initially from "being dependent' on the tutor and facilitator, to becoming 'self-directed learners" (Knowles, 1980, p.44 and p.54). The concept is similar to Vygotsky's (1978) concept of 'zone of proximal development' (p. 86). Knowles (1990), also notes that adult learners may initially reveal a 'teach me' attitude because of their past conditioning with learning, and believed the "teachers must introduce learning experiences that move the adult learner from being teacher dependent to self-directed" (p. x). Taylor (1998) felt adult learners should be exposed to various viewpoints and perspectives, as this helps them to look at things critically and "engage in problem posing and critical reflection" (pp. 48-49). Again like Knowles, he records that adult learners need support on their learning journey, and that "teachers should be trusting, empathetic, caring, authentic, sincere, and demonstrate high integrity" (Taylor, 2000, p.313).

A similar perspective is held by Rogers (1991), who emphasises three core conditions for learning, namely: congruence (realness); unconditional positive regard (acceptance); and empathy. He believes that the principle behind adult learning is 'student-centred learning', and that unconditional positive regard should be demonstrated at all times to adult learners (1992, p.26). Another fundamental element in adult learning is 'respect', and by respecting the learners, one is attributing to them positive qualities, intentions, and expectations. A respectful relationship between the teacher and learner is marked by treating students with dignity, listening carefully to what they say, as well as listening for what seems to be reluctance to tell. Respect includes treating the students as sensible people and creating a non-judgemental environment for learning. It sets the right climate for learning and encourages student participation (Rogers, 1983, p.25). Moreover, it highlights sensitivity, respect, dignity and demonstrates that positive behavioural expression and attitudes will support the adult learner to develop a positive sense of 'self' (Rogers, 1983). A vital ingredient in adult education is building the 'self' of the adult learner on their educational journey, and the humanistic approach promotes the subjective world of the learner (Rogers, 1983, Knowles, 1990, Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, Taylor, 2000, Reay, 2005).

1.4 My Lifelong Experience as a Working-class Woman

To date, my journey in education has brought me to places of wonderful enlightenment and deep despair. It is a lifelong journey that is ongoing, challenging and at times testing. "Little did I think that adult education and its transformative moments are for bad as well as for good" (Yelverton-Halpin, 2012). However, my personal 'self' was formed as a young child when I was overly sensitive to the comments of others. Negative criticism had a significant impact on how I viewed myself, and not feeling good enough was a regular chant in my mind. My journey began in Limerick, in a National School, where I received a primary education. I came from a working-class background which was hugely influential in determining my level of education. Even though education is generally important to working-class people, girls were not (certainly not then) expected to have any great aspirations. It was assumed that they would work in the home and therefore only require a basic level of education. Being able to read and write were the tools for family survival. On the other hand, boys were deemed to be the breadwinners. To take up an apprenticehip, not a white collar profession was an uncommon means for working-class boys to access employment. The

emphasis was on having a job for life after their apprenticeship. Economic and domestic needs took precedence over education for girls in many working-class homes. At the age of 12, I began secondary school and to remain as a student I had to work part time after school and full time during the Christmas and summer holidays. I was determined to be successful in secondary education and hoped some day I would go to college. Sadly, it did not happen, as I, like my other siblings, had to bring home a wage, and again it was reinforced by my family that they felt girls did not need an education.

I decided to look at professions that paid whilst you trained, as I did not want to be a burden on my parents and seven siblings. I decided that nursing was the best option. Having gone through numerous interviews, I was unsuccessful and took to working in a fabric shop, which was considered 'a nice clean job' for a girl. I constantly strove for something more – a better job, education and a chance to move to another country. Opportunities were limited, and unemployment and immigration were huge in Ireland in the late 1970s/early 1980s. Subsequently, I took the next step, which was then considered 'the norm' in a young woman's life: marriage and children. Once this status quo was achieved, it was considered that the young working-class woman was 'done for'. My predicament corresponded with Bourdieu's (1986) notion of 'habitus', 'capital' and 'field'. I came from a large family and my 'habitus' was one of limited opportunities and this was replicated across the city. As a woman my place was firmly set out in the home, performing domestic duties, duties of care and duties of personal attendant to the males in the house. It seemed that women were constantly having children and when they perhaps saw some opportunity of fulfilling a creative urge or to do something with their lives, childcare became a consideration. Also Bourdieu's (1986) concept of 'field' seemed rife in the Limerick of my youth. I felt I wasn't moving in the right circles as opportunities seemed to be on the more affluent side of the town where children went to the more prestigious schools who fed into the local economoy. My 'fields' of influence were limited and encounters with 'fields' of actual influence were few and far between. One of the greatest limitions in my life's progress was my actual address. For so many young people, coming from a certain area was the first obstacle they encountered in attaining their 'field' of dreams. This is Bourdieu's (1986) concept of 'field' in all its inglorious influence. Feeling a sense of underachievement, I was determined to take ownership of my situation and do something about it. The need for knowledge and education was one of the many driving forces in my life. I believe that 'knowledge is power' and it 'emancipates'; that freedom and

power come from knowledge (Freire, 1970). I also felt that people with high levels of education were more confident and comfortable with (and within) themselves, certainly by comparison with lower educational achievers (I felt). The psychological and social aspects of the 'self' are closely connected: how we feel and how we react or communicate in a social setting is also fostered by how we believe others perceive us in a social context. I decided to seek out part-time and evening courses to assist me in my quest, and this worked well with family and job commitments.

In Ireland in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the suite of adult education courses was poor, and mainly 'hobby' based. In the mid-1990s, adult education programmes began to change, and the choice of courses improved drastically. Throughout that period, rapid economic growth happened, fuelled by foreign direct investment and the beginning of a property price bubble. Foreign investors added to growth, as the country exported its technology and pharmaceutical wares and the (so-called) 'Celtic Tiger' was created (OECD, 2004). However, the bubble burst rapidly in September 2008, leading to a massive downturn in the economy; and job loss, immigration and bankruptcy became the norm in Irish society (ESRI, 2009). Although my experience of second-level education and lack of higher education happened in the late 1970s/early 1980s in Ireland, I find it difficult to comprehend why educational access for some groups of adults is, as bad now in the 21st century as it was then. From my 20 years experience of working with adult learners, social class and coming from a lower socioeconomic background is still the main predictor for lack of access to third level and educational achievement. My own background is similar to most of the adult learners I facilitate, and I feel this unity of spirit enables empathy and commitment to be at the heart of my teaching and learning approach.

1.4.1 My Educational Journey: A Work in Progress

Born into a working-class family, I had internalised feelings of inferiority through my family's beliefs and values. I felt like an outsider on the Ph.D. cohort and shared little in common with my peers' lineage and background. I feared their judgement. Most of the other learners in my class were teaching at third level and came from traditional middle-class families, where heritage was promoted, and education supported (Bourdieu, 1986). I felt I did not belong in the classroom and also found it embarrassing when my peers would

(unproblematically) discuss their qualifications, large homes, designer clothes and cars. I struggled with the triviality of it all; I felt excluded from their privileges. My juxtaposed feelings and beliefs were 'rattled' and I questioned my positioning. This was to be a serious questioning of my 'self' and my eligibility as a third-level student undergoing a Ph.D. degree. I had taken the long road to education, but it seemed like 'the road less travelled' (Frost, 1920).

My journey was different to that of my peers. I had not progressed to higher education (HE) after secondary school. Instead, I worked from a very young age, married and had a family in my very early twenties. Economics was central to my childhood experience. The household mantra became 'I hope we have enough food for tomorrow's dinner'; my childhood was stressful, and fear and shame played a central role in my experience. Work was the key to survival: it was the core of everything – if you worked you could do things and achieve things. Being female also held additional disadvantages. My parents felt that girls did not need an education, as they would marry, and a man would look after their every need. Disillusioned and confused at my life's lot, I continued to follow the familiar path my family had set out for me. But I knew that something was amiss. There had to be more to life than the tiny glimpses of happiness and overwhelming struggle. Reading books were my escape from reality, and books also filled my head with knowledge and ideas. I felt determined that my children would go to college and get the opportunities that I did not have. In my mid-twenties, I became interested in complementary therapies and found solace in the experience, as I loved the connection between the physical and spiritual world. The first therapy I studied was the metamorphic technique (MT), and the core thinking is that metamorphosis literally leads to change. In the practice of MT, the practitioner uses a light touch massage on the feet, hands, and head, whilst at the same time not imposing his/her beliefs on the person receiving the session (Gaston Saint-Pierre, founder). What I liked about the technique was its suitability for everyone, regardless of age or life circumstance, and also the course provided an environment of freedom. As time progressed, I got involved in other therapies such as colour healing, crystals and Reiki.

In 1990, I trained as an adult literacy tutor, which was something I had always wanted to do, but never thought I was good enough to achieve. People with literacy difficulties have always been in my life, but this became more prominent when I worked in a shop in the city.

A well-known middle-class customer would always ask me to sign her cheques when she purchased goods. I could see the impact this had on her and her life and the embarrassment she felt. This was the moment my journey as an adult learner in education began. In 1992, I did a TEFL course as I felt it would assist me in the tutoring and facilitation of my one-to-one students in adult literacy. I worked voluntarily for some years in literacy development but felt that I needed more qualifications to progress in the field of education. Ireland in the 1990s ran few part-time adult education courses, particularly if you lived in a smaller city or town. Those that existed were technical or 'hobby' based, and all were expensive. In 1995, the University of Limerick (UL) started to deliver outplacement programmes on health and fitness in my town. I had a keen interest in the area, applied for the course, was interviewed and accepted it. The qualification was with UL, and I was informed at the interview that it was a prestigious course to have on your CV. The course ran every weekend, all day Saturday and every second Sunday for a year, from September to July, and the commitment was considerable. Since I had three small children and a full-time job and the fees were very high, I was determined however, to do the course. I borrowed from the credit union, I felt it would open more doors 'work-wise' and at the same time I would be a good learning role model for my children.

Returning to education was a struggle for me as my family and close friends were generally unsupportive and passed negative comments like, 'what do you want doing that to yourself for?' 'How can you work and study and bring up your children?' 'Your kids will be neglected'; 'What are you trying to prove?' etc. This negativity was upsetting and off-putting, but I tried hard not to let it get in the way of my study. I was determined to complete the course and get my qualification. Studying and working was very tough, and I had to be extremely organised at all times. The course ran in a small community building about 15 miles outside the city. There were no direct bus routes, and I did not have a car, which was an extra barrier. After a few weeks a car pool was set up between the course members and lifts were organized and I found this very helpful at the time. Reflecting on it now a simple intervention suggested by the tutor who listened to the real class concerns such as the practicality of getting to the venue made all the difference to me. In October 1996, I graduated from UL as the proud holder of a level 6 qualification. The following year I graduated with two more level six health skills certificates, and I trained in stress massage. During my training, I had volunteered one evening a week with a local community group

delivering health and fitness classes to a group of young people in a disadvantaged area of the city. I developed a good rapport with them, and the programme lead gave me excellent feedback on my teaching style and requested that I deliver similar workshops to older adults with pay. I loved it and was so grateful for the opportunity. Finally, all my hard work and study seemed to be paying off. As the years progressed, I did a level 6 childcare training programme, psychometric testing level A and B through the British Psychological Society, and a BA in Early Childhood Studies through distance learning. Studying became part of my life - almost like a subtle addiction. FÁS (Seirbhísí Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna: Educational Services and Continuing Skills), now SOLAS, was one of the leading funders in community education running outreach programmes in towns that had no access to training and development. There were various programmes delivered for FÁS in the south and south-east of Ireland, and I facilitated some of them. In the early 2000s, the government invested a lot of money into personal development courses designed for lone parents. The initiative was run to encourage women back to work, education or further training. The programmes were part time, and the participants got paid weekly with their own personal single parent allowance and child allowance, as well as the state's childcare allowance. It offered an economic incentive initially for most of the participants. However, some of their stories were harrowing, e.g., 90% of them had no bank or credit union accounts, essential for registering with FÁS. In 2005, a new mandate was introduced in FÁS stating that all the trainers must have an honors degree to teach and deliver FÁS programmes. In 2005, a large factory closed in the south-east, and I was asked to give a presentation to the plant workers encouraging them to retrain in various fields of work or return to further education. I spoke on behalf of FÁS, as this organisation was assisting people across all work spectrums to educate themselves for the new knowledge economy of Ireland (DES, 2000).

At that time, FÁS had also introduced an incentive for self-employed workers to upgrade their skills and qualifications and funding was in place to assist adults with 60% of the cost of their chosen third-level course. After my presentation in the south-east town, one of the FÁS executives spoke to me and advised me to look at the local colleges and pick a course - they would pay 60% of the cost. I was thrilled, as I could not afford to pay for another course. I contacted the local third-level institute and looked at the programme prospectus and discovered an MA qualification I felt would benefit me and my future career in adult education. I applied for the course. At that time, I did not hold a level 8 qualification

(an honours degree). The programme designer and lead, interviewed me to enable them to assess if I had the ability and skills to part-take in the programme. After the interview, I had to hand write a 1000 word reflective essay in a two-hour frame on 'why I wanted to do the MA.' This had to be written outside but, close to the interview room and returned when completed to the interviewers. Three weeks later I was accepted through my prior teaching and learning experience. I could not believe that they thought I was good enough to be part of a Master's programme. The programme began in October 2005. Unfortunately so did the 'politics' and lack of 'transparency'. Once I began the programme, I started to apply for jobs in local Vocational Educational Committees (VECs) and Further Education Colleges (FECs). I was offered a role as a substitute childcare tutor in a local FEC. It was the first time I did not have to travel all over the south-east to earn a living: I could get the bus to work, meet my friends for lunch and feel some sort of normality in my real life. The MA was a three-year pilot programme delivered part-time to facilitate third-level lecturers. The course schedule for each semester was aimed to suit those teaching in the institute, and the modules were delivered in blocks during midterms and holidays and focused mainly on third-level education. The majority of my peers were employed, and the college funded the course fees; three of us came from other diverse teaching backgrounds. It was difficult for those of us not employed by the institute, as we had to attend lectures on work days and drop a day's pay. It was a period of change and adjustment into a field with which I was unfamiliar. While it generated transformation, it also created insecurity and uncertainty (Reay, 2005).

As the first year progressed, I applied for a contract in a Further Education College (FEC) and was informed that I would not get a contract without a BA honours degree, and my Masters degree was of no value. Shocked and disillusioned, I returned to the college in question to explain my dilemma and was informed that the MA did supersede a degree, but to teach at third level, I also needed a BA honours degree. I questioned the whole concept of prior experiential learning and its meaning, and was informed if I had not intended to teach in FE or the HE sector; an MA would be an excellent qualification to have on my CV. I was reeling from the news and wondered what I had done to myself? Maybe, my family and close friend's earlier negative comments had come to light. The challenges began all over again. While all my peers focused fully on their MA, I had an extra chore on my hands as I had to sort out a BA (Hons) degree. My little free time was consumed with investigating this hurdle and trying to get all the paperwork in order. I applied to the Teaching Council and was

accepted as a member, and again this was not sufficient for the FEC, although it was one of the criteria for teaching in an FEC. Feeling trapped and ill from the experience, I did not know which way to turn or whom to trust. I felt sickened by a system lacking in support and transparency, and which had many disparities but no clear direction. Instead of networking with my peers and others in the educational circle, I found that my time was filled with paperwork and politics. My primary objective was to facilitate adults on their educational journey, yet my passage was filled with 'rough ground' (Dunne, 1993). In October 2008, I graduated with an MA, a month before Ireland saw the beginning of the economic downturn and the collapse of the 'Celtic Tiger'. Ireland encountered enormous job losses and began to experience high proportions of people leaving the country. In March 2009, the Irish government introduced an embargo on the recruitment of teachers and civil servants and capped the appointment of teachers to certain promotional posts in second-level schools, thus creating job scarcity for new teachers and also for those with small contracted hours (DES, 2009). All of these events impacted on my journey and prevented me from moving into a secure job and place of work. In October 2009, I began a BA (Hons) degree in adult education and was exempt from years one to three due to my prior experiential learning. In 2010, I graduated with a first class honours degree and believed this to be the holy grail of all qualifications, the piece of the jigsaw most sought after by all FEC and HE sectors to gain employment. However, once again I was clearly disheartened with the structured system of education.

In 2010, an abundance of students arrived at the college from the Middle East to improve their English language skills and to teach them it was necessary to have a certificate in teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL). I thought, 'I'm ahead of the posse for the first time ever'. However, to my dismay, I discovered that this was not the case, as I needed a TESOL level 9 certificate to teach English to the international students. Confused and upset, I went back into student mode and completed the programme, as requested. During this time I was very driven by economics as my husband had lost his job and my youngest son was in college in Wales. At that time, I was financially challenged, as was the case for most people in Ireland. The educational moratorium placed more strife on people working in education and training, as there were few to no jobs in teaching. Educationalists in Ireland struggled to find teaching roles and those who had teaching hours were labelled 'well off'. Yet, despite all the push for qualifications, it seemed it only applied to some. Others went through the

structured system of education with level 7 qualifications, bringing to mind a phrase that was common in my family: 'It's not what you know, its who you know' (social capital in a nutshell). Bourdieuian literature suggests that social capital is a valued resource that is very influential in the advancement of human beings. It can assist us in finding a job, developing a strong network of friends and gaining a desirable life style (Bourdieu, 1986).

In March 2011, I applied to do a Ph.D. in UCC and was interviewed in May of that year; in July 2011, I was accepted to part take on the journey. For the first time ever I was doing something for me and not ticking a box for the eductional business that placed before me many bureaucratic tiers. I felt like I had grown six foot tall and was elevated by the idea that doctors and professors of education thought I was good enough to do a Ph.D. in UCC. I had stumbled on a moment of glory. There were 20 places offered to people around the country, and I was one of the 20. It was an incredible boost to my 'self'. A few weeks later, the student cohort grew from 20 to 30 members, and my journey began in October 2011. Robson (2002) reminds us to start where we are, as 'who we are' has a central place in the research process (p.49). Bourdieu (1986), also believed that for the working class, to become subjects of history, they are required to adopt the discourse of the dominant class to express the political demands of the working class. I now believe that although the road I have taken is the long one, there is a reason for it. And I think this piece of research will have real-world value.

1.5 The Aim of the Research

The research aim is to examine the 'self' of six women parenting alone, who returned to adult education, and to investigate whether participating in learning has a positive or a negative effect on the 'self'. The purpose of my study is to clarify what shapes the 'self' in adult education, and what influence habitus plays on the 'self', from a historical, social, economic, and political stance and how this impacts adult learners (Bourdieu, 1980). The study provides the context for education in a working-class community and addresses some of the factors that limit women in this cohort from taking their educational 'chances'. Earlier in this chapter I mentioned that my enquiry is hypothesised by three questions:

- What Bourdieuian insights into transformative possibilities can be deduced from the critical search for the self?

- What aspects of the 'self' change, evolve as adult learners return to the field of education?

- Can we evolve, to some degree of certainty, if such changes are viewed by the participants themselves as positive, negative, or both?

These questions guided the exploration of the women's experiences of 'self' on their educational journey. As they were my students, they also influenced my positioning in relation to this study.

1.5.1 The Research Objectives

The research objectives were as follows:

- To critically analyse Bourdieu's concept of habitus, field and capital and their impact on 'self'.
- To reconsider the women's perception of 'self' in adult education.
- To carry out an ethnographic study over a two-year period to ascertain the women's life and learning experiences.

In setting out the above, these objectives supported me in understanding the women's perceptions of 'self'; and to appreciate 'self' from an 'emic' perspective (i.e. their viewpoint) as well as an 'etic' perspective (my viewpoint) (Spradley, 1970). This is explained in more detail in chapter 4.

1.5.2 The Rationale for the Study

In Ireland today, a growing number of adults are returning to education to 'upgrade' their skills (as official speak goes) and qualifications or to obtain qualifications for the first time. However, adults from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and those seeking jobseekers allowance are continuing to suffer the consequences of the recession of 2008 (DES, 2012). In 2012, a new policy was introduced by the social welfare department called 'Pathways to Work': instead of having a positive psychological effect on job seekers, it has put severe pressure on the 'self' (Boland & Griffin, 2015). The report demonstrates that the policy gives employers too much choice, and little to none is given to the job seekers, as they are being pressured into insecure low-paid work. In my view, the 'Pathways to Work' policy has a

harsh bureaucratic approach that lacks humanity. It thrusts job seekers to the brink of society, threatening them with the removal of their social welfare payments if they refuse to follow the new legislation, and it creates fear and insecurity of 'self'. In the 1980s and early 2000s, a similar (inhumane) action was taken by the Department of Social welfare countrywide. It removed people from the social welfare system and placed them on FÁS courses with poor facilities, and some had horrendous environmental conditions. It was a 'game' played by the power structures to adjust the unemployment figures for the Irish statistics; a 'game' I have been very familiar with. The people attending the courses or programmes were taken off the live register and were given FÁS payment instead of job seekers allowance. However, when the individuals missed a day on the programme they lost a day's pay. Effectively many were living below the poverty line (OECD, 2003). This inhumane approach has little respect for people and it also reports that progression rates to work remains low and the dropout rates high (CSO, 2001). Ireland moved very quickly forward from the early millennium, putting courses and incentives in place to encourage people back to work. The government intervention was supportive and respectful and considered the individual or 'self' in the process. It was well-thought-out, and travel expenses, childcare costs and career advice were available to assist the people. Nonetheless, it all slowly disintegrated during the economic downturn in 2008. The banks and the speculative investments had left the country in such a sorry financial state that the basic supports to encourage and promote training and education were removed, and the reintroduction of the harsh 1980s antiquated policies were slowly brought to the surface, this time under the new guise of EU regulations (EU, Counsel, 2013) (Boland, 2015). The women in this research also returned to education, and the conditions of the new legislation which I spoke about earlier in this chapter were due to come into effect in July 2015. The single-parent allowance will change to job seekers allowance, once the youngest child in the single parent family is seven years or older (Department of Social Welfare, 2015). These women would now be classed as job seekers and would be pressured into seeking training and education, or taking up menial jobs or internships and to playing an active role in their job seeking and education (Boland, 2015). Education can play a critical role in addressing social inequalities and social exclusion, but pressuring people onto programmes defeats the purpose of adult education (which is legally envisaged as voluntary and student-led) and substitutes it with the promotion of the dominant structures in society (Bourdieu, 1980). All the positive concepts of adult education become tainted by authority

and governance putting the learners back into a space, and state they once feared and hated: schooling. Earlier in the millennium, it was well known that people with no educational qualifications were six times more likely to be unemployed than those who had reached leaving certificate standard (DES, 2001). Moreover, Kelleher (2007, p.3) claims.

> Any adult who feels that they were let down by the system in the past, or who wishes to further their education and career prospects, has the chance now to participate in the many opportunities and options that have become available in the adult learning sector.

The new change in government legislation for one-parent families is organised to assist lone parents in increasing their opportunities for job readiness. However, I believe it also removes the right to 'choice' for adult learners, leaving them feeling vulnerable in an environment of threats and sanctions. It forces people onto skills and college programmes to adjust employment figures and contradicts the whole ethos of adult education. Education can be overwhelming for most adults initially, but this new legislation may have a further negative impact on this cohort of adult learners. I believe that my research will prove invaluable because it sets out to explore the 'self' of this cohort of adults returning to education. The research is primarily concerned with obtaining in-depth information on the aforementioned subject. I hope that the results of this study will influence the delivery of adult education and advance a deeper understanding of 'self'.

> The figure below highlights the main ideas that arose when the women brainstormed their fears when they returned to education. The themes that arose from the activity guided me in the appropriate choice of literature for chapter two and three.
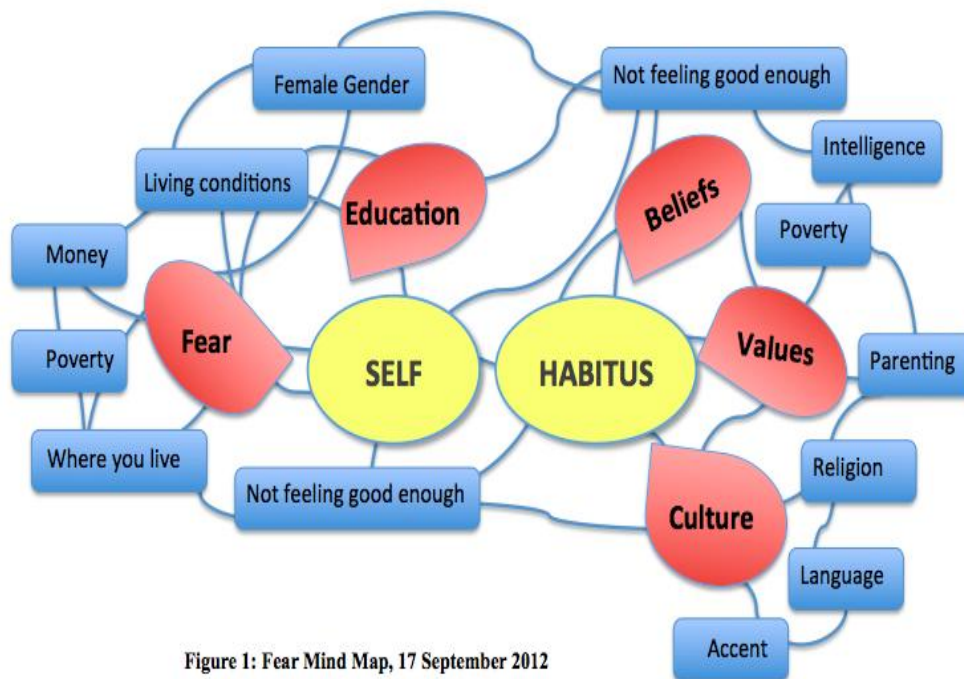
Figure 1: Fear Mind Map, 17 September 2012

Figure 1: Fear Mind Map, 17 September 2012

1.6 The Structure of the Dissertation

The thesis comprises six chapters as follows: Chapter 1 is essentially an introductory chapter which sets the scene for the research. It provides the research rationale and aims, and presents an overview of the structure of the thesis. Chapter 2 contextualises the literature on adult education and its related association to 'self, and also reviews the role of transformative learning in adult education. It concludes with the conceptualisation of reflective practice in adult education. Chapter 3 examines Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field and capital, which form the spine of the theoretical framework of this study. Chapter 4 introduces the reader to the women in the study. It then details specifically the aims and objectives of the research and the chosen methodology employed for the study and its fit for purpose to the research questions. Chapter 5 analyses the findings and presents the results. Chapter 6 discusses the key themes and patterns that emerge from the empirical study and it highlights the main findings and some key pedagogical factors to critically consider from this study. It also presents a short synopsis of the six women's onward journey in education and in life. The rich artifact of the women's heritage, culture, and life

journeys are transmitted through their stories, in the course of hidden symbolism and language. Some of the stories emerge through humour but the power of the stories in when and how they were told, are invaluable and all can be traced back directly to their habitus.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter contextualises adult education in Ireland and briefly chronicles the history and culture, influences /features from its evolution to the present day. In order to understand the 'self' in adult education, it is vital to appreciate the social, cultural and emotional aspects of 'self'. I have divided the literature review into two chapters. This chapter examines the literature on adult education insights into 'self', and considers critical theory in adult education as well as discussing the dominant neoliberalist stand that adult education plays on the 'self'. Moreover, it addresses the discourse and language used when accessing adult education which can create a culture of exclusion and supremacy between the educated and the non-educated. Chapter 3, is the spine of the literature, reviews Bourdieu's (1980) concept of habitus, field and capital which are central, in the present study, to the 'self'. The study also attempts to clarify what shapes the 'self' in adult education and what influence Bourdieu's concepts have on the 'self' from a historical, social, economic, and political stance, and how this can impact adult learners in their future life journeys (Bourdieu, 1980). Firstly, the chapter provides the setting for adult education in a working-class community and addresses some of the factors that limited the women in this cohort in their formal educational journey. It specifically examines their 'self' alongside the adult education process.

2.2 My Personal Context

The literature and theorists I have chosen to review in this thesis resonate with my own lived experience as an adult learner and as a facilitator/lecturer in adult education. As a lifelong learner, I understand that learning is not just psychological and behavioural: it is also (and particularly) social and cultural. It does not solely occur in a space of time but is shaped by culture, perspectives and learning experiences (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 22). Bourdieu (1985) based his work on the view that all human activities take place in a social context with various stages of interactions, shared beliefs, values, knowledge, skills, structured relationships, all combined together as habitus, which creates and symbolises our shared and common social meanings in life. As an adult learner, I seek to understand the 'self' through habitus, field and capital and its influence inside and outside the educational

setting to gain a thorough appreciation of the true 'self'. The theorists I have chosen supported me to think, to know and to show a strong awareness of the social world, and how such a world informs knowledge. I believe that learning is cyclical and insightful, and observation and participation are important factors in gaining knowledge and awareness of 'self' (Jarvis, 2004, p. 130). The principles of transformative learning are a learning process that I feel comfortable with as I learn through questioning, confirming, examining and reflecting (Cranton, 2006). As I lived each day as a young child and young adult, I learnt that I experienced my frame of knowledge through my family's frame of reference, and this influenced my norms, beliefs and values. I discovered as time evolved that family and culture affect one's social positioning as well as one's learning and participation in education. I learnt that family is an important part of social capital. I have been touched and affected in the real world by many theorists in the field of adult education and their views on 'self', yet, my own lived experiences have led me towards the exploration of critical theory and transformational learning, and have assisted me in the layout and stance I take in this chapter. In my opinion, the broader context of adult education in Ireland objectively shapes the learning context particularly its emphasis on educational value, job opportunities' and the labour market. Therefore, I will focus centrally on the 'self' and on some key features of 'self' in this study that I can hypothesise and evidence to have a particular influence on the experiences of the women in the study.

2.2.1 Contextualising the 'Self' in Adult Education in Ireland

In reviewing the literature on adult education in Ireland, I discovered that it began through the voluntary cultural and agricultural movements of the 1930s. At that time in Irish history, Ireland was struggling for national independence and a sense of identity. This largely affected the continuing involvement of adult education in the newly established republic (Murphy, 1973). The Irish model of adult education was initiated through the Vocational Education Committee (VEC) as they created the core infrastructure of adult education services. Today this organisation now known as E.T.B. (Education and Training Boards) is considered the backbone of adult education in Ireland. Statutory committees were set up in each of the 26 counties in the Republic of Ireland, with the role of establishing educational schemes of continuation in each county and town. The idea behind this type of education was to enhance basic education and schooling and to include practical training for employment in

trades, manufacturing, commerce and industrial pursuits (Murphy, 1973, p. 110). As the years progressed the Department of Education and Science (DES) acknowledged that Irish adult education was 'ad-hoc' and 'unstructured' (DES, 1995, p. 73) and in need of a coherent strategy for its full implementation. The Committee on adult education submitted its report, Adult Education in Ireland ('The Murphy Report'), to the Minister of Education in November 1973. This report emphasised that adult education needed an organised framework to develop and function, in order to give fuller satisfaction to the learners in the system (Murphy, 1973, p.105). The report also recommended that the Department of Education controlled the delivery of adult education countrywide and recommended that the National Adult Education Organisation (AONTAS) ensure the provision of voluntary education through the national counselling and advisory body to the Minister of Education (Murphy, 1973, pp. 110-112). At the local level, adult education would be informed by various local advisory committees, including an Adult Education Advisory Committee (p. 114). In 1998, the Irish government acknowledged that adult education needed to be reviewed and given due recognition by the state, and a green paper on adult education was introduced, entitled Green Paper: Adult Education in an Era of Learning (DES, 1998, p.40). The Green Paper was the key in the development of adult education policy and legislation in Ireland, and it embraced and defined it as a concept of:

> systematic learning by adults, to contribute to their development as individuals and as members of the community and of society; apart from full-time instruction received by persons as part of their uninterrupted initial education and training. (DES, 1998, p. 16)

This paper recommended an approach to adult education that included the personal, social, cultural and environmental concerns of the adult learner, as well as meeting the goals of economic growth and job creation. It also highlighted that lack of education and skill deficiencies must not pose a barrier to any person in accessing a livelihood (1998, p.7). The concept of lifelong learning in adult education originated in the Murphy report (1973) and was coined again in the Green Paper (1998), which stated that it:

> …may be formal education which takes place in institutions, e.g., training centres, schools, colleges, institutes and universities, or non-formal Education, which is any other systematic form of learning including self-directed learning. (1984, p. 9)

The report emphasised the 'self' as central to lifelong learning, and it set the context for the publication of the Learning for Life *White Paper on Adult Education* (DES, 2000). As also

stated (p.9), the notion of lifelong learning is that learning happens from the 'cradle to the grave' and takes place in a wide variety of settings. Lifelong learning develops greater links with industry, community services, and cultural diversity and occurs within and between the formal and informal sectors. The needs of Adult education from 2000 were informed by *Women Mapping the New Millennium* (1998) a paper submitted to the government in October 1999 pre-budget 2000 (The National Women's Council of Ireland, 1999) (NWCI).

The key aim was to:

- Incorporate a clear strategy for gender mainstreaming by addressing gender inequalities within all measures and through the development of specific initiatives to address the inequalities and effects of discrimination which women experience.

The document suggested positive action through the following measures:

1. Employment: A Women Returners' Initiative, an up-skilling Initiative and Equality Enterprise Advisors in County Enterprise Boards;
2. Education: A Women's Education Programme and a Young Parents' Initiative.
3. Support the integration of gender equality into the mainstream through:
4. Resourcing the Equality Infrastructure and the implementation of gender-proofing;
5. Matching EU funds allocated through the new EU Community Initiative (O Reilly de Brún, Gilligan, Delany and Bailey, 1999, p. 10).

The Irish Government also introduced The Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP) which was designed to facilitate people, of any age, to participate in stimulating learning experiences, and also to develop their education and training across Europe. The programme with a budget of €7 billion ran from 2007 to 2013 and financed a vast range of study visits, exchanges and the opportunity for adults to network and develop their skills. The Erasmus Programme sees the activities of the LLP continue on until 2020. The Lifelong Learning Report published in 2006 found that Irish people are now very cognisant of the need and the importance of updating their skill set and improving their qualifications. However, they also believed that the Irish Government was not doing all it could to enable them to compete in a free flowing labour market (Downs, Maundall and Mc Loughlin, 2006, pp. 22-24). Lifelong learning in Ireland is seen as:

Investment under the Human Capital Priority of NDP 2007-2013 is indicatively estimated at €25.8 billion (cited in Downs, Maundall and Mc Loughlin, 2006, p.14) Lifelong Learning is the guiding principle for education and training policy in the context of the Lisbon Agenda. One of the major outputs under this agenda was to increase the Irish workforce through the activation of groups such as the unemployed, people with disabilities, ex-offenders, women, older people, travellers and lone parents. This level of investment promised at that time would have had a clear significance for lifelong learning in Ireland and particularly for individuals with low/no qualifications (cited in Downs, Maundall and Mc Loughlin, 2006, pp.23-24). *The White Paper* (2000) set out numerous ideals that lifelong learning should embrace personal, cultural and social goals as well as economic ones and be seen as promoting collective as well as personal advancement. Furthermore, it highlighted the needs of marginalised groups and it acknowledged that community education providers in the field of adult education are to be strengthened (cited in Downs, Maundall and Mc Loughlin, 2006, p. 1).

2.2.2 Local and Community Education and its Impact on 'Self.'

The core concept of community education is one of empowerment, social justice, change, and collective consciousness. Its main goal is to have a positive impact on 'self'. It is distinct from adult general education, as its philosophy and practices are based on the local needs of the individual (Aontas, 2000). *The White Paper* identified community education as a route to empowerment as well as a role in "the promotion of participative democracy" (p. 113). It also represented adults from marginalised groups in society and became a route of access to further education and training. The philosophy behind community education lends itself to Freire's (1970) concept of transformation, with an emphasis placed on 'self' as an agent for political, economic and social change, as well as the concept of creating a community of learners where learning happens in a social and meaningful way (Aontas, 2000). In the 1980s, considering a lack of structural support, community groups around the country organically emerged with a strong focus on education for unemployed people, especially women. This practice was deemed to be positive in communities deficient in infrastructure, having a positive bearing on alleviating some forms of educational

disadvantage. Community education provides a more open friendly approach to learning and creates an experience of inclusion for those who have negative experiences carried forward from past (institutional) educational structures. However, with the lack of government funding and state recognition, community groups struggled to survive in their community settings (Aontas, 2004). The social milieus (encompassing real deprivation and a lack of opportunity) in accessing adult education as well as the immediate domestic commitments, can seem insurmountable if you are from an underprivileged background. Also, the lack of awareness that adult education is available, indeed what adult education is, is a real concern. Having had an unhealthy schooling experience, these adults may feel unwilling to put themselves through that experience again, perhaps not knowing that the concept of adult education is unlike schooling. They may be unaware that adult education (at least officially) places more emphasis on the learner; and that the approach is a more learner-centred style (Knowles, 1980). *The White Paper* (2000) suggested that adult education is inclusive to all to participate in education and training, regardless of class, gender and race. The paper is regarded as having 'equal educational opportunities' for all. However, this model of inclusion was quickly outweighed by the introduction of policies based on a meritocratic model, when the Irish government decided that a smart economy was on the agenda. It necessitated an educated workforce with extrinsic rewards such as degrees and diplomas, this myth promotes an economy instead of the development of 'self'. The Irish economic downturn in 2008, left huge budget cuts in all educational, settings, which created more barriers for early school leavers, particularly in relation to community education. *The White Paper* (2000) promised to create conditions for greater educational inclusion and target socioeconomic disadvantage and to break down barriers to equity and access. Unfortunately, the downturn postponed its official commitment, and the investment was never fully realised. This resulted in the adjournment of missed opportunities and the advancement of the 'targeted group' of adult learners (HEA, 2008, p. 69).

As I mentioned earlier in the chapter, it is assumed that those in society in positions of authority who are personally responsible are in a stronger position to be more socially responsible. This system of thinking reinforces a culture of competition and dominance, instead of inclusion and cohesion. Strength and belief come from the positive experience of taking the first step and being able to meet the challenges that adults encounter in life and in adult education. Once begun, it can assist effectively in breaking down negative preconceived

viewpoints and as I discovered myself, the willingness to share information and experiences in a safe setting is invaluable to the advancement not just in the 'self' but in the sense of academic/ scholarly/ skill based/ achievement. Bane (2007) states that, *The White Paper* (2000) pledged to change adult education in Ireland, but it was all "much ado about nothing". Its idealism was systematic of the affluent noughties (2000s), full of air and false illusions, but that delivered little on its promises. *The White Paper* (2000) was an opportunity to change and deliver adult education in a genuinely organic way to establish and support all adults on the lifelong journey of education and 'transformation' (Freire, 1970). Education creates 'self' awareness that gives meaning to life for many people, and although the educational settings are diverse, the central focus is on the person, not the setting. *The White Paper* (2000) visibly stated the need for greater adult education access from lower socioeconomic groupings, and also to develop a flexible route of entry through communities and other adult education sources. Instead, the lack of funding and structural commitments/arrangements widened the participation gap, leading to more deprivation. The Education Act (1998, 32, p.9) states that educational disadvantage is the impediment to education arising from socio or economic disadvantage which prevents students from acquiring appropriate benefit from education in schools.

This leads to diminished life chances (Boldt and Devine 1998). Early school leaving is an ongoing problem and the School Leaver's Survey Report 2008 demonstrated that 14% of young people left school without completing the leaving certificate. This figure is relatively high and although it is being seriously addressed the number of pupils who leave school early without completing their formal education is disturbing. The Survey also reported that the numbers sitting the Junior Certificate are more encouraging, with only a 2% drop out rate. However, it was highlighted that there was another group of students who do not continue on from primary school to secondary school. Of early school leavers, that is those who do not complete the Leaving Certificate, 53% of them will transfer their educational journey to the Youth Reach programme. In 2008 the Central Statistics Office revealed that 14% of the Irish Population aged between 15 and 64 had only attained a 'primary or below' level of education. This would indicate that early school leaving is prevalent on several levels and will continue to require urgent attention. Furthermore, it was also uncovered that 1 in 4 adults with low literacy levels displayed an inability to read and write due to early school leaving. Lally (2012) devised a tool kit for Foróige Youth Service

based on an American model to support youth to access all areas of the youth work sector and to encourage them to achieve some level of education. This poor educational achievement is blamed on early school leaving and people being out of practice or having fallen through the net of organisations like Youth Reach who attempt to provide education for those who have grown disenchanted with formal schooling. People may have undergone many different social challenges, with poverty, inadequate housing and poor family circumstances all contributing to them leaving education early. The number of pupils staying on in education in Ireland can vary alarmingly. The figures for 1999 show a huge disparity between 91% of pupils completing the Leaving Certificate in Leitrim against 72% in Dublin. Circumstances can vary in rural and urban areas and a more localised approach is often required as well as the national initiatives that are currently on going. One of the reasons for pupils leaving before taking their leaving certificate was the demands of The 'Celtic Tiger' for construction workers and a drive for apprenticeships to feed the needs of the construction industry. Education was seen as a barrier to those who wanted to get involved quickly in building and this necessity to plug holes in the jobs market was seen as all pervasive.

Leaving school early seemed an attractive proposition leading to good training, and a good job that would last for many years to come. Figures from 2006 seem to bear this out when a mere 5% of early school leavers were out of a job. The subsequent collapse of the construction industry and the death knell of the Celtic Tiger left those early school leavers in a very vulnerable position. They may now find themselves unemployed and at a major disadvantage as having forsaken their Leaving Certificate realising that this may be the minimum entry required for many positions within the Irish labour market. Clancy (2001) also highlights the lack of participation of pupils from lower socio economic groups in higher education. This social exclusion in areas of long-term unemployment as those in positions of power continue to reinforce the status quo. Recent figures however, are far more encouraging as now some 9 out of 10 student's progress to the Leaving Certificate. Figures from the Department of Education school retention report show that of the students who entered secondary school in 2008, some 90.6% completed the Leaving Cert. This continues the upward trend of Leaving Cert completion which stood at 90.1% the previous year and at just 83.6% in 1998. It was also noted that the retention rate for boys continues to improve. DEIS schools, namely those in disadvantaged areas also showed a continued rise in students completing the Leaving Cert, 82.1% in 2008 compared with just 68.2% in 2001 (DES, 2015).
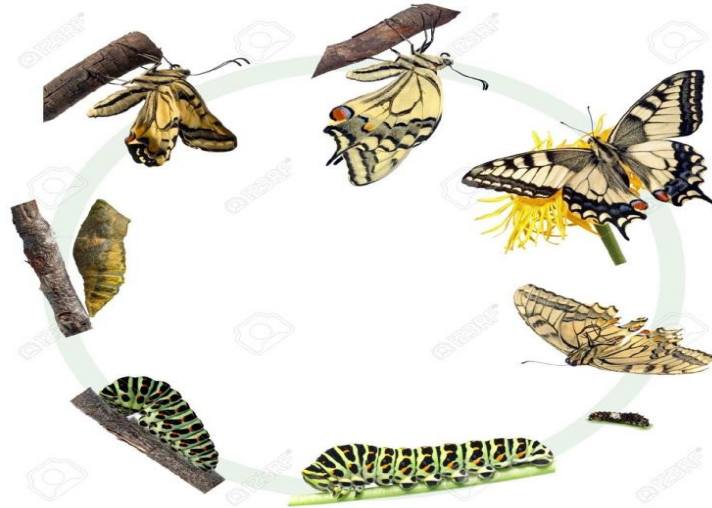
Figure 2: The Self as Transformative (Stolts, 2015).

2.2.3 The 'Self' as Transformative in Adult Education

My image of transformational learning is modelled on such theorists as Freire (1970), Brookfield (1980), Boyd and Myers (1988), Mezirow (1991) and Dirkx (1997). Learning not only encourages practices that transform the learner but it also has a significant impact on the 'self'. Individual life journeys and experiences vary from person to person. In this section, the emphasis is placed on the similarities and differences placed on transformational learning by the above theorists (Clark, 1993). For Freire (1970), great emphasis is placed on dialogue, conversation and respect. He also emphasises the importance of praxis (informed practice) and its direct link to values and beliefs and this is where the cognitive thinking patterns are acted out through behaviours and actions. For example, when the women in the study began the course, it was noted that they believed they were 'not good enough' to do certain tasks or activities. It was obvious that this belief triggered their behaviour, their words and their body language, as they spoke of 'not feeling good enough' or 'intelligent enough' to participate in specific tasks. Once the women gained a deeper understanding of their actions, their self-awareness grew, and they even began to see their behaviour towards some events change slowly (more to follow in chapter 5).

This is akin to Freire's (1972) notion of *conscientization* – 'developing consciousness, but the consciousness that is understood to have the power to transform reality' (Taylor, 1993,

p. 52). This level of realisation can be unlocked through education, which supports people to see their oppressive circumstances, to reflect, and to find ways to transform their position (Freire, 1970, 1972, 1975, 1993). Education is regarded as a form of liberty, as it gives people the power to change their world and their circumstance (Freire, 1975). The critical educator promotes issues of social justice through critical thinking activities, which creates dialogue and discussion with the learners. The subjectivity of the student is acknowledged throughout the learning session, and the students are encouraged not to look solely at their own position and 'self', but to look at the political factors that influence the 'self' and others, both locally and globally (Freire, 1970; Shor, 1996, Welton, 1995). This approach to teaching and learning is active, not passive, and it gives the learners the tools to change their oppressive positions, as well as building the awareness to give people a new sense of direction or purpose in life. Critical learners/educators may find that education gave them the freedom to understand the dominant structures of society and to appreciate how class distinction is formed and how the cultural codes are practiced (Bourdieu, 1997, p.214). Having this level of awareness gave me the tools to support the women, to question their reality and to consider possible actions for change and liberation. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the women in the study are all parenting alone, and all come from working-class backgrounds. The activity (Fear in a box) that was performed before the study began demonstrated clearly how the women felt as they returned often for the first time to education. Figure 2, Chapter 1, presents a visual represntation of the 'self' that emphasises the women's doubts. Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* became the most internationally celebrated model of adult education – the cultural representation of education as a cultural act of empowerment and social change (Barreiro, 1974; Freire, 1968; 1996; Torres, 1998). It provides a model of structural transformation from below, beginning with the circumstances of people's daily lives and ultimately aiming to shape a more just society. Many social and political movements have integrated adult learning and education as a powerful means of supporting personal, social and political empowerment connecting intellectual ideas with activism (Antikainen et al. 2006; Chrabolowsky, 2003; Gohn, 2008; Mayo, 2009).

2.2.4 Critical Reflection in Transformative Learning

Transformative learning is a vision and a conceptual framework for teaching adult learners, and the emergence of critical reflection is a process that adult educationalists claim

is uniquely associated with adult education. For Brookfield (1987; 1991), transformative learning has an interrelated three-pronged approach to learning. His first step is to support the learners to question their reality and to replace or reframe their negative experiences, events and emotions with positive alternatives. An example of reframing in my class is when the women spoke of past mistakes, and we worked on an activity, to reframe the negative assumption to a positive outcome. They were given a piece of paper with two typed columns: one column called *mistakes* and the other *successes.* Initially, they wrote negative practices and neglected to address their successes; but when reminded of the positive things they had achieved, like being a mother, the birth of their babies, their strength as women, etc., they began to list their successes. Before long they started to dwell on their positive assumptions, and this became common practice within the learning environment. Step 2 in Brookfield's concept is that adults take a different view of what they previously believed about themselves, and this was also achieved in the example above. Step 3, as the women began to understand the constructs of power and how traditions of the dominant culture are handed down from generation to generation, or culture to culture, they understood how the minority groups in society are underrepresented, and how all this links back into the status quo.

Boyd's (1991) approach to transformation is grounded in the field of depth psychology and primarily based on a belief that the unconscious mind shapes our thoughts, feelings, and actions daily. Boyd (1991) found that adult learning is psychosocial, emotional, and spiritual, and he draws on a strong interplay between learning, feelings, emotions and the effect of unconsciousness that seeks to gain a voice (Dirkx, 2000, p.1). Besides this, he believed that transformation is deeper than individual autonomy as it goes beneath the surface of 'self' to create mutually supporting and compassionate interactions with people moving to an exploration of 'self'. He coined this as a process of 'individuation' (Dirkx, 1998). Throughout my continued lifelong learning, as a student and facilitator of adult education, I have experienced a change in many of my different 'selves' which I believe required engagement with my unconscious 'self', through ongoing reflective dialogue between my consciousness and unconscious 'self' (Dirkx, 1997). Reflecting at this level is a key in understanding personal ways of knowing, which are rooted in life's experiences and emotions. In this literature, I wanted to look at the various aspects of transformation through the theorists who used TL (Transformative Learning) as an intrinsically deep form of critical

reflection to understand the dominion of objectivity and its dominant logic and the subjective reasoning and instincts of adult learners.

Mezirow (1997) proposed critical reflection as a crucial feature of transformative learning and a tool to question individual world views and those of others. He believed the catalyst to the transformation was an exploration of 'self' and others and placed a strong emphasis on dialogue and reflection to create autonomy for and with the individual. In his early work, Mezirow conducted a study on women returning to higher education and focused specifically on the concept of perspective transformation. This method was used as a support to assist the women in identifying and changing their view on their gender and their culturally induced roles and relationships. He also sought to explain:

> how adult learners make sense or meaning of their experiences, the nature of the structures that influence the way they interpret experience, the dynamics involved in modifying meanings, and the way the structures of meaning themselves undergo changes when learners find them to be dysfunctional. (Mezirow, 1991, p. xii)

The outcomes that are symptomatic of transformative learning are that the learners demonstrate a change in their assumptions, their outlook and in their behaviour. The transformational theorists I have briefly discussed believe that a vital element in transformative learning is empathy, that this leads to critical reflection and to the examination of our social norms and standpoints, which in turn can lead to the desire to change (Mezirow, 1991; 2000, p. 31).

Dirkx (1997) sees transformative learning as a holistic approach to learning, as it considers the multifaceted perspective of the subject and reflects the emotional, moral, intellectual, and the spiritual dimensions of 'being in the world'. Besides, TL allows adult learners to learn, from their formal learning experiences, to build and rebuild their personal meaning from those practices (Dirkx, 2006, p. 24). When the women returned to education as an adult learner, they assumed that all their peers were middle class and privileged and all had progressed educationally from the second level directly to third and travelled through a formal linear route. However, they discovered over time that this was not the case. It was later revealed through mutual communication that some of their tutors came from working-class backgrounds and that their parents double jobbed to get them into third level education. They also discovered that not all the tutors were well off financially, and not all had perfect

relationships with colleagues in the workplace. This new information emotionally assisted them in the realisation that their assumptions had clouded their judgement. The women began to question the social, political, cultural, and economic contexts that influenced and shaped their lives (Dirkx, 2006; Baumgartner, 2001, p. 17). Transformative learning is complicated as it involves thoughts and feelings and it travels between thinking and intuition, coherence and imagination, of the subject and object and of the individual and the social (Baumgartner, 2001, p. 18; Grabrove, 1997, p. 95). The expanse of transformative learning differs with the above-mentioned theorists, but fundamentally all see critical reflection as a normative approach to transformative learning, and all place emphasis on politics, power and dominance and consider the broader personal relationships of the adult learner in their personal relationships and in the workplace. All life experiences are subjective. They are fully influenced by the objective structures within, which we reside, and are predisposed to these structures, and this sways the 'self' in life and education (Mezirow, 1990). The 'self' however is determined by 'habitus' and it reacts within a field which has its own internal competing forces (Bourdieu, 1979b, p.124).
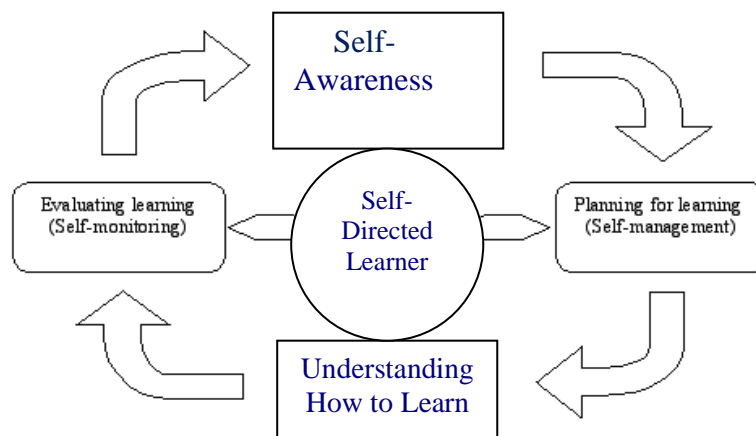
Figure 3: Self-directed Learner

2.2.5 'Self' as a Directed Learner

The concept of self-directed learning was coined by Knowles (1980). He lays claim to the 'self' as having a personal responsibility for learning. All learning, he says, lies within the individual. Once the personal dimension of learning is addressed, it is then vital to survey the social aspect and its impact on the learning process, as self-directed learning is more associated with the instructional method of learning. It is a practice that focuses on the

discussions, demonstrations, group work, simulations, problem posing and collaborative learning activities. Planning, implementing and evaluating learning is key to the learning process, which supports confidence in the 'self', as well as creating independence and adding consistency to the educational experience. Knowles' world view is constructivist and focuses on adult learning theory. He sees adult education as informal learning, which is understood as all learning that occurs outside the curriculum, within and between formal and non-formal educational institutions and programmes (Knowles, 1998, p. 67 and DES, 2000). The *White Paper* (2000) describes adult education as a lifetime practice that endorses upgrading of skills and knowledge to adapt and adjust to the economic demands of the local and global marketplace. Adult education is also seen as a process of self-fulfillment, independence, and a goal in becoming a self-directed learner, in, informal, non-formal and informal education settings (Klapper & Cropley, 1991, p.31). Moreover, Jarvis (1985) views adult education as reflective of the times we live in, and the continuous changing of social conditions (p.25). Lifelong learning is learning that takes place across the entire lifespan from the cradle to the grave, a concept that promotes the adult learners as 'inner-directed' self-operating learners (DES, 2000, p. 47).

The notion of self-directed learning places full responsibility on the learner to pursue educational opportunities for learning throughout their lifetime. However, the danger of this can appear to be infused by a neoliberal political agenda. The sense of 'self' in adult training is revealed in how learners engage with the employment process. The women had now complied with the 'rules of the game'(Bourdieu, 1986). They learnt how to format CVs, perform interviews, and 'sell' themselves successfully to prospective employers after they achieved their FETAC level 4 awards in 2013. Their confidence increased and all decided to stay on in college to complete their level five qualification. Achieving FETAC level 4 had a positive effect/affect on the 'self', however this new found qualification would allow little to no advancement in the workplace. In the bigger scheme of things these women would still have to continue doing the menial jobs, the jobs they tried to avoid before the course commenced. However, they had reached a new academic standard and a renewed sense of 'self' and were ready to take on another year of study and commitment. Observing the women and their fresh sense of 'self' reinforced the challenges they had overcome in the year. As a group we reflected whether this was self-direction, social direction or the direction of political ideology. The women were comfortable with each other, and they had built up

social contacts over the year and also became familiar with the tutors and the system. Was it camaraderie, familiarity or pure motivation to learn? Critical theory claims that adult education emancipates. It also highlights that active participation by the oppressed persons is 'education of equals' based on 'an active, dialogical, critical and criticism-stimulating method' (Freire, 1974, p. 45). 'Individual autonomy' is another word used in the context of adult education proposing that the learners take control of their learning, working towards a goal of continuous personal development (Knowles, 1970, Mezirow, 1991, Smith, 2001). Self directed learning, in the class room needs to be monitored continuously. Some students engage with independent learning opportunities and are motivated to develop strategies for learning. Others however, despite their efforts, struggle to make meaningful progress in their learning or may lack self-motivation and confidence in their study strategies (Knowles, 1970). The women used the phrase 'self'-directed in an ad hoc way, yet some did not understand what the term meant and felt insecure and isolated almost afraid to ask for help. Some of the discourse used in adult education can be seen as overwhelming for the novice, and it takes a long time to become 'self'-directed. In these circumstances, the role of the teacher as reflector is vital as they can observe at what stage the learner becomes 'self'-directed (Knowles, 1970). Teachers can help their students develop the skills to be successful self-directed learners by providing support, guidance, clear goals and effective learning strategies. On the other hand, some adults may even decide that this is not for me. There were many times I questioned, my 'self' on my own educational journey and asked is this my true authentic 'self' or the 'self' of the dominant culture of education and politics.

2.3 The Macro-Economics of Adult Education and its Influence on 'self'

The world's labour market is in a continual state of change due to technological development and the globalisation of industry in the marketplace. In Chapter 1, as part of the background and rationale for the study, I referred to the high-tech advancement of the workplace and the need for upskilling and lifelong learning as a prerequisite to retaining employment. This is compounding the official discourse in relation to adult education, a personal commitment and motivation where to continue learning is now considered a necessary attribute of 'self' in the labour market (UNESCO, 2008). The EU governments have put in place technical and vocational education as a tool to assist people to cultivate the attitudes and values to participate in lifelong education, and to promote Knowles' (1980)

concept of self-directed learning officially. However, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, self-directed learning does not happen immediately: it occurs over time. People who are long-term unemployed will initially need more support and nurturing than those who are recent job seekers. The women in the present study were initially inhibited and sheltered by their low socio-economic status, and for change to take place in their development, self-motivation and self-confidence, encouragement was required. The macro-economic issues such as unemployment and educational investment are aimed at creating employment and are critical indicators of financial performance in all EU countries. They are observed closely by governments at a national and global level to keep businesses going and money flowing into the countries, and all of this happens through the provision and ease of 'human capital' (Bourdieu, 1986). The interplay between education and economics is subject to serious question: education is a human right not reducible to a source of economic capital. Up until now, the 'self' has been influenced and shaped by factors such as levels of unemployment, levels of education, levels of knowledge, and all of this affects the individuals on their life's journey (Freire, 1975, Bourdieu, 1980 and Habermas, 1985). The supply of knowledge and employment is determined by the business of education and training, and this, in turn, creates an economy of knowledge and elitism, often deterring 'outsiders' or the less educated to enter the chosen social circle (Bourdieu, 1985). This model of education creates an 'insider' 'outsiders' view of 'self': on the one hand education is a human right and, on the contrary, it creates separation and exclusion moving towards symbolic and social capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Spradley, 1980; Freire, 1975):

> [it is] one of the most important conditions for overcoming social injustice and reducing social disparities in any country […] and is also a condition for strengthening economic growth (UNESCO, 2008, p. 24).

The presence and use of economic, cultural and social capitals, and the symbolic capital they represent, often provide a negative effect on 'self', and from my experience as a learner and facilitator, capital pushes people away creating division and exclusion (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977; Bourdieu, 1986). When adults return to learning, they may feel inferior and cautious and find it difficult to engage with tutors/lecturers. These feelings of discomfort may prevent them from expressing their opinion in class and from getting involved in group discussions when the lecturer is present. There may be times when the learner feels that the lecturers are superior to them, and they may feel like lesser people. The lecturer choice and

use of linguistics may make the experience, even more, unsettling, and widen the gap between the learner and the lecturer. It may be unclear as to why they lecturer doesn't use simple terms to explain complicated concepts, and establish an inclusive practice. Instead, it may be debilitating for the learner, and it may take some time before they feel comfortable in participating. When this study began in 2012, it was observed that some of the women in the course practiced a similar emotional frame of reference to the above, and they too lacked the confidence to voice their thoughts. This heightened my awareness of the depth and distance which socio-economic fields and capital play on the 'self' (O'Brien & O Faithaigh, 2007; Rudd, 2003). The literature indicates that adult education is a means for social change, and public good, and all should have access to it, but also have a responsibility to participate in the benefits of sustainable democracy (Dewey, 1916; Baumgartner, 2001; Mezirow, 1990; 2000). The importance is placed on cultural and socio-political fields of knowledge, and on the development of community-based, non-formal adult education. Education informs, protects and equips people to enlighten and protect themselves and children thus: the EU pays too much attention to vocational training in the public and private sector, which focuses mainly on human capital theory (UNESCO, 2008) (Delors, 1996; Faure, 1972). In the Faure Report (1972) lifelong learning is seen as the cohesive development of individuals and communities dealing with rapid social change and learning. UNESCO (2010) highlights lifelong learning as retraining and emphasises that learning new skills would assist people to survive the demands of the rapidly-changing workplace. Its concept is to adapt and readapt to the 21st century, to economic, technological and cultural changes. In this new era of 'knowledge', there is a shift towards individuals to acquire new ways of living amidst cultural differences, and to upgrade their skills and re-examine their values (Matheson & Matheson, 1996; Griffin, 1999; Bagnall, 2000). There is also an emphasis on the learner to allow greater 'self' agency to individuals (Medel-Añonuevo, 2006). As mentioned in Chapter 1, the women in the study were initially motivated by economics. They also found when they returned to college that it was something to do and somewhere to socialise. Yet, as time progressed, and through self-reflection and the examination of 'self', their lives were slowly transforming as they began to see and experience things differently. They wanted to change their sense of 'self' for themselves, rather than changing it for others. It was as though the learning deepened the meaning of their lives, and changed their original economic purpose for attending the programme.

As noted by Rogers (1961), humans are purposive beings with a core mission that may be revealed as individuals go through a 'process of becoming' (p.196). Freire (1993) talks about learning being the 'ontological vocation' of men/women and we are inherently driven to learn. The general consciousness that was created in the classroom, through enabling discussions and freedom of voice and choice, initiated self-reflection on their behaviours, values, and responsibilities to family and community; and it also assisted in identifying paths for future 'self' action. Transformative learning takes place and happens in a safe place and space where there is room given for thought and freedom of expression. At an early stage in the study, I became aware that dialogue amongst the women in the setting was not just interpersonal communication: (where they spoke of economics, employment and values) but it was deeper and more intrapersonal. The verbal exchanges between the women at times involved deep sharing and inquiry (a deeper spiritual dimension). The strands of theory that interest me are captured in the vignettes in chapter five, as the women themselves used *their* discourse to describe a deeper understanding of the 'self' in adult education.

2.4 Neoliberalisation in Education

Neoliberalism in society believes in the freedom of the individual and that individuals are responsible for their own welfare. The social influences that contributed to the composition of the individual are of no great concern to a neoliberalist agenda. This theory became popular in the 1930s and had been much to the fore in times of economic strength when economies were booming. However, in times of recession and the introduction of the state welfare, neoliberalism took a back seat only to come back strongly in the 1980s and has been ever present since. Neoliberalism is fundamentally opposed to the dependence of individuals on state handouts and is in favour of privatisation where the market dictates the economic realities for people. Private health insurance, paying for all utility services and the commodification of education are all central tenets of neoliberalism. The free market was lionized by governments with an emphasis on less state regulation of economic affairs. Economic barriers to the transnational movement of goods and capital were removed, and there was a marked reduction in taxes on capital. Social and educational programmes were severely cut, and there was a strong transfer to create privatisation in all state-run companies and bodies. The major goal was that the prevention of inflation was paramount, even at the risk to full employment. This is an overview of the situation and a general representation of

the policies followed by the government in Ireland, where the interests of finance capital dominate the economic outlook, but whose doctrine is not affiliated solely with any particular political movement. As mentioned earlier in chapter one, education is an important human right. Political events in the past few years in Ireland emphasised the crisis in the Irish educational system. In this respect Ireland was new to neo-liberalism, primarily because the indigenous capitalist class was historically weak, and was forced to play the role of 'middleman' for international capital. The transnational corporations (TNCs) that located in Ireland benefitted enormously in terms of grants, light-touch regulation, and one of the lowest corporation tax rates in Western Europe (formerly 10 per cent, now 12.5 per cent) (McCabe 2010). In the 1980s, when foreign industrial investment stalled considerably, the government responded by extending its low corporation tax rate to financial firms, creating the International Financial Services Centre (IFSC) in the Dublin docklands area. Thereafter Ireland became an effective tax haven, with the key selling point of an absolutely minimum level of regulation and oversight (McCabe 2010, p.11). Its business is to facilitate TNCs and serve as a tax haven for international capital. Its business is to facilitate speculation on price and to do everything in its power to preserve accumulated wealth in the event of collapse. The strategy, thinking and policy agendas up to, during and after the boom period have revolved around one very simple idea: 'be nice to the rich' (O'Toole 2010, p.23). Against this backdrop Ireland's reputation as a tax haven is understandable yet, while policies and doctrines have necessarily changed with the economic collapse, this very simple strategy continues to hold sway (McCabe 2010). The austerity measures are in fact a covert bailout. To suggest that the policies are not working is to put the objectives of government policy out of sight as Ireland remains open for business. All of this has impacted largely on employment, living standards and by allowing neoliberal policies to take hold within the field of education.

> Education is a fundamental human right". As such it is clearly the responsibility of the state and a core element of any development policy committed to social justice. Securing the right to education is key to enabling people to secure other human rights, yet the right to education is violated by governments around the world (Archer 2006, p.7 cited in Greene 2007).

The ideology of 'educational choice' serves those that can afford these desirable 'choices', but not all social actors can actually exercise choice in this 'free market' of education. Disadvantaged parents have fewer financial resources to invest in the education of

their children, and less cultural and social capital to transmit to them relative to advantaged groups (Reimers 2000, p.55). Under such a system we will continue to see the middle classes and the sons and daughters of those from the educated professions (who have higher levels of valued cultural and social capital) gain the most access to and benefit from the education system, while those sections of the population who enter the education system from socially, economically, and culturally marginalized positions will continue to be the ones that benefit least from an unequal and unfair education system, which continues to reward certain sections of the population disproportionately (Chubb and Moe 1990; Lauder and Hughes 1999, pp.24-25; Whitty, Power and Halpin 1998, cited in Kivirauma et al. 2003; Ball 2003, cited in Hill 2003; Machin and Vignoles 2006, p.14; Gerwitz et al. 1995). More recently, children from higher socio-economic groups are acquiring even more college places as the gap between social classes widens (Donnelly 2013). The Employer and Manager, Higher Professional, and Own Account Workers group have increased slightly since 2010/11 while the participation of new entrants in the Manual Skilled, Semi-skilled and Unskilled groups has remained more or less the same (HEA, 2013). The employers and managers group account for 18.9% (17.9% in 2010/11), higher professionals for 11% (10.7% 2010/11), lower professionals for 9.3% (8.8% in 2010/11), and the self-employed category account for 8.4% (7.6% in 2010/11) of new undergraduates in 2011/12 (Donnelly, 2013). Therefore very little has changed since Clancy (2001, pp.158, 159) reported that more than 58% of 3rd level entrants in 1998 came from just four socio-economic groups (higher professional, lower professional, employers and managers and farmers), in spite of these groups making up just over 37% of the relevant national population.

Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) Student Grant Application System (Reilly 2013a) will inevitably have heaped further intolerable pressure on disadvantaged students accessing higher education in Ireland. Indeed, it is also noteworthy that since the onset of the economic crisis in Ireland student contribution charges have been rising. They will stand at €2,500 in September 2013 and rise further to €3,000 by 2015 (Donnelly 2013). Union of Students in Ireland (USI) president John Logue argues that the:

> deliberate attempts by this Government to create a two-tiered education system, through the increase of fees and slashing of the grant, have resulted in students from lower socio-economic being pushed out of our third-level institutions (cited in Donnelly 2013)

Supported by Irish academics and former students, the students presented a petition declaring what another model of what higher education might be guided by the pursuit of learning rather than the pursuit of profit, driven by radical enquiry rather than bogus metrics. Stories like this are commonplace displaying the true face of the Irish education system, where profit is paramount and people are consumers of a service. In fact, O' Sullivan (2005) states that:

> 'mercantile paradigm', evident in the Irish education system, asserts that "what education is for is a matter for consumers of the system, such as pupils, parents, civic leaders and business interests, to decide (p.112).

Currently education has an interest in enrolment fees which seem paramount in the business of education (Breen and Goldthorpe 1997, p.275 cited in Kivirauma et al. 2003). Neoliberalism was taken to extreme levels in Ireland whereby the unregulated banking system bankrolled developers who aimed for massive profits on an overpriced property. This practice was replicated in many capitalist countries where the economy collapsed under the weight of unpaid loans. Neoliberalism caused the crash, but taxpayers in many countries took up the tab. The banking system was guaranteed by the state to the detriment of its citizens. The ethos of neoliberalism is that the general population picks up the pieces of the unaccountable businesses that create the debts. All other avenues and alternatives to the bailout of bankers and gambling developers, such as the burning of the bondholders, have been ruled out. Because the money that could be utilised for investment has been gathered to pay for the European banking crisis, the Irish economy follows in its predictable downward spiral. The cost here has been felt most keenly by many of the educational programmes which have seen drastic cuts in educational budgets. As mentioned in chapter 2, many students have faced huge administration fees, and allied with the cost of securing accommodation, a return to education has had to be postponed or shelved completely. The power structure is again in evidence here, as education espoused as a human right becomes a contested field of inner struggle with many giving up while battling to participate and succeed. Money has become the prime facilitating factor for educational participation. Reflecting on their backgrounds and habitus, many see again how the system is skewed against them, favouring those with the means; those who see their educational journey as a customary rite of passage. The ease with which some adapt to this rite of passage and is denied to others is central in the writings of Bourdieu, Freire and Habermas. Education is deemed to be a human right and it should not be a battle for students who may suffer because of the commodification of education. However

access to education is based on economics and it only leads to the creation of further obstacles for the already disadvantaged. From their backgrounds and habitus, they see again how the system is skewed against them, favouring those with the means, who as stated earlier see their educational journey as a rite of passage. This is reflected in how both Bourdieu and Habermas view these experiences from the structured norms of an individual's experience. In his theoretical concept, Habermas developed three interconnected frames: 'life-world', 'systems', and 'language decentration' (Habermas, 1984; Giddens, 1982; Laughlin, 1987). Similar to Bourdieu's (1980) concept of habitus, Habermas contends that everyday social reality for individuals is congruent with their culture values and norms. Habermas. 'life-world' resonates with habitus, and his systems reflect Bourdieu's concept of structured structures (1984).These views incorporate the rules which were instigated to direct and lead human behaviour in the settings in which they find themselves, be it law, religion, working environments, etc. In Habermas' world view language decentration concerns itself with the ability of humans to face the difficulties they encounter in 'life-world' (habitus) and the systems (structures) that control the 'life-world' (Laughlin, 1987). He continues to explain that individuals develop the ability to cope with the "external world, the social world" and their subjective inner world (Laughlin, 1987, p. 486; Giddens, 1982, p. 323). The new coping device in society to remain in, or gain employment, is adult education, as it has a distinct link through neoliberal framing to industry and the marketplace. And most courses and programmes are increasingly designed around economic demand and specifically the securitisation of jobs. For adult learners to succeed, they need to achieve technical competence and social competence to progress to the workplace. In today's society, the young Irish people may be extremely technically competent but some may lack the social aptitude required for the workplace (Laughlin, 1987, p. 486). According to Collins (1979), a more technical education system is 'trendy' and enhances the necessary skills for employment. Educational governance has turned education into a business, a business of 'knowledge'. Education appears as the cure for all ills of the welfare society (Tomlinson 2001, cited in Mulderrig, 2003). The system of education and its associated meritocratic rhetoric has now become a cultural norm in the existing status quo (Hill, 2003). This emphasis on a technical education has occluded a more social and holistic education which places emphasis on democratic forms of communication that instill confidence to belong, to

participate. Thus, students do not, or have not been encouraged to, use the most basic form of human communication – their voice.

According to Habermas, the confidence to speak one's mind is based on the assumption of freedom, freedom from unreasonable domination or the fear that one will be reprimanded for speaking. Language and its use, he believes, are the essential tools for a greater appreciation of society. This construct of society is utilised "to make possible a conceptualization of the social life context that is tailored to the paradoxes of modernity" (Habermas, 1987a, pp. 353-368). Many adult learners do not have the technical skill to make themselves clearly understood, or indeed the confidence to speak publicly: they are usually fearful of voicing their opinions. This can be attributed to being overwhelmed by their surroundings and indeed their sense of 'self', which would seem to indicate an urgent reappraisal of teaching techniques when developing confidence in adult learners. The current behaviourist system of further education centres on creating jobs, places too much emphasis, on learning outcomes. It reverts back to a system of rote learning; a system of schooling that was despised by most of the adult learners I facilitate. This challenge of integrating oneself and being the truest form of oneself is the great challenge for all in education, both the tutor and the learner. The basic methods of communication must be re-evaluated and upgraded for adult learners in valuing their own opinions and articulating them in public. Neglecting these core values in pursuit of the transitory demands of the market will lead to subsequent long-term difficulties for all learners. Indeed, the value of the market itself will be undermined if it is not underscored by a confident and enterprising workforce nurtured by the ability to articulate its views.

2.5 My Critical Influences

Freire's work has motivated me to strive to become a critical pedagogue and an emerging critical ethnographer. The relevance of his emancipatory approach to adult education attempts not just to question the 'self', but also to investigate society as a whole, and to discover why things are the way they are (Finlay & Faith, 1980; Fiore & Elsasser, 1982). As a facilitator of learning, the tutor must place the 'self' in the context of adult education requiring reflection of their beliefs and values and their place in society. Viewpoints require continuous challenging, to ensure that the model of education is

concerned with emancipation and freedom for the learner. The current system is structured on how those who are not given the opportunity for an education are frowned upon by those who are. Education can give us a positive reflection of ourselves on our life's journey. Our sense of achievement should be enhanced as this journey continues. Any sense of dissatisfaction must be examined and addressed if we are to learn fully from the experience. Our appreciation of theory should be tested in our actual experiences. Accepting theory for its own sake may help us pass a test, but it will not enable us to comprehend fully and appreciate our place in the world (Bourdieu, 1980). Critical literacy compels us to ask questions and to understand what is working and not working in our current social reality. Developing the ability to question reality is the means through which change materialises (Freire, 1970). Both Freire and Habermas, in their presuppositions relating to their critical theory of society, are keen to find a linkage between education, social domination, and cultural reproduction. There is no presumption that cultural reproduction is a continuous sameness from generation to generation, but instead, society is shown to operate via a system of cultural domination. Cultures may differ through the ages, but the overriding factor is that eventually one culture dominates another. We see this in global conflicts raging at present, where different sects and political groupings are vying for supremacy, thereby imposing their particular viewpoint over that of the vanquished.

Freire and Habermas also shared their ideas for the analytical study of authoritarian individuals. Borrowing from Marx their alienation and praxis theory – what has alienated a person and what he/she are going to do about it – is essential for us to understand, to ensure that we seek freedom from being oppressed. What makes us feel dominated by certain individuals and cultural and societal influences is vital to be understood, before we can fully accept our place in society. If we feel we are being denied rights or are not being fully supported by the state, we must investigate these matters and bring them to the attention of ourselves as well as to the relevant authorities. Today, states appear embedded within markets, rather than national economies being embedded within the boundaries of States (Habermas, 2000, p. 52).

2.6 Critical Literacy

> Thought and study alone did not produce *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*; it is rooted in concrete situations and describes the reactions of labourers (peasant or urban) and of

middle-class persons whom I have observed directly or indirectly in the course of my educative work. (Freire, 1970c, p. 21)

When I was teaching and working with the women in my study group, I wanted them to believe in their own power to learn. I wished for them to see that their educational journey was well within their grasp and that they could achieve whatever standard of education they wished for. The style of teaching is reflected in the teaching approach of Paulo Freire, who understood that teaching is essentially about politics. The teaching curriculum and the way people are taught are often oppressive, disguising the power of the discreet arms of the state. Getting people to learn in a certain way can keep them subservient. Teachers can be oppressed in this banking system of knowledge. We can know things but not do anything about them. Teaching is all about the challenge: challenging students to take the material on board and then to look at it forensically; to agree or disagree with theory and to say why you think about the way you view the world. Adults returning to education often feel that the privilege of returning casts them as the grateful beneficiaries of the educational system. You are getting a second chance- 'better not mess it up' with too many questions or challenge what you are being taught, (including the way you are being taught). Learning, according to Freire, is about learning about yourself, as much as about the knowledge you are accruing. Students ought to be encouraged to ask the following questions in a Freireian inspired classroom: 'How am I developing as an individual in this class?'; 'When I am attending an adult education class am I merely reverting back to the school boy/girl model of myself?'; 'Am I afraid to ask questions in case I might be wrong or if I might annoy the teacher?' These are all questions about 'self'. These are 'self' questions that all adult learners should be encouraged to ask when they are back learning. Tutors may often say that 'there are no stupid questions', but, some tutors become impatient when these supposedly non stupid questions are asked. Freire's view that education is political is underlined by his contention that education can be taught in such a way that *doesn't* get people to soak up information (in using his 'banking' metaphor), and meekly follow the system thereafter. When you teach people to teach themselves and to be truly inquisitive about themselves and how they are developing, you can be said to be a true educator. For Freire:

> Education makes sense because women and men learn that through learning they can make and remake themselves, because women and men are able to take responsibility for themselves as beings capable of knowing – of knowing that they know and knowing that they don't (Freire, 2004, p. 15).

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If a teacher teaches about equality but has class 'favourites' or is 'harder' on some pupils than others, then that teaching session is null and void." Those who authentically commit themselves to the people must re-examine themselves constantly" (Freire, 1970, p. 60). This viewpoint is augmented by the thoughts of educationalists like John Dewey, who was also a strong critic of the mere transference of facts. Dewey, like Freire, believed that education was a vehicle to change society socially:

> education is a regulation of the process of coming to share in the social consciousness;
> and that the adjustment of individual activity on the basis of this social consciousness is
> the only sure method of social reconstruction (1897, p. 16).

Freire (1970), always the modernist, wanted his theories to work in the context of contemporary education and future forms. In his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, he wanted to free students from oppression and encourage them to develop their own theories and viewpoints that culminate in their own actions. This was all central to his development of critical pedagogy which has provided a model for my own teaching approach. Perhaps tutors should seek to challenge their learners to achieve their goals, to look to themselves. It is not about what is reflected on a grade sheet, but what is reflected in the learners. The belief and courage they develop in themselves are replicated in their educational success. When they realise that they have a contribution to make both to themselves and to society their learning is elevated. Their sense of self has been expanded immeasurably. My current and (future) job is to make sure that this does not stop for them, or for me. Similar ideas are reflected in the writings of Habermas and Humbolt, who both contend that curriculums are not merely designed to increase the store of knowledge in students. The first consideration of education is to inculcate in students, under the leadership of a researching faculty the ability for a forthright and critical inquiry that is essential for public life. Then they (the students) are in a position to influence practices in the public sphere (Habermas & Humboldt, 2013, p.26).

Habermas (2000) contended that the public sphere is a social space where people can congregate to discuss freely and identify the problems in society that need attention. Education, according to Habermas, is to give people the confidence and skill to articulate their feelings and beliefs and to bring this to the general betterment of society (Habermas, 2000; Freire, 1970). For Freire and Habermas, education is a dialogical process, a two-way system between the facilitator and learners, both theorists emphasising the importance of striving for freedom and emancipation for the learner. Teaching students to think is to give

them a gift – a gift that is inherent in all of us, but not always received and nourished (Freire, 1970). Getting learners to present their thoughts and ideas to a class is a wonderful way of enhancing their sense of freedom. By giving them some co-ownership of the class, their sense of 'self' soars (Rogers, 1985). It can be very frustrating for adult learners not to have their prior experience recognised, and not to be allowed to tell their stories as theory relates to them. Learner feedback is a licence for lecturers/tutors to reflect on their class delivery and teaching style and it gives rise to critical reflection. Habermas was very mindful of the need for students to feel safe in their classroom contribution. This he likened to a public sphere which allowed and indeed encouraged opinions to be aired which added to the fabric of social life.

> a theatre (sic) in modern societies in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk and a realm of social life in which public opinion can be formed. (Habermas, 1974, p. 49)

Society needs people to articulate their views from the pub to the public arena, as they are the opinions that form a society, and society needs to be informed. The opinion of people needs to be heard through 'voice is choice'.

2.7 Critical Discourse and its Effect/Affect on 'Self' in Adult Education

Adult education policy in Ireland has its own language, jargon, a discourse that separates the dominant powers of education and the workplace from the 'normal folk' (Hughes & Tight, 1995). The dialogue or discourse used in adult education has a political stance, as it perceives adults as 'human capital' to nourish the 'dominant' culture while obscuring the notion that education is emancipatory. The language used in educational policy is influenced by neo-liberal language that adopts adult education principles, confusing/enabling lifelong learning and emancipation, terminology/ideas for its own economic and political logic (Bourdieu 1998; 1998a; 2001; Chomsky, 1999). This has important implications for adult education, especially its emphasis on equality of opportunity and social inclusion (DES, 2000). The terms used in adult education such as 'individualism', 'consumerism' and 'market competitiveness' promote a distinct responsibility for 'self' to improve his/her employability, work opportunities, and life in general. It authorises adult education as a source of self-improvement yet, recommends it as advantageous to economic growth and global flexibility in the labour market. The concept promotes individual

responsibility and neglects to analyse the dominant economic and political orders. According to Vincent (1993), adult education is framed within a neoliberal form like a 'symbolic gloss of popular democracy' (p. 374). The language itself is a perfect medium of power as it contributes to the established or accepted rules of the dominant culture (Habermas, 1977, p. 259). Teaching adults to attain certain standards to enter the workforce and thus assist the economic power of countries can actually be detrimental to the 'self'. True adult education is an empowering experience of 'self', where the person is first, and the cultural beliefs are placed alongside the 'self' instead of through it, partially informed by the economics and philosophies of the dominant neoliberal culture. In an ideal world, the political and economic system ought to be sensitive to the broader principles of adult education and given space to support the individuals on their educational journey. Adult education ought not just affect the behaviour or the individual but also affect the emotions and attitudes of the person, as it feeds into the objective structures of society (Bourdieu, 1980). But adult education also plays an important civic role, integrating people into civil society and encouraging democratic citizenship and emancipation (DES, 2000).

Social emancipation can occur through education and through dynamic interchanges with the people to create an 'education of equals', based on 'an active, dialogical, critical and criticism-stimulating method' (Freire, 1974, p.45). The notion of adult education as a dialogical process creates a 'self' that's independent with a potential to extend a broader social perspective on life and in general (Freire, 1974). Higher and further education has twin goals for the economic and social prosperity, and these are an essential ingredient in the lifelong learning ideals (O' Brien, O' Fathaigh, 2007, p.17). Adult education in Ireland has a distinct purpose in its contribution to the economic and political mandate of the country (DES, 2000). It is described as a 'second chance' opportunity for adults to re-access education, or to gain new knowledge and educational skills to contribute to the concept of 'lifelong learning', a discourse designed by the dominant powers in politics. Language type, tone and accent is conditioned socially through individual habitus, and it is constitutive as it helps to imitate and withstand the status quo while supporting transformation (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p. 258).

Having attained their new-found educational status, adult learners did not always place their immediate emphasis on economic reward. Many of them feel the pull of

volunteering or somehow enriching the fabric of the social setting they are living in. They want to share their experiences with other groups from a similar habitus as themselves, through inspiration, encouragement and support. Their innate wisdom bolstered by their academic achievements can enrich their social environment and culture. Adult learners are often those who begin movements for change and transformation, who organise evening classes and discussions and whose very presence is uplifting for those who encounter them, and in my view, this is lifelong learning. As a facilitator of learning, I set out to survey the needs of the learners with each class or cohort to arrange conditions that satisfy the needs and develop these capacities. The planning has to be flexible enough to allow for the individuality of experience, voice and choice aimed towards continuous self-development. For Freire (1975), the crucial part of learning is a critical reflection, and this can only take place in the light of our lived experiences, as individual learners and our relationship with others in the community and in life. It is within this context that adults learn to reflect on their experiences. Education must be re-conceived not merely as a preparation for maturity, but as a continuous growth of the mind, and an ongoing clarification of life and 'self'. In a sense, education can give us the knowledge for mental growth: the rest depends upon how we absorb, interpret and experience it.

According to Dewey (1916), real education comes after we leave school, and there is no reason why it should stop before death (p. 25). However, lifelong learning is encapsulated as learning from the 'womb to the tomb', 'birth to death' and 'cradle to grave' (DES, 2000). A major objective of learning is to teach students to think and to engage in their own, and others' learning, through the articulation of views (Stenhouse, 1972). In a similar manner, Belenky (1986) indicated that "knowledge is created in relationships between the '*knower*', other '*knowers*', and the material world" (in Jarvis, 2005, p.84). Gilligan (1982), whose main work was her involvement with feminist pedagogy, also specified that "how and what people learn are shaped by where and with whom they learn" (in Jarvis, 2005, p.84). Houle et al. (1961) support the notion that social interaction and active engagement encourage the learners to explore and evaluate the subject area, and they also recommend that the educator should take a guiding role in the learning process. This approach is thought to promote the processing of skills/knowledge to a much deeper level than passive learning (Jarvis, 2005, p.91). One of the aims of education is to help participants to put "knowledge into practice, and it is this combination of reflection and action that he calls 'praxis'; and that education is

a human and revolutionary process where students should claim ownership of their learning (Freire, 1972, p.51).

Figure 4: Self-dialogue and Reflection (Escher, 2013)

2.7.1 Dialogue with 'Self' or Self Reflection

The figure above represents the women examining their personal thinking about a topic and how they form *their* opinions, and this type of critical reflection was encouraged in all the teaching and learning sessions. For example, in Chapter, I mentioned that I used an activity called 'Fear in a Box' when the women called out the words they associated with fear. This helped them to filter down the overwhelming vastness of the subject and its connection with various areas of their lives. Jarvis (2003) reminds us when we are consciously thinking, we are changing our perceptions of 'that aspect of reality', and we are also changing our own perception (p.55). As the study progressed, the women clearly established that they were learning from each other, and from childhood educational influences and memories that continue right through their adult lives (Bandura, 1977). When experiences are shared, spoken about and discussed in a group setting, both the learner and the facilitator discover the many perspectives of the subject matter. By being attuned to the feelings and thoughts of others, we are actively learning from them. Jarvis (2005, p.76) informs us that "....learning is a social activity. Learners learn when they engage with knowledge in social contexts". Social interaction through dialogue can enhance motivation and prolong engagement with the task. It can also encourage new information and ideas.

These ideas can be shared and perhaps result in deeper thinking about the subject. This interpersonal interaction may lead to greater reflection (Bandura, 1977).

Dialoguing with others also encourages us to reflect on our knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, beliefs, emotions and senses (Jarvis, 2005, p.55). According to Rogers, one of the major strengths of reflection is it does not just teach one section of the individual (such as the mind or the body), but the whole person experiences the learning and by the whole person, we mean the cognitive, physical, emotional and spiritual (in Jarvis, 2005, p.55). Similarly, Freire (1972, p.72) supports the notion of communication being central to learning, and suggests that 'authentic thinking, thinking that is concerned about reality, only takes place in communication'. Dialoguing and communication are human activities, and "without dialogue there can be no communication, and without communication, there can be no true education" (p.74). Mezirow (1991) also agrees that communication is a vital part of education and that it is instrumental in supporting the learner to understand what others mean and making sense of our own meaning on subjects. In addition, he states that communication is emancipatory as it helps us to identify challenging meanings through the process of critical reflection (Jarvis, 2003, pp. 71-72). Critical reflection leads to a process of self-examination and the conscious awareness of our thoughts and feelings about specific issues and circumstances (Schön, 1987). Agreeing with this theory, it is clear when a learning moment is aligned with an appropriate activity, it encourages us to view situations from various perspectives. This process can lead to the enhancement of 'self' creating a better awareness of 'self' and others. There is a solid relationship between 'self' and critical reflection. This argument is also supported by Schön (1987), who suggests that reflection incorporates giving voice to what is unspoken, and confronting the difference between espoused theories and theories already accepted or '*in use'*. We reflect and document the changing nature of how we learn, and not just as a singular experience, but also as one which involves dialogue (Schön, 1987, p.82).

Dewey's speculative theory is mainly concerned with conscious self-awareness, thought, and problem-solving orientation (Roberts, 1998, p.53). In his exploration of reflection, Schön (1987) informs us that there are two types of reflection: reflection-in-action (thinking on our feet) and reflection-on-action (reflective thinking). He suggests that when we encounter new situations we engage in reflective practice, when a feeling of internal

awareness is aroused, and a self-directed approach to learning is encouraged. Furthermore, he states that to move forward, as reflective learners it is necessary to go into the centre of every learning experience, to look at our perceptions of ourselves and to understand our own doubts (Schön, 1987, p.83). Engaging in reflective practice through active engagement provides the basis for self-enquiry. It is a conscious awareness of what we are doing, and should enable us to do things better. Rowntree (1988) believes that reflective students think about their experience of study and then decide what changes need to be positioned to match their needs. He also states that we should prepare for the experience beforehand, participate actively in it, and then reflect on it afterwards (Rowntree 1988).

In the context of the active reflective cycle, reflection can encourage a better self-awareness and can refine our understanding of ourselves, and hence enhance the 'self'. When we are actively engaged, we are prompted to look at various perspectives and viewpoints. When we engage in this type of thought process, critical thinking is promoted, which can lead to change. The old dictum that we learn from experience is the cornerstone of Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle. He suggests that reflecting through experience is an essential part of the learning process as it generates new knowledge and builds on existing information. Moreover, he describes learning as the creation of knowledge through the transformation of experience, in which reflection is an explicit part (p.41). This change or transformation is the bond between reflective practice, critical thinking and learning and the 'self' and new knowledge is generated from linking past experiences with present challenges. For Freire (1972b) individuals are not 'recipients' but already "knowing subjects" and through reflection, they achieve a deeper awareness of *their* "socio-cultural reality, which shapes their lives and of their capacity to transform that reality" (p.51). The women in the study initially had negative beliefs about themselves as adult learners, and this had an adverse influence on their motivation to learn (Brookfield, 1988; O'Brien & O Faithaigh, 2007). What is more, emotional factors can also influence how learners think and process information. Feeling good about the 'self' and the subject matter is a good indicator for successful learning. Positive emotions can enhance learning while negative emotions can be a stumbling block.

However, mild anxiety and curiosity are good motivators and can improve the learning performance (Biggs, 2003, p.26). Reflective practice may help enlighten those who may be experiencing difficulty with their self-belief and self-efficacy. By making a clear

distinction between our behaviour and who we are, we can learn to improve more rapidly. When we are willing to let go of past efforts and reflect on where we went wrong, we are placing ourselves to learn actively and to be stronger for this experience: 'What doesn't kill me makes me stronger' (Gandhi, 1940). The 'self' is one of the central drives in human beings - the psychological homeostasis or state of equilibrium becomes imbalanced, and it can adjust to creating feelings of insecurity, fear, social distance and other negative situations. However, this imbalance can also be a driving force that can exercise a determining influence on a person's life, for good or bad.

2.8 The changing perceptions of the 'Self' of Irish women in Education

Women in Ireland have been oppressed both educationally and financially, and this oppression was carried out by church and state in a patriarchal society. Second-level education was fee paying until 1966 when the law was changed by then Minister for Education, Donogh O'Malley. Until then, most Irish working class children left school at 12 and began working. Over the years, in education, things have significantly improved for women. The OECD announced in 2014 that 76% of those who took the Leaving Certificate completed it and that the 25-34-year-old bracket has a higher rate of Leaving Certificate completion than the overall adult rate of 87%, that is, 5% over the OECD average (OECD, 2014). However, nationally and regionally, women are underrepresented in decision-making in Ireland. It was noted by the OECD in (2013, p. 8) that a mere 15.7% of Irish TDs, just one-fifth of local authority members, and one-third of the membership of VECs were women. Female representation in EU parliaments averaged 27.5% in 2013. In business, Irish women are seriously underrepresented on boards of management of Ireland's top companies. Irish women only make up 10.5% of boards in Ireland, well below the 18.6% EU average, with no women as board chairs or CEOs of publically listed companies. In October 2013, MEPs backed a European Commission proposal to ensure a gender balance on all boards of publicly-listed companies. Female students outnumber males in business, administration and law, but it is still very much a man's world when it comes to the top jobs in these sectors. It was also noted that Irish women earn less than three-quarters of males. Yet, despite the pay gap, Irish women's pay has improved since Irish EU membership in 1973. Their employment rate, too, is up from 35% in 1987 to 42% in 1987, with the EU average in 1997 being 51.1%.

In the rhetoric of today's global world of multiculturalism and diversity, education is no longer something that stops at a certain age. Instead, it is now considered lifelong. Lifelong learning is a process of education that can be achieved from the 'cradle to the grave' (DES, 2000). It has become a governing principle of educational policy in Ireland, and there are several routes one can take to achieve one's educational goals, for example, part-time education; full-time access for mature adult learners to second level; third level and further education; distance learning; online learning; workplace learning; and finally, the Open University forum. These educational concepts are there to break barriers to support and facilitate adults to return to education when the need is required. The old dictum of one-stop education no longer exists. Programmes are continually created to make education more accessible to adults of any age, status or socioeconomic group. Courses are run in a multitude of locations around Ireland to support the concept of learning for life. For adult learners, the most popular fields are social sciences, business, and law. Unemployed people are more likely to participate in lifelong learning. Despite the rise in educational advancement and the jobs market, the women in this study and those on the margins of society feel or experience little improvement on the jobs front, and particularly now, with the new social welfare changes in place. Third-level fees are rising continually, and further education and training is there as an option and support but, with no financial assistance for childcare and travel expenses, pushing these women further away from any educational achievement and widening the barriers and gaps to educational attainment (O'Brien and O Faithaigh, 2007).

S- Social	
E- Emotional	
L- Living	
F- Fulfilment	

Table 2: Acronym of 'self'(Yelverton-Halpin, 2014)

2.9 Conclusion

In summary, this chapter began by giving a brief introduction to 'self', and it examined the literature on adult education in Ireland and its impact on 'self'. It reflected on critical theory in adult education, and it addressed the language used in accessing adult education and its prevailing exclusion of same. The chapter also looked at how globalization

has impacted on education and focused on Habermas for his works and understanding of neoliberalism and its intricacies on education and the effects it has on its students. The chapter then looked at Freire's model of critical literacy, and why it focused on the ideas regarding social integration through critical consciousness, which I consider to assist in the belief of 'self', and decrease the marginalisation of adult learners from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. The chapter also examined some of the literature on transformative learning theory in adult learning, and the ability to become a critical reflective learner, which can create empowerment of 'self'. Systems of power that transcend materialism are also an element tied to demographic, ethnic, and gender considerations. The themes of adult education and 'self' that arose in patterns of power, politics, criticality and transformation, speak directly to chapter 3. The ideas were thematically guided by Bourdieu's multiple spheres that effect/affect us in our everyday lives and 'selves'. Bourdieu's (1980) concepts of habitus, field and capital and how these shape the 'self' in adult education are central to this thesis as they speak thematically to the 'self' as a socio cultural entity in the 'structured structure' of adult education. Adult education acts as a fundamental catalyst for the expansion and ultimate convergence of the philosophy of society. Indeed, it seems that the classroom has become the test tube where the inequities of capitalistic corporate power are fermented. These beliefs and assumptions inhibit the use of other methods because the methods often operate under the guise of neutrality, detachment, and objectivity. My work as an educator and researcher is inherently intertwined with my politics. I believe that structures exist in our world that not only allow, but enhance, underlying inequities in cultural fields and society. Bourdieu uses the concept of habitus as a base for all inequities, and they are easily noted in the socioeconomic fabric of society.

Chapter 3: Bourdieu's Lens: Habitus, Field and Capital

3.1 Introduction

This chapter examines Bourdieu's concept of habitus, field and capital. The main Bourdieuian proposition claims that moving between fields creates various forms of capital, and these influence the 'self' (Bourdieu, 1977a; 1980; 1985; 1986; 1990; 1992 and 1997). Firstly, Bourdieu offers us a sociological model of habitus and a common example of 'self'. He considers 'self' as an interchangeable and exchangeable object that perceives and experiences things subjectively, yet it is deeply influenced by the world that surrounds us. Some practices and activities like education, training and employment can enhance the 'self' and increase the social capital of the individual and possibly his/her amounts of economic capital. Habitus functions towards a relatively 'sensible' goal which is defined for us by what we believe we are capable of and indeed what we are worthy of (Bourdieu 1990). This begins in childhood where outside structures and experiences can limit and prevent the child from experiencing and moving in certain fields of practice.

Educational achievement and progression, and how the individual approaches education, is very much predicated on how much social and cultural capital that individual possesses, and what influences have been at play in their formative years. For the women in the study, and myself personally, education was a sought-after 'commodity' (though I don't want to reduce education to this image and status now), 'sold' as being progressive via the media and other more dominant class structures. Bourdieu argues that habitus creates a 'sense of one's place', an understanding of what people consider as being for them and not for them respectively (Swartz, 1997, p. 106). In relation to education, Bourdieu accepts that an individual's educational decisions are not dictated solely by their degree of economic capital. This chapter opens with an introduction to 'habitus' as it underpins the social foundation or 'roots' of who we are as individuals. The theory influences all aspects of who we are socially and it is stored in the origins of our very being. It then goes on to discuss education as a field of practice, viewing education as the 'playground' for success and the advancement of cultural, symbolic and economic capital.

3.2 Habitus

Long held as one of Bourdieu's most important (yet imprecise) concepts, habitus refers to cultural capital as it is physically and socially embodied in the 'self'. It is the DNA of our habits, skills, and personalities that are rooted in our psyche due to our life's circumstances (Bourdieu, 1986, Wacquant, 1989).

> Habitus: simply means who you are as a person. [It describes who you are, based on your upbringing and the people and situations that have influenced you while growing up [Your culture, ethnicity and your class background] (Bourdieu, 1990, p.63).

Bourdieu developed three power models - habitus, field and capital, and he used these models to contextualise social encounters in everyday life, from family to relationships to work and education. His work was highly influenced by the social theories of Marx (1883) and Weber (1818-1883). Marx, was a socio-political theorist, whose work is central to the philosophy of class development and whose ideas became significant in economics and politics. His theories became very well known and lead to them being collectiely referred to as Marxism. For Marx (1883), society progresses through the class struggle and the key to being a strong economic focus (money) between what he terms the 'owning classes' and 'working classes'. Much of this work demonstrates ways in which workers are exploited by the capitalist mode of production and how this is the deciding source of social life. He also coined the term 'class consciousness', which is a subjective awareness of common vested interests individuals experience in life. (Marx,1867). Bourdieu borrows from Marx's general theory to largely understand the processes of social reproduction. But encompassing the notion of capital, Bourdieu moves beyond the purely economic deterministic view, to see from another cultural perspective. Bourdieu extended the theory of economic capital as a path to power and developed the notion of social capital, which has an enormous bearing on education, particularly its internalising influence on class habitus (Swartz, 1997).

Habitus

Capital

Field

Power and
Dominance
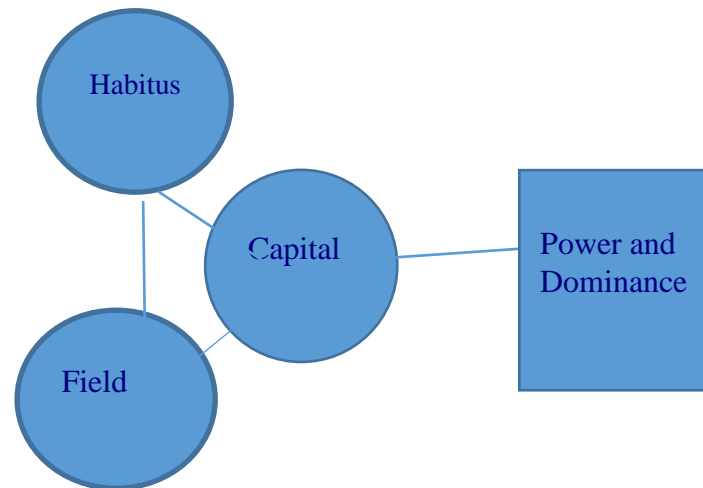
Figure 5: Bourdieu's 'Trinity' – the Three Power Model of 'Self.'

Bourdieu suggests that your habitus influences your capital and the field in which you operate which culminates in your overall sense of 'self' (What we feel we are worth/ value and what we can achieve). It can envelop us like a second skin. Indeed, it can leave a mark on our own skin (Bourdieu, 1980; Wacquant 1989; Swartz, 1997). Often we see people with scowl-marked foreheads, and a type of world-weariness etched on their faces: this can exhibit a physical sign of our habitus, giving off a clear signal that who we are is greatly influenced by affects and effects of our habitus. Habitus can be an intuitive knowing of our 'accepted' place in society. Dressing in a certain way can also be an indicator of what we experience. Seeing others dressed similarly can further enhance what we consider to be the accepted norm of our social group or place in society (Bourdieu, 1985). It is a branding of our consciousness. Furthermore, the acceptance of the environmental conditions of our place of habitat or residence can lead us to think that this is how it should always be. We have truly embraced our habitus and act accordingly, when our accepted norm, is our acceptance of what we have been influenced by (Bourdieu, 1985).

Similar to Freud's (1933) theory of the super-ego, habitus has comparable roles: the individual internalises certain circumstances and situations as normal, without fully comprehending the objective changes that are related to persons of a particular social class (Wacquant 2005, p. 316). Bourdieu (1990) proposes that when you are from a certain category (working/middle class) in society, habitus tends to generate and mimic all the common behaviours associated with that habitus: accents, dress code, career and job trends

which afford a comforting similarity for the individual. The habitus is the product of our socialisation and our practices of communication that we take for granted in life, and it is merely an assortment of personified characteristics that we act out automatically. The sociologist explains that what is reasonable and unreasonable is a consequence of our habitus and it "reproduces those actions and perceptions that are consistent with the conditions under which it was produced" (Swartz, 1997, p. 103). Bourdieu proposed that everyday life and action is perceived subjectively through separate engagements that take place within each field of practice (Bourdieu, 1977a). Bourdieu describes habitus as 'a power of adaptation'. It constantly performs an adaptation to the outside world which only occasionally takes the form of radical conversion' (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 88).

3.2.1 Gendered Habitus

As mentioned earlier, the six women in the study came from working-class backgrounds. As is apparent from Bourdieu's work, to fully comprehend another's habitus, it is vital to carry out a comprehensive understanding of your own. It was through deep reflection that I discovered, as far as I could discover, the common socio-cultural traits in the composition of my 'habitus' and its similarity to that of the women in the study (Bourdieu, 1985). Over time, the women viewed learning as an opportunity for 'self' improvement and enhancement, socially and economically. Evaluating as far as possible, my own system of beliefs and social patterns assisted me in attempting to analyse the social field of 'self' in education and the evolution of 'self' through the educational journey. The women in the study were 'aware' that learning is influenced by their cultural backgrounds and that their desire for learning was also influenced by their habitus (Bourdieu, 1985). The 'habitus' of women is primarily influenced by other women, and is socially constructed and generative (e.g. the primary effects on the roles of women as mothers) (Bourdieu, 1986). For example, choices of clothing and makeup and hairstyle, are made on the

> basis of practically oriented dispositions that have already been inscribed in the body
> and subsequently take place without overtly direct conscious awareness of the principles
> that guide them (Ford & Brown, 2006, p. 126).

A female culture is a productive place that gives rise to and greatly influences the female habitus. It is the 'patterns of thought which organise reality by directing and organising thinking about reality' (Bourdieu, 1971, p. 194). Importantly, habitus helps not only to reveal

how the female habitus is embodied but also how taken-for-granted social inequalities are embedded in everyday practices. A woman's embodied capital can also be collectively embodied cultural capital which demonstrated in their dress, demeanour and attitudes (Reay et al., 2005). The daily duties of the women in the study had to be considered before going to college. Unlike their male counterparts they had to organise childcare, meals, and other domestic chores, as well as attend class, study, research and submit their projects to their tutors.

WOMEN'S GENDER/ MEN'S GENDER

Figure 6: Gender and Habitus (Mypokcik, 2015)

The above figure presents the perfect balance between male and female gender. However, when men commit to engaging with adult education, their experience differs from that of women. They are more likely to be able to engage fully with the task in question, can attend college with complete dedication, with few to no family distractions. The women in the study found it difficult when their children were ill, or on school holidays, as they had to take time off the course and it also meant they had to work hard on their study trying to catch

up later, on the lessons they had missed. However, the women in the study were individually competent and did not depend on men, as they have lived alone as single parents for quite some time. This had inadvertently and temporarily thrown the patriarchal structure off balance. For one thing, the cultural norm that men are the 'breadwinners' no longer applies to most Irish women, as men have lost the power base, at least, to 'demand' women's dependence and subordination. Girls are making significant advances in educational achievements, yet they are underrepresented in senior work roles and in third-level academic roles. On the other hand, men between the ages of 35 and 64 have a predominantly poor educational attainment. The schools in Ireland were largely influenced by secular orders, and although girls received a good education, they had few to no prospects of developing a real career. Bourdieu (1986) argues that the domination of male culture is rooted in our collective unconscious, and we are unaware that it exists.

Gender stereotypes and prejudiced beliefs present males as more valuable than females. Furthermore, not all people consider themselves situated between the male/female gender categories, as a growing number of people struggle with the traditional forms of sex identity (O Connor, DES, 2007). Transgender and other gender groups are often ostracised by society for not adhering to the traditional gender roles ascribed to them, and they face deliberate forms of oppression and discrimination in society (Fitzgerald, 2015). Bourdieu's (1991) theory places emphasis on struggle, power and the conflict between male and female habitus, for identity as well as for professional jobs and other occupations. The women in the study desired a career with enhanced economic and symbolic capital rewards, and they also knew that having the right language or vocabulary would support them on this journey. Bourdieu (1985) informs us that 'habitus' is, "located within the body and affects every aspect of human embodiment" (Shilling, 1993, p. 129). Women will inevitably experience adult education in a variety of ways based on the gendered habitus, *that they learn to internalise* in childhood. The term 'hexes' is used by Bourdieu regarding the embodied habitus or "deportment, the manner and style in which actors 'carry themselves': stance, gait, gesture, etc" (Jenkins, 2002, p. 75).This 'habitus' can be diverse from culture to culture, but the basic roots of a woman's habitus are similar historically, socially and politically. Habitus is equally a "structured structure" and a "structuring structure" it is a consequence of our behaviour and our particular relations with people which can limit our future actions in life (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 53). As a result of this habitus is both the "embodiment of our social location" (Noble &

Watkins, 2003, p. 522) and "the structure of social relations that generate and give significance to individual likes (or taste) and dislikes with regard to practice and action" (Laberge, 1995, p. 136).

One of the great strengths of Bourdieu's 'habitus' concept is that it introduces a historical element to understanding the social conditioning of the body of work that is "missing in many accounts of gender (McNay, 1999, p. 102). The notion of habitus and 'hexis' assist us to understand the embodied practices of gender, identity, class, race and ethnicity in the course of "patterns of thought which organise reality by directing and organising thinking about reality" (Bourdieu, 1971, p. 194) (Reay, 1995, p 354). Habitus helps us to appreciate the embodiment of gender and culture and how we fail to notice gender and social inequalities that are deeply embedded in the everyday practices of life. Habitus is a constant interplay between past and present, so that individual history plays a strong role in the development of a durable habitus that none the less responds to present circumstances (Jenkins, 2002). 'Habitus' provides a "practical sense" for how to act in any particular social reality (Bourdieu, 1998, p.25).

Butler (1990, 1997) focuses more on feminist theory and believes that gender is performed out of bodily and verbal nuances as she shifts her attention to the embodied gender 'through which normative gender discourses are maintained' (Butler, 1997, pp. x–xii). Butler stresses that race, class, ethnicity and "regional modalities" intersect with gender to make up social difference (Butler, 1997, p. 6). The concept of intersectionality means that various proportions of social life cannot be broken up into separate and pure strands in other words everything is intertwined or interconnected. This is seen in the intersectionality of gender, class, space and education and the working class restrictions placed on working class women. A study was carried out Ehrenreich (2002) and Toynbee (2003) in Britain and the USA, and the results indicated that working class jobs with bad pay continue to separate women's experiences. Gillborn and Mirza (2000) gathered data from 118 British Local Education Authorities, and again found that social class makes the biggest difference to educational attainment, followed by 'race' and then by gender and they also highlighted that class outcomes are always intertwined with gender and 'race'. All social classes continuously function but Reay (1998) points out that far more attention is necessary if the processes of social inclusion and exclusion are taken seriously. Furthermore, Reay (1998) reminds us that

the importance of education is not viewed differently by different social classes but instead middle class position is generally seen by both classes as essential to social mobility and capital gains. Social identities are entangled and bound together between subjective and objective structures and all necessitate the same emphasis on space and difference (Harris, 2006; Longhurst et al., 2008).

3.2.2 Structure Agency and Habitus

The composition of the social world and how it influences human behaviour is one of the great debates of sociological thought. The structural view emphasising the hierarchy of the social order and how pre-ordained it is, has been proffered by sociologists like Emile Durkheim who state that human behaviour is dictated by social structures. "The individual is dominated by a moral reality greater than himself: namely, collective reality" (Durkheim 1952 (1897), p. 38). On the other hand Karl Marx argues that social structures dictate to the detriment of human behaviour and that agency or an individual's own decisions can be the determining factor in how they progress through life.

> It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but on the contrary their
> social being that determines their consciousness (Marx 1978 (1859), p.4).

The social world is comprised of structures like societal structures, family structures and economic structures. The impact this has on us as individuals can be both productive and restraining. We need order to manage to survive but this order can be inhibiting and stop us advancing when we accept certain structures. The social structure of Irish society has been hugely influenced historically by social class, and as mentioned in chapter one the women in this study are working class. Social structures determine an individual's behaviour but agency refers to the ability to make personal choices in their daily lives that are not governed by any outside structural forces except their own desires and will. This free will is independent of social forces and is not constrained by what society might think of these actions. Durkheim, a structural functionalist sees structure and hierarchy as essential in establishing the existence of society (1952, 1987). He argues that structure has a much bigger influence on an individual that the individual has on society's structures. Structures can relate to family structures, group structures or economic structures like business. The structures can be

expanded to include social, gender, race and class structures and how they impinge on our decision making and indeed how we live our lives. These structures can comprise economic structures and those of a cultural nature relating to our customs, traditions and our general outlook on life. However Durkheim did acknowledge that structures can be influenced by agency and by pre determinism.

> In so far as we are in solidarity with the group and share its life, we are exposed to (the influence of collective tendencies); but so far as we have a distinct personality of our own we rebel against and try to escape them (Durkheim 1952 (1987) pp, 318-19).

Weber although primarily seen as an individualist, in his most famous work suggests the theory of how the impact of social forces like a Protestant work ethic and the capitalist market place can impact on social behaviour (Weber, 2001, (1930). Some theorists put forward the view that what we know as our social existence is largely determined by the overall structure of society. The perceived agency and free will of individuals can also mostly be explained by the operation of this structure. Theoretical systems aligned with this view include: socialization and autonomy in determining whether an individual acts as a free agent or in a manner dictated by social structure. Dreier (2008) in his work uses critical psychology as a framework and he proposes that we may best conceptualise persons as participants in social practices that constitute social structures who can either reproduce or change these social practices. This proposes that social practices and individuals cannot be understood properly when these two parties are seen in isolation.

> Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please: they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly found given and transmitted from the past (Marx, 1978 (1852), p. 595).

Though a noted determinist, structure and agency matter for Marx and he was aware of how one influences the other, echoing the theories of Giddens and Bourdieu echo Marx, both of whom recognise the relevance of both structure and agency while emphasising that structure resides to some degree within us all as humans. The debate is furthered by Archer and Mouzelis who, whilst stressing the importance of structure and agency, disagree with Bourdieu and Giddens stating that both structure and agency must be analysed as distinct from each other. They believe that structure exists outside of individuals and that its very composition is open for debate (Archer, 1999, pp.79-86). Our practices and our structures are created by people who have certain viewpoints and habits and this is what forms a social

structure when the majority of people are willing to accept a structure in how they live, drive, or seek education. Social structures are created by inherent practices that we accept as the norm. How we conduct our lives in social practice is directly linked into how these social practices were formed by us collectively. This acceptance of the influences of agency and structure as co-habitators is highlighted when we realise that while we may have some agency in decision making the structures of life will always have an influence on our decision making. This viewpoint is not universally accepted and some have come to challenge the overall concept of social structure and if indeed social factors have any bearing on our behaviour at all (Crothers, 1996, p. 21). Whilst we need some form of structure in life to co-exist somewhat peacefully with others, the structures in place can also be a form of restraint and instead of a humanity bond it could become a form of bondage for some. There is a structure in kinship and how we relate to each other. We can never fully escape determinism and act with full freedom. It is impossible to live without some structures as every structure was created by humans whilst appearing as natural phenomena. We have to have a connection between structure and agency to be productive. It is when one overrules the other wholly that a dystopian existence manifests itself and we either feel intimidated or we completely lose the ability to plot our daily lives. In sociology the distinctive stable arrangement of institutions whereby human beings in a society interact and live together is called socialisation.

Social structure is often treated together with social changes which deal with the forces that change the social structure and the organisation of society. Change the social structure and the organization of social practice also changes. Agency theory states that people will obey an authority when they perceive that authority will be held responsible for its actions. Structure and agency are the essential forces in the social world. They comprise how we relate to each other and the fabric of that relationship. Are we the progenitors of our social world or the masters of it? Bourdieu argued that "certain structuralists" see "agents as the simple 'supports' of structures invested with the mysterious power of determining other structures" (Bourdieu, 1977a, p.487). We are the outcome of how structure and agency coalesce and reconcile with each other when both are seen for their inter dependency. Habitus is a constant interplay between past and present and individual history plays a strong role in the development of a durable habitus that responds to current situations (Jenkins, 2002).

Friedman (2013) writes:

> Habitus is especially useful because it helps to conceptualise how the moblile persons past can shape their horizon of expectations in the present. More specifically, it illuminates how embodied inscription of this history has an indelible impact. It explains how, when the mobile person's conscious presentation of 'self' may align with the subjectivities of those that mobility has brought them into contact with (p.11).

For Bourdieu habitus and capital are used in order to understand how individuals interact with the field, the position they occupy and what this means in terms of adult education. Habitus consists of our thoughts, tastes, beliefs, and interests and it assists us in understanding the workings of our world though practice (agency) which is linked with capital and field (Reay, 1995, p. 154).

3.2.3 Language: A Critical Component of Adult Education

Throughout history, language is presented as an integral part of social life and its usage is demonstrated as a key component of cultural capital. Bourdieu created an incisive critique of formal and structural linguistics, arguing that these disciplinary frameworks take for granted, yet, fails to grasp the specific social and political conditions of language formation and its use (Bourdieu, 1991, p.3). While most people can read and write, those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds use language almost as a weapon to preserve their dominance over those from a lower socioeconomic habitus. Reay reminds us:

> Within the educational system almost all the authority is vested in the middle classes. Not only do they run the system, the system itself is one which valorises middle rather than working class cultural capital (Reay, 2006, p. 294).

To illustrate the above people with high levels of formal linguistic skills have more confidence to actively promote their abilities and to progress through the dominant social structures at an easier pace (Reay, 2006). Having the ability to reflect is similar to the use of language. For example everyone practices it mentally, but having the correct language and resources enhances the ability to write reflectively with confidence and ownership (Bourdieu 1991; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). Bourdieu (1984) claimed that it is essential to reflect upon ones 'habitus' as it helps us to determine the internalised embodied social structures and internally defined hierarchies of our habits and 'habitus'. For Freire, action-reflection and consciousness are a human ability and having the words language and vocabulary supports people to "…work and transform the world" (Freire, 1998, p.102). Bourdieu (1991) believes

that high levels of education are understood to be the product of certain habituses, and these are often passed on from generation to generation. Moreover, it can often lead to economic capital which can often be embraced as part of the educational process. The complex object of elitist language is formed solely by educational powers through social, historical and political conditions. It gives rise to a separate homogeneous language or speech that exists only within that community of practice, yet is treated as a '*victorious'* language (Bourdieu, 1991, p.5). Outside that selective group, people, remain excluded and ignored for not having the linguistic competence to communicate in this idealised linguistic practice. Bourdieu describes this as 'the illusion of linguistic communism' (Bourdieu, 1991, p.5). People speaking in their local dialects were prompted to change their dialect to be accepted and to conform 'to collaborate in the destruction of their instruments of expression' (Bourdieu, 1991, p.7). Linguistic, practices can be used as a positive axis point that enables a 'habitus' and a field to meet

> Which are, to varying degrees, 'compatible' or 'congruent' with one another, in such a way that, on occasions when there is a lack of congruence (e.g. a female student from a working-class background who finds herself in an elite educational organisation), an individual may not know how to act and may literally be lost for words (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 17).

Each individual appears to grasp their social world from a subjective perspective to try to apprehend their own lived experiences and that of others and "it assumes that this apprehension is by itself a more-or-less adequate form of knowledge about the social world" ((Bourdieu, 1991, p.11). However, possessing levels of cultural and symbolic capital in education does not guarantee a seamless path to better employment. From my own experience, this is a false perception as I have travelled a much tougher road to my goal as I have outlined in Chapter 1. Bourdieu's sporting analogy as 'sport as war' equates with the challenges a student faces in their chosen choice of course. They must overcome their own fears and learn to 'play' the education 'game' by passing their exams and gaining the relevant accreditation for further progression in education or in the jobs market (Bourdieu 1991; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). According to Bourdieu (1991), each field of practice has its own unique discourse/language (jargon), and habitus is played out in each field of practice. From my own personal experience, the field of education is comparable to a magnet, with no beginning and no ending. As each time, I decided I had enough of the educational merry go round I went back for another ride and continued on my quest for more knowledge. This

magnetic force of fields and in this study the field of education attracts people from multiple habituses to try out new courses by stepping into new arenas and consequently experience fresh starts and additional forms of capital. Notably, here, Bourdieu takes a step outside the traditional makeup of the field and views from both a bottom-up and a top-down perspective approach when observing a culture of practice (Bourdieu, 1992). For this reason, it follows that the interdependent fields of play cannot be brought down by any overpowering common logic like capitalism, modernity or post-modernity, as within a field the very shape, division and structure become a stake to these agents.

Bourdieu (1985) believed that habitus was so much a part of an individual's identity that people often mistook the 'feel for the game' as normal, as well as not considering that it is culturally developed. Bourdieu believed that the system of schooling facilitates the elite classes to accept unproblematically the existence of its dominance, e.g. by unquestioningly adopting the dominant language which sets class habitus apart from the rest of us. When the women and I met for the first time, they dreaded being asked to read in class and initially even to speak. They felt that they did not pronounce their words correctly and felt ashamed of the consequences. I had to reassure them that, like everything in life, education is a practice and as time progresses they too will learn the language. I informed them of my own story and educational journey, and it seemed to put them at ease. I felt it temporarily removed the 'them and us' division . This situation highlighted Bourdieu's viewpoint that people from disadvantaged classes see the status quo as being determined by their own unwillingness to succeed, rather than their membership of a lower social class. As an adult education facilitator, my experience has taught me that some students need more support and nurturing than others, and when they feel secure, the reluctance to participate in their learning is often removed. Too much emphasis has been placed on the ability of social groupings to change their viewpoint and progress as a group. I have seen that it is often the individuals who change first within a group, that can influence the thinking of the group. However, I believe they must be given the time and the resources to do so. While the education equality is ostensibly present, the dominant forces of culture and cultural criteria e.g. financial capital and cultural capital are still prevalent. Learners with a lack of such capitals still struggle (Harker, 1990, pp. 91-92). Cultural capital, (the education, skills, sphere of the influence we possess) all contribute to our standing in society. Parents often provide a large volume of this capital in their handing down of knowledge, attitude and the attributes needed for what is the

tradition of success in life. Dominant classes largely consist of the financially endowed but they also possess great quantities of cultural capital, and cultural and financial capital are often extrinsically linked.

3.3 Capital in Adult Education

> Capital: is the term used to describe an array of things; money, land, property, educational merits, work and the people you socialise with. [Bourdieu focuses on three types of capital [cultural (people) economic (money) symbolic (power, educational merits] (Bourdieu, 1986, pp. 47-49).

Engaging with adult education can augment social capital levels by opening up opportunities to develop new networks of friends that are outside the confines of domestic duties and parenting. One of the greatest challenges facing the women in settling into adult education, but making and sustaining new friendships, is a developing supportive mechanism for social adjustment. Engaging with adult education can create opportunities to meet new people and establish new friendships. Educational qualifications are also a form of meritocracy and can represent symbolic and economic capital, as they provide the receiver with a means of improving employment opportunities. Enhanced further education and higher education qualifications can lead to real improvements in salary and living standards (DES, 2000). This view can often be presented to justify social inequality because it is perceived that some people are naturally predisposed to the finer things in life than others (Bourdieu, 1985). This belief is even adopted by the culturally submissive. They may never have had the opportunity in their formative years to challenge this assumption. Their habitus has been genetically bequeathed to them akin to runners in a race, who hand on the baton to the next. Bourdieu (1985) contends, however, that habitus is ever changing but that the 'self' can be attuned to subtle changes in forms of accumulation of cultural capital. By being aware of the effects of habitus, as far as possible we can endeavour to change the structural influences that bear down upon us. When your identity is not accepted you look for one that will be (Brando, 1994). Changing our habitus however, can be a tense and anxious experience.

3.4 The Power of Capital

Capital can be associated with both measurable goods and the norms and values of society, such as marketplace structures and the role of ideology. Power, on the other hand, is behavioural, but a combination of both may hold the ability to oppress and dominate. There

are many types of capital, e.g., cultural, symbolic and economic but all are interconnected and intertwined in some way. For example, if a person is economically prosperous they may also have a lot of cultural and social capital (friends in high places). However, if that person runs into financial difficulties and economic debt they may also experience a decline in their social and cultural capital. The right cultural capital: forms of knowledge, skills and education, may give higher benefits to the possessors and a higher status in society (Bourdieu, 1999; Reay, 2004). Parents provide their children with cultural capital by handing on the attitudes and knowledge required for 'successes' in the current educational system. Bourdieu (1986) conceived three forms of cultural capital: institutionalised (educational qualifications), embodied (socialised forms of knowledge and 'long lasting dispositions'), and objectified (cultural goods, artefacts) (p.47). Dominant classes largely consist of the financially endowed, but also by those who are in possession of greater amounts of cultural capital. Then there is the class, as mentioned earlier, the working classes, which may be lacking in the cultural and financial capital. These can often comprise of subjugated minorities who are denied the rights to education and due respect within society. Their experiences have led them to accept their lowly place in society, and they view the dominant class with suspicion. They can feel a sense of oppression through their perceived abandonment by society. Their sense of 'self' is lowered and they adopt defence mechanisms for survival. Their habitus has formed them with a harder exterior and a suspicious attitude toward authority and a 'feel for the game'(Bourdieu, 1986). The primary holders of 'valued' financial and cultural capital are predominantly from the dominant class whose background and professions include doctors, consultants, artists, teachers, intellectuals, etc., certainly they would identify and share empathy with each other (social capital). The dominant class are aware of the distinctions between themselves and the subjugated classes. They speak about this divide ideologically but are preoccupied with their own concerns and a struggle for survival in their own field of expertise. When I first entered the world of education, in my naivety I believed it to be a place to gain knowledge and to develop 'people power'; but over time, I discovered it was a den of insecurity and a place of struggle (Bourdieu, 1986). My first reaction to this finding was one of shock and disbelief. My assumption was that, if a person had the privilege to gain such a wonderful place in society as an educator, why was there so much diffidence? Even so within the confines of the educational system lay the power of governance and political bureaucracy. Power is fertile in all 'stellar' environments

as it manoeuvres its command through values and practices, seeping through individual identity creating insecurity and uncertainty for the educators generating a continuous process of questioning the 'self'. Foucault reminds us that power depends upon knowledge and knowledge depends upon power. He writes:

> Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere… [Power] is simply the over-all effect that emerges from all these mobilities … power is not an institution and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society. (Foucault, 1982, pp. 26-27)

For Foucault, power is everywhere, in that it is indicated in what we know, internalised in our identities, and infused in every social relationship. It is 'transmitted by and through us'. It 'goes right down into the depths of society' (Foucault, 1982, pp. 26-27). Foucault purports that struggle against one's inherited constraints because of one's 'habitus' is necessary to gain some control over the overweening power that can be arraigned against us. This echoes the Bourdieuan concept of a willingness to change one's habitus by resisting the controls and constraints which are inherent in the system of power that governs us so that we can increase our cultural and economic capital. Bourdieu (1985) merges habitus, capital and field to form an original approach to comprehending, how social inequality is prevalent in society and how this inequality is continued on. The current spate of homelessness in Ireland is indicative of this lack of capital, both cultural and financial. The struggle is compounded by the dichotomy between what is said in public and what is actually happening on the ground. The structural variables such as housing shortages, poverty and unemployment create the conditions within which homelessness will occur, and people with personal problems are more vulnerable to these adverse social and economic conditions than other people; therefore, the high concentration of people with support needs in the homeless population can be explained by their susceptibility to structural forces, rather than necessitating an individualistic explanation of homelessness (e.g. Focus Ireland, 2015). Their habitus leads them to believe that they will always be abandoned by society. Their field of influence and experience to date is limited to their absence of homes and identity and their lack of economic capital. Having no place of residence labels them with 'no fixed abode'. It prevents people from having proper living conditions, from gaining employment, or from achieving an education. Bourdieu contends that class inequality can be perpetuated through governmental neglect. A lack of one of the basic needs in life such as shelter is detrimental to the 'self'. In

Bourdieu's words "every established order tends to produce the naturalization of its own arbitrariness" (1980, p.164). Similarly, in the caste system in India, there are myriad levels of different classes all designed to keep the Brahmins and the upper castes where they are. This very much reflects Bourdieu's theory of horizontal hierarchies, which all cultures have in one form or another, designed to subjugate and keep people in their accepted place. Attempting to elevate one's position on the horizontal graph can be detected as insolent and can lead to punishment in certain societies. Acceptance of your place is the agreed form of governance in these cultures and companies. To understand this inequality, Bourdieu demands that we should investigate the composition and forms of capital structuring in a given field rather than just accepting vague statements on their own terms. By doing so, we can understand how people aiming to secure or maintain their capital reserves are also able to keep the power of one form of capital over another. Life informs us through experience how certain fields operate from residents' associations to sporting clubs to amateur dramatic groups, and how they can develop an inner system of cliques and inner sanctums, creating 'a culture within a culture'.

In Chapter 1, I revealed that my place of birth was Limerick city. The class divide was evident to me from early childhood. Bourdieu, in his analogy of field, uses sport to assist us in comprehending this concept. In reality, I lived and witnessed sport as a form of symbolic capital. Boys from working-class backgrounds in Limerick whose parents wanted them to have successful careers encouraged their sons to play rugby and move in the rugby circles. It was seen as an opportunity to gain cultural and economic capital. The junior clubs were confined to the periphery of the city, but if the boys played well and were successful they moved up the scale to higher leagues. When people are comfortable in situations, they learn to navigate successfully in that specific social environment like 'fish in water' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Generally speaking, growing up in a middle-class neighbourhood, people possess the ability to socialise and move in the right circles or fields, to remain in education, marry into the 'right family' and become 'law-abiding citizens'. As creatures of that habitus, one would feel instinctively at home there and have the confidence and comfort of knowing one belonged. On the other hand, people growing up in disadvantaged areas would feel comfortable in their habitus, move in fields connected to that habitus and learn to jostle for money, work and power within that locality. When we change the distribution of capital within the field, the structure can also be amended, and capitalism is no longer the central

controlling force of the field of practice (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 78). In the field of academia, certain individuals are delegated to do specific jobs, and they hold the positions due to their qualifications and their social and cultural habitus. Society is made up of numerous fields, and they are dynamic and exchangeable, and they underpin the roots to all forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1993). Another key component in the notion of habitus is that when individuals are influenced in a certain way they begin to believe and behave in that way, and are meant to respond accordingly (Bourdieu, 1993; Rudd, 2003). What is socially and culturally acceptable within the norms of our cultural class is what we relate to in our daily lives. How we act and react revolves around our 'habitus', as it is a socially organised system of behaviours that familiarise our 'thoughts, perceptions, expressions, and actions' (Bourdieu 1990a, p. 55).

3.4.1 Commodifying Education as a form of human capital

Turning education into a commodity (a key feature of neoliberal forms of education) has the effect of benefiting those from a higher cultural and economic capital. It tends to disenfranchise those from lower socioeconomic groups and backgrounds. This creates an unfair distribution of cultural capital, and, in turn, underlines the distinction between the holders and non-holders of these values and it re-inforces inequality. The commodification of education has a huge effect and affect, on people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds attending college. Big registration fees and difficulties with childcare considerations and college fees have placed an unfair burden on students from this 'habitus' profile. Their aspirations may have been low, but now they see the lack of financial capital as being crippling. Thus turning education into a commodity ensures that:

> Relations of power no longer exist between individuals: they are set up in pure objectivity between institutions, i.e., between socially guaranteed qualifications and socially defined positions. (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 187)

Thus, for Bourdieu (1970), 'history becomes nature' (p. 78), and what was once a product of cultural and capital reproduction becomes rooted in law and education. Power and its structure are a series of perpetuated rules of the unfairness of social and cultural capital. Perpetuated to be conquered and divided by the lack of education and choice. By investing money wisely in the financial institutions, and by selecting the best in educational establishments for their sons and heirs, the governing class safeguards its power and control.

They must only "let the system they dominate take its course in order to exercise their domination" (Bourdieu, 1977, pp. 188-189). As mentioned earlier in the thesis, it is my belief that every person deserves an education, and it should not be a commodity, or 'choice' but a human right of passage for everyone. However, having a great divide between the educated and the uneducated keeps the status quo running smoothly for the people at the top of the power hierarchy. Persons from disadvantaged backgrounds have very few financial resources to invest in education and lack the 'proper' (real advantaged) cultural and social capital to assist them in gaining an education (Reimers, 2000, p.55). In Chapter 1, I mentioned that the Irish adult education system is increasingly underpinned by 'business' values and is primarily understood as a 'service' to learners. Learners are 'customers' attend college on a supply and demand basis; and this logic slowly removes education as a human right (Dunne, 2002, p.86). Education is a fundamental human right. As a 'public good,' it is clearly the responsibility of a state that remains committed to social justice. Securing the right to education is key to enabling people to secure other human rights, yet the right to education is violated by many governments around the world (Archer 2006, p.7, cited in Greene, 2007, p.x).

From a Freirean perspective, adult education is a means to reduce social inequality, increase knowledge and nurture social mobility (Freire, 1970). Agreeing with Freire, and in my personal experience of adult education and that of the women in the study, I believe adult education also enhances critical thinking and highlights diversity and discrimination in society and other social issues and factors that can be at least resisted (Ejieh, 2004). Adult education proclaims to be an equalitarian system that nurtures and supports adults for their self-benefit or for their career advantage. However, the meritocratic system that is currently in place ensures that adult education functions primarily for job progression. It still excludes the minority groups in society (O'Brien & Ó Fathaigh 2007). Bourdieu argues that if we wish to avoid the opposition between individuality and structuralism: we must realise what has formed the individual. We must take their habitus into consideration and see how this has influenced their thinking, their view of society overall. How they integrate with the structures of education, law and societal norms depends on their view of 'self' as formed by their habitus. If you don't feel good enough or have a positive view of 'self', the structures of society can be overwhelming. This was a key viewpoint of the women in the study. The structures of life need to be challenged to ensure that they are serving the public and not just reproducing themselves and continuing to alienate the people (Bourdieu, 1977a, p. 487).

Figure 7: The Subject becomes the Object, and the Object Becomes the Subject (Eisher, 2013)

The above figure depicts to me how social structures embody the human habitus

3.5 Social Field and Habitus

Bourdieu's concepts of social field and habitus have had an enormous influence on sociological investigation linking science to how it has been developed and evolved throughout time and history. Bourdieu sees individuals as part of every detached structure with their own subjective view that is influenced by their habitus. He also emphasises the importance of 'self' reflection and believes that researchers enter the world of research shaped by their individual habitus, and this supports them to choose the right fit for their inquiry and the lens through which they look, the theorists they choose and the methodologies they use (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). In Chapter 1, I pointed out that the practical methods undertaken in this study have assisted me to critique the social field of adult education, 'from an outsider's, and an insider's viewpoint'. Critical reflection aided me in my choice of methodology, and it also had a profound influence on my habitus. For Bourdieu (1990), sports metaphors were very useful when detailing habitus and he used the term 'feel for the game' (p.66) when he referred to it, as when a rugby player instinctively knows by carrying, passing, kicking and grounding the ball with the team scoring the greater number of points being the winner. The aim of each team is to gain possession of the ball, take it into opposition territory and to place it in the goal area or zone. Each of us has an embodied type or 'feel' for the social situations or 'games' we regularly find ourselves in.

However, going to college, and coming from a lower socio-economic background, could leave us feeling disadvantaged like a 'fish out of the water'. We would not possess the skills necessary to understand and thrive in college life. (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) Having returned to education as an adult learner, our previous experience of our schooling may influence how we adapt to our new surroundings. Our habitus of limited opportunities may leave us suspicious of our tutors and facilitators, and of this new cultural background. This brought home to me Bourdieu's concept that our thoughts and perceptions are not the full result of our individual freedom of thought but are instead examples of how we have been dominated by our habitus which generate our behaviour and thinking (Bourdieu 1990).

> The individual who applies the sociological imagination is one who is able to put him/herself away from the familiar routine of his/her own experiences with daily life. (Giddens, 1999, p. 2)

We are reminded that the concept of habitus includes the Marxian concept of 'dialectic' or contradiction in that things in the world do not always work smoothly. There are contradictions, paradoxes between the accepted dominant 'common sense' perspective and our own hard-won experiences. It is this that allows us the ability for freedom of thought, however much we might be unknowingly and unwittingly taken in by our 'dependence'; on our 'taken for granted' assumptions of how the world actually 'is' and how it reacts to us. The strength of Bourdieu's arguments is accentuated by his opposing view of theory for theory's sake. He is laying down the gauntlet to accepted theory. He wants to challenge the academic world and wishes to bolster his arguments with anthropological studies and to test his own theories completely. Seen as the anti-intellectual intellectual, Bourdieu lived his theories and recorded them accordingly. My own lived knowledge is similar to that of Bourdieu's. My experiences are first-hand and registered from the genesis of my adult education journey in 1990 to the present day. Bourdieu's theories have inspired and enlightened me, and they correspond to my life and the academic cycle of knowledge intelligence and intellectual elitism. Bourdieu's involvements with political action were influenced by his theories, and he was a leading campaigner for social change and as we know he lived in the communities who were affected by the Franco-Algerian war. He was a committed interpreter of theory, but he also put them to the test. Many intellectuals become fogbound by their own addiction to theory and academia, seldom leaving their ivory towered totems of thought. For Bourdieu, engaging in theory for its own sake:

... that is good for textbooks and which, through an extraordinary misconstrual of the logic of science, passes for Theory in much of Anglo- American social science ... There is no doubt a theory in my work, or, better, a set of thinking tools visible through the results they yield, but it is not built as such ... It is a temporary construct which takes shape for and by empirical work (Waquant, 1989, p. 50).

Bourdieu committed to his vast array of ideas and sought out their verification in everyday political life. The disruption was a byword for his ability to perceive where he might rattle the accepted norms and imbue them with political volatility. And his social activism during the 1980s and political activities during the 1990s brought him much attention in France beyond his field of expertise. The influence of habitus also engendered our preferences and dispositions towards our environment, and Bourdieu and his social activism during the 1980s and political activities did likewise.

3.6 The Field
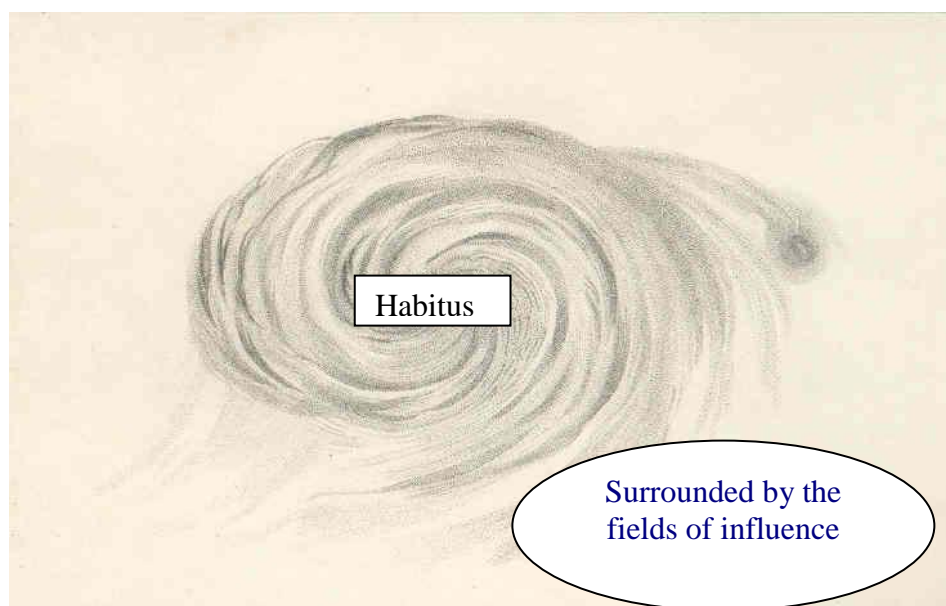
Figure 8: Fields of Influence (Adapted, from Bourdieu, 1985) the above figure depicts how habitus is influenced by the various fields of influence

Bourdieu (2003) believed that the fundamental and unpredictable theme of power creates a conflict of interest within the various fields. The field is a composition of relationships between positions and they are neutrally understood by the firmness of purpose they impose upon their agents / institutions and by

their present and potential situation (*situs*) in the structure of distribution of species of power (or capital), whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field as well as by their objective relation to other positions (domination, subordination, homology, etc.) (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 97).

Generally speaking, Bourdieu (1985) divided different professions, jobs, careers and forms of education into fields and each field comprises a separate definition of knowledge, sets of rules, and differing forms of capital. These forms of capital are a significant tool in the progression of people within the numerous fields. All these fields are connected in some way or form, creating a continuous interactive web between them. However, the fields are varied, and the social interaction establishes the interaction where there is a struggle to reach a particular outcome. In the field of education, there is the positioning of internal structures reflecting the different levels of power relating to that field. We can view how the relationship between management and lecturers is constructed and how this continues on to relationships with administration staff and the students in general. Again habitus would have an influence here as those brought up in a middle-class environment may feel somewhat more comfortable and less acquiescent when accessing the world of adult education. Facilitators, teachers, lecturers and learners from a less affluent habitus may feel more threatened and suspicious of the hierarchical model, and have a tendency to cower before the levers of power wielded by certain members of the educational institutes. In this instance, we can see that a field can present an arena of social struggle over the appropriation of certain capitals, and this is reflected by habitus. There is a good proportion of adult learners in the adult education sector who come from disadvantaged backgrounds where their habitus was one of never seeing a family member make the journey that they now have made.

Field: is the term used to describe [A setting in which people and their social positions are located. Within each field there are rules of engagement and this continues through the habitus of the person and their (social, economic and cultural capital). All Fields effect/affect each other, and are hierarchical, but most fields of practice are under the power of a higher authority to the larger field of power and class relations.] Subordinate to the larger field of power and class relations.] (Bourdieu 1990a, p. 140) (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p. 27)

For Bourdieu, certain social classes assume authority in certain fields, and the French elite developed an assertive attitude towards art, food and education and these were used to separate them from other social classes. Habitus plays a central role here as art forms have a distinctive appeal for some and for others an aversion (O'Brien and O' Fathaigh, 2007). For

some, the word 'arts' has a somewhat elitist connotation and is an acquired taste attracting the select few. Agreeing with this concept, the women in the study never ventured out to the theatre, which they regarded as expensive and 'posh'. Instead, they attended the annual Christmas pantomimes and musicals in the local theatre. The women in the study saw art and theatre as symbols of power and money and felt out of their comfort zone when it was discussed, yet other social classes may feel more comfortable in theatrical and artistic surroundings. In today's society, symbols represent themselves in brands such as transport, clothing, living conditions and types of education. The six women in the study were driven by modern day symbolic capital and strove to carry the most up-to-date mobile phones and apps on the market. They were also experts on clothing labels and brand names and shopping online for designer labels kept them up to date with fashion. This gave them a sense of prestige, wearing the symbols of exclusive clothing products. Our appreciation of the aesthetics of life and our palate for cultural items also display the influence of habitus. Our likes and dislikes relating to art objects, fashion and food display and identify with a particular habitus. In, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (1979), Bourdieu argues that French people's sense of taste in art is directly linked to their social class positions. Here he forcefully argues that aesthetic sensibilities are shaped by a culturally ingrained habitus (Bourdieu, 1986). The background and lineage of high-profile individuals exhibit their flavour for fine art. They are often exposed to it from an early age; they have been 'trained' to appreciate it as natural. This appreciation becomes in itself a cultural artefact.

The new world of technology and globalisation sees adult education come in many forms: public, private, higher, online, distance learning and further education or training. To appreciate how this form of education may not be accessible to all, we look to Bourdieu's approach to social class, and its formation is highlighted in his now-renowned treatise. Here Bourdieu conceptualises how access to academic qualifications are a method of structural inequalities and how some individuals have academic qualifications bestowed upon them as a form of cultural capital, and the long-term impact can lead to economic capital (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 187). Most of Bourdieu's work focuses on class and class distinction, and the forms of capital that produce and reproduce power and dominance but Bourdieu extends this symbolic sphere to class struggles that transcend gender, culture and family. The gender issue was a major source of struggle for the women. They felt pressurised into putting all their

energies into their families and providing financially for them. How would they cope with the extra cost and time demands presented by a full-time return to education? Would their family suffer when they had to put so much effort and time into study? As women, I could see that their priority was their family and they didn't want to do anything that might jeopardise it. At times they envied how men seemed to be freer in this regard as a lot of the family responsibilities were placed on the women. In fact, Bourdieu (1986) informs us that habitus can shed light on our life's limitations and achievements. If our immediate families have demonstrated a history of success within their lifespan, then this positivity can allow us to think that things in life are possible. If we have been shaped by a habitus deprived of advancement, this background can inform the 'self' to believe, that it is not feasible, or not possible. And some of the women in the study waited until they began the course to be told all things are possible.

In the field of law, those from disadvantaged backgrounds who find themselves before the courts may have inculcated a persecution complex from the influence of their habitus. A belief that this is the norm and that they should not be surprised when their turn to be accosted arrives, and they are taken by the Gardaí for questioning. A certain siege mentality can develop for people of this habitus, and their entry into the social field may consequently be very limited. When considering the field of power, we can perceive the horizontal structure, as mentioned earlier, which appears in all fields, and within these structures, we can see the struggles that are continually composed. These social struggles are the controlling factors in the conversion of the innumerable types of capital, be they symbolic, cultural, or physical that are evident between the fields themselves (Bourdieu, 1986a). The composition of the field, according to Bourdieu, is the various relationships that is in place between individuals and is defined by where one group's power ends and that of another begins. Capital comes in many forms, and each field has a rate, and some have more worth than others. Fields can be independent or interlinked. The fields of the law and the state would normally be separate though less structured societies with more complex structures would constitute having an increased number of fields and more relations between differing fields. Dictatorships, military juntas and religious-led countries would have a strong interweaving of fields, where certain forms of capital would be all-pervading. All fields are structured and historicized because they each have a constitutional history. Two of the fields that overlap,

though they have different histories both in France and Ireland, are those of education and religion.

In his native France, there existed a strong connection between the Catholic tradition and education, and indeed in Ireland too this was very prevalent. Many teachers were discriminated against on religious grounds and certain inappropriate questioning of teachers at interviews found them either not being employed or indeed losing their jobs. Despite emphasising equality for all religion, Ireland is predisposed towards a Catholic tradition, and many parish priests act as the chairmen of primary schools' boards of management, despite the reported falling of numbers at Sunday mass. Thus many people for different reasons have felt obliged to adapt and change their distinctive viewpoints, sometimes for better, sometimes for worse. Attempting to shake off the influence of one's habitus is admirable if done for the correct reason. On the other hand, meekly accepting your place and even going against your own principles for economic survival may have a detrimental effect on the 'self' further down the road. Changing one's habitus influences may be one of the greatest challenges to the 'self' in today's society. Thus, changing the habits of a lifetime takes courage and deep reflection as we are accosted by a myriad of questions. When students re-engage with adult education, are they truly being themselves, or are they masking their fearfulness of entering a new stage of performance? It is ourselves that must first see that change is necessary and indeed beneficial before we don the cloak of a new habitus. Choosing and being influenced by a new habitus can let us reflect on our sense of 'self' as we are actually changing. Can we feel the difference? Is it manifest in action? What sort of feeling does it give us? This habitus, changing the aspect of our thoughts, can make us see that we are to be more valued by 'self'. That 'self' is recreating and bringing a new more positive self-image. The 'self' evolves when we see the benefit of changing. Knowledge and its accumulation are liberating. Our horizons are so much bigger. We can think bigger than what we were taught to believe. When we actually realise that adult education is not just about learning academically, but also about informing us of who we are and who we are becoming, it is then that we can say that our habitus is actually changing. Similar to the French system, Ireland too experienced the interconnecting fields of religion and education and its influence on the Irish school system. We recall how evident it was that religion held sway in the appointment of teachers and academics in a certain viewpoint dominating all others. The Catholic ethos held sway in an

undemocratic way. These two fields nurtured each other and formed a social grouping that was common to both.

> The field is a veritable social universe where, in accordance with its particular laws, there accumulates a particular form of capital and where relations of forces of a particular type are exerted (Bourdieu 1990b, p.164).

3.6.1 Playing the Fields

In recent years, the political and industry fields had an enormous synergy i.e. Tendering for building work and the creation of wealth for those in construction (be they developers, bankers or politicians). Many bankers had close ties with politicians, and this was disastrously represented in light touch regulation which led to the collapse of the banking world. This situation is reflected in Bourdieu's view, that within each field: there are different practices and social positioning's which different groups utilise to attain power. These practices reflect the various forms of capital which individuals bring to play to secure their positioning within diverse fields. As we have seen in the example above, fields are not always related to classes, and although reasonably independent of each other they can merge for mutual benefit. When analysing the rules and general activity within the field, we can see that the field operates somewhat like a market in which different interests are in competition for the particular benefits associated with it. The progress of participants within the field and their uncertain futures are predicted on how they play the rules that are intrinsic to the field. Again we witness Bourdieu's 'feel for the game' and how comfortably they adapt as participants within a particular field and 'make their play' (1986a). Factors such as types and volumes of capital, and how participants objectively relate to others, are major factors in the achievement of success or otherwise. Sometimes this feel for the game is oblique in that participants have an innate understanding that bending the rules will be not only acceptable but desirable. The fallout of this approach is reflected in the myriad of tribunals in Ireland over the years, relating to beef exports, planning and the currently suspended banking enquiry. Even the term 'white collar crime' seems somehow to negate their actions and the consequences of same. Again we can see the influence of habitus. They behaved like they did because they thought it was normal and that they could get away with it. Indeed up to some months ago, no banker went to jail save for some lower ranking officials in Anglo Irish Bank who were recently served with custodial sentences. The afore mentioned scenario was indicative of how the banking system in Ireland worked and how those who were in charge of

banking governance in the Irish economic field felt they were immune from prosecution. There exists a culture of arrogance in the fields of commerce and politics, utilising capital from being born under the influence of a privileged habitus. This arrogance was most prominently displayed from the terminology adopted by banking officials to describe banking details right down to officials of Anglo Irish Bank actually declaring on taped conversations that they plucked interest figures out of a bodily orifice.

> A head honcho banker said recently they wouldn't be facilitating those he called "chancers" in their pursuit of mortgage relief. The derogatory term being used to so describe people who did what was expected of them in a civilised society, is shocking in its arrogance. For a most disgraced and corrupt institution as the banks to speak of Irish people in this way ought to be made an offence in law (O' Sullivan, 2013)

Here, in a nutshell, is the unholy trinity of Bourdieu's field of influence being dictated by an inherited capital from the bosom of a privileged habitus. Those from a less overhyped habitus would very rarely even have entered the august buildings of this despicable activity. We can very clearly see how and to what extent participants from a certain habitus are able to make an efficient use of the resources they are endowed with, or indeed to use this influence for more corrupt means. This is a privileged position to be in. It is a function of the adaptation of their habitus in this particular field. Leaving aside, the criminality involved, resources are only as valuable as to how they are utilised by the person who possesses them. If they have not been brought up to use them confidently, then these resources lie dormant and have no use. The habitus is the subjective system of expectations and predispositions acquired through past experience, and which is the fuel which ignites the drive or otherwise of the person who has the resources (Bourdieu, 1986). Knowing the rules of the game is second nature to those who have been weaned in a habitus of expectation. They expect to do well because they have seen it work for their parents, and this is carried on then to the next generation. Generational habitus is one of the strongest forms of capital. Everything is lifted by it, and many of the struggles experienced by those from a more arduous habitus are removed.

When considering the field of art, Bourdieu emphasised the struggles within, where a succession of artists from different generations attempted to storm the standard positions and hierarchies of artists, who were then ridiculed by the next sorority of 'avant-garde' artists, whose mission was to justify their own powerful positions within the eternal flux of the art

forum. This permanent removing of what went before is the cyclical need for recognition and is indicative of the struggle that is ongoing in all the fields. Through the use of our accumulated capital which is determined by habitus, we are all players in our particular fields. How we relate to them is the permanent adoption of Bourdieu's theories. This is highlighted again by Bourdieu, who again uses one of his favourite sporting analogies. Much like a football stadium or a baseball pitch, he determines that social fields are areas where people struggle for position and play the game to win. 'A field can be any structure of social relations' (King, 2005, p. 223). Trying to find our place in society and placing ourselves in a field that is not our habitus experience is one of the journeys we must navigate.

This is when we need to tap into our cultural capital and use what influence we have to make progress in a particular field. This is what Bourdieu described as 'sport as war', again using his sporting metaphors to make his point. As in sport, mental strength is essential to success in life; but this habit must be practised from our earliest years to have the maximum benefit. Those who do not possess it have to fight very hard to acquire it, and when they enter the field at a later stage in life, and perhaps not as well prepared, the struggle is tougher. Thus, those who have always had the benefit of a rich habitus are willing to adapt and use diverse strategies to survive and handle themselves in any situation in their accepted place in society. Bourdieu (1977) believes the concept of habitus is tightly interwoven to all fields of practice and social structures which are essential in the analyses of the sociology of society. Therefore, Bourdieu (1977) sees the notion of reality as social, to exist is to exist socially and what is real is the connected link and our perception of those around us. Habitus links practices to positions and the definitions of habitus are many, but the most famous is probably:

> The conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence produce habitus, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them (1977, p. 53).

Bourdieu used the metaphor 'social space' and demonstrated how it is divided geographically as well as characteristically, through class and power (Bourdieu 1977, p. 98).

3.6.2 The Power of Cultural Capital

> Education is, in fact, one of the most effective means of perpetuating the existing social pattern, as it both provides an apparent justification for social inequalities and gives recognition to the cultural heritage, that is, to a social gift treated as a natural one. (Bourdieu, 1974, p. 32)

Being overlooked in work situations, and not having your value recognised, has been the lot of many of these spectators, who are watching the main action but not taking part in it. Why is it, that seemingly similarly equipped individuals are not treated equally in certain fields? What are the hidden forms of capital, precisely, that are not obvious to all? To put it in a sporting metaphor, why are some individuals picked to play on the team, whilst others just barely make the subs bench, and seem willing to do so? This may reflect their view of themselves and their acceptance of their place in the field. Their habitus (and specifically their previous experiences therein) may have them believe that this is where they are, and they are lucky to be there (Bourdieu, 1989, pp. 265-68; 1996c, pp. 188-229). I could relate to this as when I entered the field of education, I became aware of the different levels of academic achievement, leading all the way from degree to doctorate level. I realised that to reach the very top level; I would have to utilise every ounce of capital I possessed. My habitus had cemented the view that people with Ph.D.s were superior; that I had to take my place in the hierarchy. This was reflected in how they comported themselves and even how they spoke. I imagined an untouchable world where these people were out of reach and lived in an ivory tower. This viewpoint is reflected in how some people comply when in the presence of medical doctors or figures of authority. Their habitus does not permit them to see themselves as equals with these figures of achievement.

My own journey in the field of education has turned full circle, where now students have an elevated view of me. This constant turning of the Bourdieuan wheel indicates that we are always attempting to reach the next level with our capital accrual from our habitus always, trying to influence our place in the field. Our ongoing struggle, whereby we pursue desirable outcomes, is as always described by Bourdieu in sporting metaphors. He believes there is a distinction between the explicit rules pertinent to a particular social setting and the internalised, implicit rules composed of cultural capital that will decide who is to be the better player in any given contest. We must learn to play the game not on our terms, but on the socially accepted terms in a series of particular fields. Bourdieu posits the belief that society,

in general, comprises a group of self-determining fields, such as the academic field analysed (see *Homo Academicus* (1984). Here Bourdieu states that fields interact with each other and are hierarchical. Most fields he continues are subordinate to the greater fields of power and class relations. Within fields, there is the 'the field of forces' and the 'field of struggles'. We see again the determining influence of how habitus *influences* individuals to internalise and embody these rules and play the game as social agents with specific forms of cultural capital using his sporting analogy. They are like a skilled tennis player who either follows or controls the ball in a game of tennis. Do they feel like leaders or followers in certain fields of practice, influencing the academic field and the faculties and disciplines contained within it? Here we see how financial and cultural capital aligns itself to present a stronger force within the field.

International studies have shown that levels of cultural capital relate to parental economic capital which in turn has a bearing on a student's cultural capital. The natural trajectory continues into the academic achievement of these students (Chang, 2006; Chen, 2005; Kelly, 2004; Tsai & Shavit, 2007; Wu, 2009). Students who emanate from families with lower socio economic buoyancy are less prevalent at prestigious colleges (Ministry of Education, R.O.C., 2009a). This formative viewpoint is intrinsically understood by individuals from a certain habitus. Their natural relationship with the educational field has been formed by many years of access to both cultural and financial capital. We see how students from strong economic capital backgrounds may repeat exams over and over again until they achieve the desired result. They know that there is a second and indeed third chance for them to qualify finally in their chosen field. For others to enter this field minus this form of capital can be very daunting. Their expectations may be lowered by their lack of cultural capital, and their dearth of financial capital will only extenuate this situation. They certainly do not have the luxury of repeating ad nauseam, and thus are very aware of the importance of succeeding the first time. The six womens' perceptions of further and higher education were similar to mine as a new student to the whole game. They looked at college as the beacon of light and as a way of moving forward and becoming more independent. Hence, the externalised image of the place and their idealistic views soon were shattered by the established power base. They found that in the first few weeks of the programme the management and tutors were kind and supportive, but after some time, they still felt like 'outsiders'. The emotional support that was demonstrated at the beginning was quickly removed, and the nurturing environment changed to one of dominance and power.

> Only in imaginary experience (in the folktale, for example), which neutralizes the sense of social realities, does the social world take the form of a universe of possibles equally possible for any possible subject. (Bourdieu, 1980, p. 261)

Bourdieu tries to capture the differences in the social relationship between those who have the finances to pay for their social interests and those who have not. And he is also keen to stress his viewpoint as nothing other than a refusal, a disgust – disgust for objects which impose enjoyment and disgust for the crude, vulgar taste which revels in this imposed enjoyment (Bourdieu, 1979, p. 486). Bourdieu postulates that cultural capital breeds cultural capital, as people from similar backgrounds display the same liking for works of art because of their familiarity within its display and knowledge of it (Bourdieu, 1969). In the world of academia, elitism appears to matter more than ever before. Among literary critics and theorists, Bourdieu's most widely-read work is probably *Distinction* (1979). In this book, he analyzes a nationwide survey of cultural tastes, and he demonstrates the division between those that have a wealth of cultural and financial capital and how they embody the characteristics of difference toward other class habitus and cultures (p. 34). All universities, technical institutes and colleges of further education are now shaped by the demands of the marketplace, and they pursue profit by competing for student-customers, research funds and other sources of money. Within each of these further and higher education structures lies an elite system. Irish universities are driven by image and brand and having a degree awarded from some of these universities creates a distinction amongst the graduates. The top ranking university in Ireland is presumed to be Trinity College Dublin, and the hierarchical differentiation between the universities and colleges is reinforced by academic managers and those with economic and cultural capital who profess the hierarchy to be so. The increasing emphasis on academic life within the college structures is to employ people with the highest level of qualifications and offer them temporary contracts with no security. This leads the 'self' to a place of uncertainty and self-doubt and a continuous need to self-prove even among the advantaged within the system.

> Apart from the fact that the increase in the proportion of holders of the most prestigious academic qualifications among the ruling classes may mean only the need to call upon academic approval in order to legitimate the transmission of power and privileges is being more and more felt, the effect is as though the cultural and educational mechanisms had merely strengthened or taken over from the traditional mechanisms such as the hereditary transmissions of economic capital, of a name or of capital in terms of social relationships (Bourdieu, 1977a, p. 496).

From an 'outsider' perspective, these educational establishments, seem to portray that all is sheltered and *cosy* internally, and to be employed in these structures is to be offered a haven of comfort. However, when you teach within the confines of these organisations you begin to experience the power of cultural and economic capital and elitism and how it is used as another mechanism 'to get ahead'. Wisdom for the 'feels for the game' and how to 'play the game' comes naturally to those with the correct level of cultural capital. I felt that coming from a perceived lower level of social class did not imbue me with sufficient levels of social capital where I would have been mixing with people of influence. My struggle was with completing my education against formidable odds (Reay, 2000). The higher social classes inherit the tools and the resourcefulness to overcome being dominated (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1964, 1970). Field, capital and habitus are areas where I have personally experienced many different emotions. When I entered the field of higher education, I was always asking myself if I belonged; who was I to inhabit this rarefied world? What were my credentials, and should I just know my place? These are the same questions which many of the women in my study also uttered. They were coming from a similar habitus to myself, and their views were formed by their own lack of cultural, social and economic capital. Ironically when I first met the women in the study group in class, the roles were reversed. I was now the teacher and my students were now in my previous position, they were now, looking up to me as a leader and an educated woman. As a student myself, I would not have been able to comprehend either, that my teachers did not come from a privileged background. In my student's eyes, I was the tutor, and they saw me as someone who had risen up the academic field with ease and perhaps coming from a habitus of privilege and overflowing capital. This was how I viewed lecturers and scholars myself, as we are all creatures of our habitus:

> This aristocratic disdain for lower-class attempts to appropriate higher-class culture leads to a peculiar set of values in higher education. Namely: "... a tendency to prefer eloquence to the truth, style to content" (Bourdieu, 1967, p. 335).

How we shake it off and improve our view of ourselves is the journey that I have been on for the past 25 years. The passage has been slow and at times painful and working with the women in this study has highlighted the journey as one of acceptance for me. It is my hope that the women in the study will also have their spirits awakened on their educational journey and shake off whatever preconceptions they have of themselves and their abilities. Education is knowledge and knowledge is a gift that is deserving of all habituses, and social and cultural

capital should not unduly shape what is something that is a fundamental human right (Freire, 1975). Habitus can and does influence us, affect us, but ultimately it should not define us. We can begin to redefine the 'self' when we develop an awareness of capitals and fields and how they operate. We can also learn to succeed in any field without it being the dominant force. It can also operate as a human force. For Bourdieu, education was always about people before profit, not profit before people.

3.7 Conclusion

The chapter has discussed Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, capital and field, and their influences on a person's capital stores. To emphasise Bourdieu's concepts I found that I had to be subjective at times and draw from my own life experiences in order to be objective with the literature. The fundamental concept of habitus is at the sociological centre of who we are as individuals. Habitus and capital are in a constant struggle for positioning within the field of adult education, and the conflict they create establishes, yet, comprises, the values and beliefs of the 'self' within the educational space. The field of adult education is complex and highly influenced by cultural capital: only when you learn how to 'play the game' on the field do you move forward in your position. The field creates all the possibilities and problems as it is the space with which capital and habitus are enacted. It largely authenticates one's destiny either way. For Bourdieu, educational qualifications enable and also legitimise social inequalities. People from higher economic, social and cultural statuses are seen to be more deserving of their place in the social structure. This is the essence of Bourdieu's fourth form of capital-symbolic capital. Bourdieu's concepts also highlight that the education system has a vital role in maintaining the status quo. Habitus is a lifespan of unconscious repetitious actions and habits that shape our knowledge and our way of thinking. Furthermore, it develops through a set of practices applicable to life's circumstances and capital stores that become embedded in our psyche. Education is the field of practice that can also break down the barriers between the various social groupings and create the success of the 'self' and a reimagining of the habitus. "We can let circumstances rule us or we can take charge and rule our lives from within" (Nightingale, 2015). One of Bourdieu's main contentions is that our thinking can be determined by our social settings or habitus (rationality is 'socially bounded') (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, 126; Bourdieu 1990a, pp. 63-64).

Chapter 4: Research Design and Methodology

4.1 A Critical Search for the 'Self' in Adult Education: Bourdieuian insights into transformative possibilities.

The purpose of my research is to explore the 'self' journey of six Irish women who recently returned to adult education. This study began in September 2012 and concluded in August 2014. It was set in a small urban context in an Irish city. I wanted to hear the voices of the women themselves: to listen to and to understand as far as possible their feelings about returning to adult education. I wanted to hear about the challenges they faced, the glories they experienced and the choices they had to make along the way. I was particularly interested in how education shapes and changes the 'self'; how such change is perceived to be positive, negative or both.

As highlighted in Chapter 1, all of the women in the study are single parents. Most never completed second level education, and none had previous experience of adult education. Their ages vary from 30 to 55. I was curious to investigate their motivations for returning to education, and wanted to know what supports, encouragements and challenges they faced from their families, friends and neighbours; and how they felt about this. I sought to explore the women's experiences, views and perspectives of adult education and how it impacted on the 'self'. Being exposed to change, notably a decision to return to education can be an enriching or stressful experience or a combination of these things, and such transitions can significantly shape individual 'lifeworld' perspectives (Schulz, 1972).

My study posits three questions: What Bourdieuian insights into transformative possibilities can be deduced from the critical search for the self? What aspects of the 'self' change, evolve as adult learners return to the field of education? Can we evaluate, to some degree of certainty, if such changes are viewed by the participants themselves as positive, negative, or both? The chapter begins with a portrait of the women before their educational journey began and it also introduces the reader to their age background and educational achievements. The chapter then presents my underpinning ontological and epistemological positions as they support the research framework and design, and assist in the elicitation of appropriate data. The methodology section explains the ethnographic approach undertaken and highlights the relevance and benefits of this method approach. More specifically, this

research study is described as critical ethnography. My goal as a researcher is explored in this chapter, as is my perceived scientific role. The data methods and the methods for analysing the data are also addressed, and the validity, reliability and limitations are also presented. The chapter also reflects upon, and outlines, the ethical approach taken in the study. Beyond ethics that inform a framework design, they incorporate the moral code applied throughout the study. The chapter then concludes with a summary of the methodology chapter and introduces the reader to Chapter 5 (the empirical findings section).

4.2 A Portrait of the Women before their Educational Journey Commenced

Ethnography effectively means painting 'a portrait of people' (Spradley, 1970 p 56). As mentioned in Chapter 1, the six women taking part in the study were all single parents (owing to various life circumstances); almost all were from lower socio-economic and working-class backgrounds. The lack of cultural and economic capital in particular is emphasised throughout the study. One of the common story threads they shared was that many left school early, while none attended further or higher education. All are mothers, parenting alone, with some living on the threshold of poverty. All were in receipt of social welfare payments, widowed and recipients of a single parent allowance. The economic challenges the women faced were constant and, at times, they did not have enough income to sustain a basic standard of living. Returning to education was financially beneficial initially, as they were given an extra weekly allowance on top of their social welfare payment. Though the external motivation for returning to education was monetary, as time progressed the motivation became more internal - the drive came from within. The ages of the women were wide-ranging, (from 30 to 55 years old), allowing for a broad collection of values, beliefs and attitudes pertaining to their adult 'selves' over three and a half decades. Listening to the voices and stories of the women was a critical feature of the study, as this encompassed the women's own views and perspectives on returning to education. I had to develop an understanding of the women's lives and, in cases of human rights, sometimes act and advocate for the group.

4.2.1. Marge's Story

Marge is a 44-year-old single mother who grew up in a working-class family in a small Irish city. There were six siblings in the family, and her father worked as a Docker on

the Quays in the city. At that time, he would have had long spells of unemployment which placed an enormous strain on the family finances. In the late 1980s, Marge's father lost his job, as Dockers were no longer perceived as a necessary part of the city's local workforce. The emphasis in the family was on early school leaving. The children were expected to start bringing in an income as soon as they were old enough to work. Being one of the oldest, Marge was handed the responsibility at a young age to be a wage earner. She attended secondary school until her Intermediate Certificate (Junior Certificate) and her attendance was good. While originally finding secondary school to be positive, and a 'good laugh', she explained that financial pressures at home moved to the forefront, leaving her in a situation where she had to make a decision about school or work. Although she would have loved to have stayed on to do her Leaving Certificate, Marge knew that it was never an option for her. Consequently, she felt a slight resentment towards her parents: "Why was money always a problem?" she queried. She saw other parents who invested in their children's education and who always seemed to support them, but for her it was quite the opposite. Despite her pleadings, her parents thought that she was better off leaving school and getting a job. They did not have any high aspirations for educational achievements, and did not see why Marge should have either. Marge was an intelligent woman who had lots of dreams and she seems to identify herself as poor working class. Her lovely face bore deep lines displaying signs of premature ageing. She was saddled with enormous responsibilities as a young girl, and her tone of voice seemed weary and disillusioned when she spoke of her childhood.

4.2.2 Anne's Story

Anne's story is similar to Marge's. Her father, Michael, left her mother when she was a very young girl. He suffered from alcohol problems which led him to lose a succession of low-paid employment. Although he was not a huge contributor to the family's finances, what little he did bring in was of some support. Anne's mother was an early school leaver herself, and she never had the opportunity to develop a career or have a nice job. She came from a large family of five girls and three boys and little or no emphasis was placed on the potential of the females in the family. When Anne's father left home and abandoned his responsibility as a parent, her mother found a job as a dishwasher in a local hotel. This type of low status employment was a common route for a lot of women at that time when the father left the family home. This was not unique to working-class women, as many women from middle-

class backgrounds would also have had to leave the family home to seek work in more menial positions. One of the reasons for this was the payment of cash in hand, which in those days was a great blessing for people in these difficult circumstances. Alcohol abuse would have been an important contributing factor to men leaving their wives and children, with the threat of destitution an inevitable outcome. Anne demonstrated strong feelings of abandonment and carried these emotions with her all her life. When her father left the family home, he left Anne's mother with the unenviable task of rearing several children herself, and this left an unyielding emotional wound. Anne's experience of parental separation and the transition to a one-parent family had adverse effects on her and her siblings' well-being. These were felt both in the short- and long-term (the transition from a loving two-parent family to a one-parent family) and also had a more enduring effect that persisted into adulthood. Anne's mother went to work every night, and Anne had to bear the responsibility of looking after her brothers and sisters. She found the experience tough and miserable and felt that she spent a lot of time worrying about issues that should not have been forced on her at such a young age. "Where were they going to get money for food?"; "What would they light the fire with?"; "Why couldn't she go on the school trip?" She would often get the blame for anything that went wrong in the house. Sometimes her mother would come home late and tired from work and there would be a big row in the house over some chores that Anne did not have time to do.

4.2.3 Joan's Story

At the age of 50, Joan returned to further education. Separated, with four children in their twenties, she had worked wonders to get herself and her children through some very tough financial times. Like Anne and Marge, Joan was an early school leaver whose circumstances mirrored the familiar life path of separated women. However, unlike Anne and Marge, she had a steady job for many years, working in a local factory making parts for cars until it closed down in the 1990s. She got a nice redundancy package at the time and was glad to be able to stay in the home to rear the children. Joan identified with the upper working class, as she felt that she was a bit better off than some of the other women in the group. Joan's demeanour was positive, and she demonstrated a lot of gratitude. However, she harboured a sense of loss where her education was concerned and always wanted to have done well in school. She would have loved to have been a nurse, but that was a dream that

she felt was long gone. A breast cancer survivor, Joan's passion for mothering and nurturing was evident when she spoke expressively about her role as a mother. Joan felt useless as a woman once her children had finished school and went on to live their own lives. She realised then that she was not qualified to do anything and needed to do something with her life. Her husband had left her for another woman and that impacted hugely on her confidence and how she felt about herself. She attended some counselling sessions to help her deal with the anger she felt about how life had treated her. These sessions were extremely beneficial, and she felt considerably stronger afterwards. She believed that gaining some educational qualifications was essential to improving her life; to giving her the chance to try again.

4.2.4 Rosie's Story

Rosie is a 55-year-old mother of four children who came from a large urban housing estate on the periphery of the city. She was the eldest child of a family of six children, and she identifies with a strong working-class background, as her father worked in a local brewery in the city centre. All the people on the street lived in small houses and had low incomes (all worked in local companies for little money). Rosie remembers moving into the housing estate when she was 10 years old. At the time, her mother was expecting her third child and the family were very excited about moving into the new house as everything looked and smelt new. The house had a front and back garden, and a coal shed in the back. Rosie's mother told her that you had to have two children of different genders to get a three-bedroomed house from the council at that time. Rosie said she could remember with pride the moment she and her sister were getting a brand new bedroom and an upstairs bathroom. Rosie recalled the first house that she lived in, and although she loved it dearly they had no room, and the toilet was in the yard.

> It was nice though 'cos it was slap bang in the city centre and Nanny lived across the road. We all loved the new house but it was miles away from everything even school and the shops. As the years went by my father lost his job and he had terrible problems trying to find another one, as 'he was great at his job in the Brewery's, but he wasn't able to do much else [Rosie]

Rosie left school after her Intermediate Certificate and got a job in the local chipper (fish and chip shop). At 17, she became pregnant and got married. Her husband treated her very badly, and her relationship was in constant turmoil. She left him on numerous occasions but always went back to him. Rosie had three children (two girls and a boy) and was

determined that they should do well, go to school and college and marry when they were more mature. Rosie was an open person and did not have any difficulty expressing her feelings openly. She was warm and friendly and wore her heart on her sleeve.

4.2.5 Vicky's Story

Vicky is a 30-year-old mother of one living with her child. She has intermittent contact with the father of her child. She is a bright and vivacious young lady who is now really coming into her own. Shy as a younger girl, she is now fully aware of her worth and where she can go in her life. Vicky was born and raised in the heart of the city and is third generation Italian on her maternal side, and Irish on her paternal side. Her grandfather was born in Italy and eventually moved to Ireland in the 1950s, where he settled and started his own Italian takeaway business in the city. He met a young Irish girl and married her. Vicky is very proud of her Italian/Irish heritage, and finds it gives her an "extra" edge to her identity. Growing up in the city centre had many advantages as you could walk everywhere. You never needed to use public transport, and there was always something going on.

However, in the 2000s there was a big change in the city when the council encouraged a whole new style of living. Local shops began to close due to mass competition and the opening of large supermarket chains and other English and European franchises. Bigger and bolder housing became part of the whole package and fewer people lived and worked in the city centre, impacting on what was expressed locally as 'foot fall' (or people walking past the shop). Or as her father would say: "SUV fall: people weren't driving cars anymore they were driving buses, and there was no room for pedestrians". It was difficult for customers to stop and buy from the business or park near the premises. This had a knock-on effect, and Vicky's father had to downsize. He turned the business into a takeaway only, removing the seating area and installing a hardwood partition in the hope of renting half the premises to contribute to finances and overheads. Vicky stayed in school and did very well in her Leaving Certificate, and applied to do a business course in 2002. Her parents were very proud of her, and they wanted her to be a success in life. In August 2002, Vicky received an acceptance notification from a college in Dublin and Cork. She screamed with excitement, pride and delight and hugged her parents with total joy and happiness. At that same moment, her mother, Maria, opened a letter that she had received from the local university hospital. Maria

had been diagnosed with a tumour in her large intestine in 1998. She subsequently had it successfully removed, making a superb recovery. Every year she had to have tests to check that everything was okay.

In August 2002, Maria had usual annual tests. The results were due on Wednesday 14th August, 2002. Vicky and her father waited in anticipation as she peeled open the envelope. Her face grew pale: "the tumour is back, and it's bigger", she cried. The three of them stood by the kitchen door and hugged each other in silence. Vicky did not go to college as planned as her mother's health rapidly deteriorated and she became her primary carer. Six months later, Maria died and Vicky stayed in the family home to look after her father and to work in the business. In 2008, she married her childhood sweetheart and the following year gave birth to her daughter Maria Louisa. Vicky saw that education had value and was eager to make something of herself. She felt that this became more apparent when her relationship broke up two years after Maria Louisa was born. She realised then both the importance of being independent and of being a women with education. Her mother always told her that women should be independent and should never rely on anyone.

4.2.6 Karen's Story

Karen is a 38-year-old woman, born and raised in the city by two parents in a close-knit family of eight children. Karen identifies herself as working class, the daughter of a 'true-blooded' Irish man and woman. Although there was an emphasis on education in her family, Karen was a very strong-willed young girl. She was anxious to earn, as many of her friends, who worked in local factories, had money. Karen did her Leaving Certificate in 1993, but the minute it was finished she applied for a job as a shop assistant in a local supermarket. She married at 22 and had three children, two girls and a boy. In January 2010, her husband committed suicide. He had suffered from depression when he lost his job due to the Irish economic downturn in 2008. Karen was devastated and spent a lot of time grief-stricken from the shock of it all. She became very depressed and lost the motivation to do anything. Her life had crumbled before her eyes. When she married Tony in 1999, she imagined that they would be together until their 90s. Then a chance meeting with one of her old teachers from school, whom Karen was very fond of, helped straighten her out. The teacher remembered Karen as being an excellent art student, and she spoke about the importance of creativity and how good

it was for your mental health. These few words lifted Karen's spirits and so in 2012 she decided to give her education another go. She had been unemployed for some time and was determined to get herself back on track with a proper education to improve herself and her employment prospects.

The above stories do not just recount the conversations and narratives of the women, but they also attempt to give meaning, explaining their perspectives and social realities and the differences and similarities between them and other groups of women in education. I have tried to present the stories in a simple and clear manner, capturing some of what was heard, observed and said during the course of the study.

4.3 My Ontological, Epistemological and Paradigmatic Positions

My research design is influenced by how I view reality, specifically by how I believe it to be significantly multiple. Each view or perspective is unique to those concerned. Individual beliefs create a subjective reality of 'what is', and together this shapes and moulds who we are. This is aided by a reworking of our senses, perspectives and experiences (Crotty, 1998, p.10; Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 110). The relationship between the 'knower' and what is 'known' is established, and this knowledge (or the participants' way of knowing) was critical to formulating my own research approach (Mertens, 2010, p.32). I felt it necessary to avoid a linear path of discovery and instead took a cyclical approach to the design process. How I thought and how I valued had to be reflected upon (as far as possible), in order for me to find new ways of understanding the research inquiry. Crotty (1998) suggests that an interrelationship exists between the theoretical stances adopted by the researcher and the methodology and methods used, and it is essential to have a curious mind, leading us to examine fields that may be very unfamiliar to us.

My own view on knowledge, or my epistemological position, is referenced by how we learn through experience, and how we come to know things intrinsically in logical structures. Such a position appreciates the importance of diverse contexts, e.g. class, gender and environment. We all have the power to change contexts (albeit in a limited way). I was interested in how 'self' changes and can be amended. Therefore, the transformative paradigm appeared as a good fit. It is particularly useful for addressing change processes: for challenging inequality and injustice in adult education. From my study, I found that reality is

shaped by social, political, cultural, economic and racial ideas (Mertens, 2010, p.26). Freire (1970) challenges us to be critically conscious of our understanding of reality, to be 'authentic' human beings, and he suggests that we examine our consciousness against the dominant ideologies of culture, life, and education (Freire 1970a, p. 17). As a facilitator of education and a researcher, I could not and cannot separate the two in my own journey of 'self'. I strive to develop my ability to make personal choices and to challenge the teachings of others and understand what informs them. Cox (1981, p.128) states:

> All theories have a perspective. Perspectives derive from a position in time and space, specifically social and political time and space. (…) There is (…) no such thing as theory in itself, divorced from a standpoint in time and space.

I use qualitative methods to gather the multiple perspectives at each stage of the research process, as this provides me with the opportunity to address the complexities of the study and to advance a base for social change. I am 'familiar' with the field of adult education and can parallel my own learning journey with that of the women in the study. There is a familiarity to be had from this study- certainly informing a deeper understanding of my 'self' throughout the research journey. Having had an interrupted second- level education, and not having attended college until adulthood, I had an affinity with the women – their educational journey was similar to my own. By knowing what I now know, I could empathise with them. This helped me to pose open-ended questions that would elicit a rich history of themselves. My reality is composed of what I experienced personally, or what Bourdieu terms habitus, i.e. how social and cultural messages (both actual and symbolic) shape my thoughts and actions (O' Brien and O Fathaigh, 2007, p.65). I wondered if this habitus compared with that of the women in the study. The transformative paradigm provided me with a philosophical framework. I felt it would give me a solid theoretical structure to work with. I also felt that my research area was culturally complex and challenged the status quo. This transformative, paradigm would give me the conceptual tools and conscious awareness to see and observe positions of power and exclusion in our educational setting. Furthermore, I sensed that issues surrounding the understanding of the women and building trust with them were paramount in the research process (Mertens, 2010).

> Social reality exists in things and in minds, in fields and in habitus, outside and inside social agents. And when habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product, it is like a 'fish in water': it does not feel the weight of the water, and it takes the world about itself for granted. (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 127)

I wanted to know, to the best of my ability how the women felt about their educational journey as adult learners. As they were not 'products' of the 'natural' social world of education, (i.e., 'fish in water') recording their journeys was important to me. I was interested in finding out if they felt more like 'fish out of water'. I felt that the most fitting way to ascertain this was to immerse myself in the inquiry and use qualitative research. More specifically a critical ethnography approach was chosen. This approach is contextual and reflexive as it emphasises the importance of power, inequality and exclusion in understanding their real life experiences.

4.3.1 Critical Ethnography

Ethnography is central to the study of human behaviour in the social context in which it takes place. I employ this approach as it is holistic; it allows me the opportunity to 'immerse [myself] in the day-to-day lives' of the women in the group (Robson, 2002, p.186, p.187). Acting and thinking, practice and theory are linked in a continuous process of critical reflection and transformation (Mertens, 2010, p.7). What I love about ethnography as a methodology is that it is used in real situations which are not contrived. Its approach is holistic, by its very nature it can yield surprising results (Mertens, 2010). Robson (2002, pp. 186-187) states that:

> Using ethnography is very much a question of general style rather than following a specific prescription about procedure … it's a matter of getting out into the field.

My preferred learning style is reflexive: 'people watching' is something I thoroughly enjoy. By observing people, I gain knowledge. I see knowledge as a gift that 'emerges only through invention and reinvention, through the restless, impatient, continuing hopeful inquiry men pursue [sic] in the world, and with each other' (Freire, 1974, p. 53). Knowledge is indeed power (Freire, 1993). It has guided me and armed me to identify, name, question, and to dig deeper into the layers of complexity of the 'self' of the women I studied. It certainly unsettles: what I think I know or the existing state of affairs (Mertens, 2010). I believe too that it is tacit or implicit knowledge from my own lived experiences that prompted me to realise that 'we can know more than we can tell' (Polanyi, 1967, p.4). In retrospect, reflecting on the various choices of methodology gave me the opportunity to find a fitting approach which better serves to understand the phenomenon of the 'self' in a very real world context. The mental mechanisms of these frames assisted me to make sense of the women's new

world of adult education. The reciprocal link between me as a researcher and the women in the study sustained me in defining and focusing the research (Mertens, 2009). As an emerging ethnographer, I needed to unshackle myself from my comfort, and not depend fully on pen and paper, but instead, go into the adult education setting and immerse myself in the phenomenon of the 'self'. Langham, (1981, p.174) states that you:

> must go out into the villages, and see the natives at work in gardens, on the beach, in the jungle; [you] must sail with them to distant sandbanks and to foreign tribes, and observe them in fishing, trading, and ceremonial overseas expeditions.

One of the distinguishing features of ethnographic research, including the educational lessons from anthropology, is participant observation. I found this to be a useful way to check for non-verbal communication of feelings, and it assisted me in understanding how the women connected with each other; how they spent time on different learning activities (Mertens, 2010). It was an excellent tool for checking language and specifically colloquial terms used by the women in the interviews; it supported me too as the researcher to observe and be aware of the quieter more timid women in the study (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p.8). As an emerging ethnographer, I had to pay thoughtful consideration to the ways in which language was expressed and used within the participants' culture, and realise that the use of vernacular terms was a fundamental part of their dialogue in their stories (Denzin, 2001; 2003). My interest in their social world helped to focus on features that are unique, individual and qualitative (Crotty, 1998, p. 68).

The 'unassuming' nature (it is simple and lacks arrogance) of ethnography takes into account the social and psychological intricacies which can affect the 'self' and self-abilities of individuals. It is non-invasive and was practiced by early anthropologists as a form of fieldwork. I 'lived' in the social world of the adult learner in a limited way throughout the research context, from September 2012 to August 2014. The setting was on the outskirts of the city in a purpose-built structure to accommodate three groups of adult learners. I worked with the women three days a week from 9 am to 3.30 pm. The facilities were initially destitute but improved over the two-year period. A lot of the data was collected during the fieldwork, and multiple viewpoints were composed, value-laden with personal experiences and local knowledge.

As mentioned earlier, Bourdieu (1980) is central to my thesis. He practised anthropology in his early career and returned to it again in his later work. Anthropology is a scientific discipline; it is self-reflective and focuses on the evolution and diversity of humans and how they adopt and adapt in time and space. Ethnography emerges from anthropology: it was taken to gather information and to document the lives, societies, and cultures of people (Mertens, 2010). Its approach is similar to that taken by field biologists or primatologists, except it studies *human* language, expression, emotions and perceptions. Ethnography stands apart from other methodologies, as it places great importance on culture and the revelation of what happens in that culture (Boas, 1938). It also shows people in sites of culture and sites of culture 'in' people. According to Erikson (1972, p.10), ethnography is an inquiry-guided research approach that is guided by a point of view; what 'gets done' in the setting is the inquiry. Observing and participating in this study allowed me to ask questions relating to my 'self'. Its qualitative approach looks at 'a slice of life' through observation, communication, life history narratives, descriptions of events, and other verbal reports which are all valid primary methods for learning about the culture of 'self' of the women in this study (Mertens, 2010). Bourdieu contends that it is almost impossible to be truly objective when conducting research because we are intricately linked to our surroundings. We are products of the system we are attempting to evaluate. We see things through our own subjectivity, and our perspective is skewered through what we already have become: 'We don't see things as they are; we see them as we are' (Nin, 1961, p.124).

When conducting this study, I found that societal structures of oppression were operating within the adult learning setting and that this culture was reinforced by forms of hierarchical power and dominance. As an emerging ethnographer, I struggled with the issues of injustice that became more and more apparent during the observations and discussions, and began to turn from a position of 'what is' to one that imagined 'what could be' (Carspecken, 1996; Denzin, 2001; Noblit, Flores, & Murillo, 2004; Thomas, 1993). I felt I had to rely on critical theory more than I had anticipated, in order to interpret and assist in illuminating the social actions of the women. Critical ethnography is the doing of 'critical theory' in ethnographic work – it is classed as conventional ethnography with a political purpose (Thomas, 1993). It is the 'doing' or the 'performance' of critical theory that disrupts the status quo, and this is also consistent with Freire's notion of critical theory in action, or praxis (Madison, 2005, p. 5; Freire, 1975). Thomas (1993, p.34) believed that when using critical

ethnography you begin with "a view of what there is to know, an ontology, that furnishes a set of images and metaphors, in which various forms of social oppression constitute what is to know". The central and critical position I have taken in this study is one of observing and interpreting relationships and power in adult education. My own personal biography has assisted me in attempting to understand this cultural complexity (Torres, 1998b).

I wanted to know and uncover deeper social, historical and political meanings that reinforce the marginalisation that most of the women in the study felt. I had to understand and explain how power interests mediated in these relations; to go below surface level meaning to expose how "bodies of ideas, norms and ideologies create meanings for constructing social subjects and create concepts like gender, race and student" (Thomas, 1993, p. 34). Critical ethnography examines how dominant cultures impose their ideals and ideologies on cultures to maintain control of people and power, making life tougher and harder than necessary (Thomas, 1993, p. 33; Bourdieu, 1980). Now as an emerging critical ethnographer, I was committed to the fieldwork, which I believe became the foundation for my inquiry (Freire, 1972). It is here 'on the ground' of the unfamiliar that I encountered such social conditions, and issues of unfairness (Thomas, 1993). It was then that I realised that I needed to go beneath the surface and become more critical (Thomas, 1993). I gathered and analysed the stories from the women, and this helped me to identify the relevant insights of their experiences. I do not accept that perception is the truth, as I believe the truth is embedded in every individual; it is when you live 'within' the context of the study that you begin to differentiate the reality and the participants' experiences. I believe that when overpowering social constructs and the interests they represent are studied and evaluated, a developed awareness emerges. It is then that transformation, and the freeing of hope can be achieved in the face of such a restrictive society (ethnography emancipation) (Thomas, 1993, p.4). When a researcher does not see the optimum conditions of advancement in society for a particular group, I believe it is morally incumbent on him/her to make a particular contribution; to investigating key causes for this, and to reveal responses that could lead to a situation of greater freedom and equity for that group:

> Conventional ethnographers study cultures for the purpose of describing it; Critical
> ethnographers do so to change it. (Thomas, 1993, p. 4)

The notion of change is problematised in this research. Change is not always 'for the good', as some lecturers may have untimely expectations for their students to perform certain academic standards, or perhaps the students may feel overwhelmed and decide that college is not for them. Some of these themes frequently emerge in adult education. In Chapter 2, I spoke about the concept of transformative learning in adult education, I believe it supports critical consciousness and conscious awareness in the learners and gives 'voice' and 'choice' to problematise and accept life choices (Friere, 1972). In the field of education, critical ethnography resulted in the merging of individual epistemology and social theory. The epistemological movement was the outcome of a shift in research paradigms within the field of education that reflected an attempt to 'break out of the conceptual cul-de-sac of quantitative methods' (Rist, 1980, p. 8). Critical ethnography is an approach that thinks about and observes the relationships between knowledge, society, and political action. Interpretive ethnographers focus mainly on the description of the interviews and observations and offer a powerful tool to support, review and evaluate a culture (Thomas, 1993, p. vii). As an extension of ethnography, critical ethnography also owes a great debt to anthropology and sociology, disciplines which are influenced by phenomenology, structuralism, semiotics and hermeneutics (Thomas, 1993). Transformation is key to critical thought and critical consciousness, and it is central to the social world we live in (Linklater, 1998). The dominant and hierarchical powers within adult education settings could create pressure on the learners to perform and act in certain ways, and the advantage of the critical approach to my investigation is that it highlights both empowering, and disempowering experiences lived and felt by the women in their adult education experiences. The literature states that critical inquiry goes beyond simply seeking to understand a culture: ethnography 'unmasks hegemony and address[es] oppressive forces', calling for societal transformation (Crotty, 1998, p. 12). Critical ethnographers, therefore, attempt to uncover invisible hegemonic practices that perpetuate injustices and societal inequities (Carspecken, 1996). In Chapter 1, it was noted that the women vocalised their fears of the language used in adult education and also the accent of the tutors. They were concerned with 'not being good enough' and coming from 'the wrong side of the city'. From my subjective perspective, I believe that these 'self' concerns widen the gap between the knowledge holder and knowledge receiver (not that I want to reduce education to a series of input -output of learning events). Going beneath the

surface and delving into the root causes of inequality creates emancipation for both educational partners.

4.3.2 Critical Ethnographic Case Studies

I use case studies in this research, as I feel they can assist me in gaining valuable information about the women in the study and the context within which to understand it. Case studies are data gathering instruments tailored to individuals. They allow me to examine in detail the complex and critical characteristics of the subjects in the investigation, as well as to support me when trying to establish reliability in the findings. As a woman and an emerging ethnographer working with other women, was a shared experience in itself, and this emphasized that the 'self' journey happens with others. The social 'self' means that there can never be a fully autonomous one. Yin (1984) states, that a case study research method is an experiential inquiry that explores a present-day phenomenon within its real-life context. This occurs when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used (Yin, 1984, p. 23). A case study is described as an in-depth study of a particular situation. Rather than using quantitative research (using statistics and surveys) this is a method that is flexible enough to introduce new and surprising results (Yin, 2003). Another feature of the case study is that it gives me the opportunity to focus on 'self' as a key topic, and it assisted me to choose the methods that were most appropriate to gather the data (Yin, 2003). However, there are no strict sets of guidelines in a case study. I had to be therefore aware that the survey was focused and concise at all times. Otherwise, I could have ended up with a lot of irrelevant information. Case study descriptions try to recreate a direct experience for the reader. Their purpose is to describe the setting and provide the study with rich and vivid details of the place and the people; to facilitate new meaning and understanding of the problem (Merriam, 2001; Mertens, 2010). As a researcher;

> I have accepted that it is right to say that the condition of generating descriptions of social activity is able in principle to participate in it. It involves "mutual knowledge", shared by observer and participants whose action constitutes and reconstitutes the social world. (Giddens, 1982, p. 15)

My immersion in the study helped and assisted me to empathise with the real-life story accounts of the women as their journey reflects much of my own. Shadowing the women allowed access to the group as well as the opportunity to probe using a critical lens the complex human issues the women experienced.

4.3.3 My Role as a Researcher

Reflecting upon my position as a researcher was vital because it compelled me to acknowledge my own knowledge, power, biases and privileges. I had to be critical of the power structures that influenced the women in the study too. I had experienced strong authority along my own educational journey, and this heightened my awareness of theirs. A concern for positionality is sometimes understood as 'reflexive ethnography': it is a 'turning back' on ourselves (O' Sullivan, 2008; Davis, 1999, p.4, p.6). When we turn back, we are accountable for own research paradigms, our own positions of authority, and our own moral responsibility relative to representation and interpretation. I had to keep alert, as far as possible, to explore (where possible) any concerns that arose, and at the same time, I had to probe for meaning in their fears, for example, and continually seek out the causes and the depth of those fears. I had to listen and observe for underlying inconsistencies in words and actions and observe constraints caused by internal and external factors in the study. I began to ask myself: 'what am I going to do with the research and who will ultimately benefit?'; 'Who gave me the authority to make claims about where I have been; and 'how will my work make a difference for these women's lives?' (Madison, 2005, p. 8). Participant observation is the main method of data collection used in critical ethnography, and knowing this encouraged me to look carefully at Le Compte (1999) and reflect on the process that he describes. I realised that I needed to identify and monitor relationships with the women in the study:

> to help me to get the feel for how things are organised and prioritised, how people interrelate, and what are the cultural parameters; to show [me] what the cultural members deem to be important in manners, leadership, politics, social interaction, and taboos; to help me become known to the cultural members, thereby easing facilitation of the research process; and to provide [me] with a source of questions to be addressed by participants. (Le Compte, 1999, p.91)

I had to make every effort to minimise my 'felt presence' in the study, as an 'insider' also I wanted to remain an 'outsider' and a non-participant in the sense of avoiding any disruptions and intrusions when observing with the women. On the other hand, as well as being an 'outsider', I had to take on the role of a participant 'insider', which provided me with a means of conducting honest unobtrusive observations (Jorgensen, 2014, p.7). Participant observation gave me a unique access as an 'insider' to the subjective meanings, interactions and structures the women experienced. A key feature of critical ethnography involves prolonged direct contact with the six women in the group in an effort to look for

wholesome, holistic explanations of the 'self' in an adult education setting. The women's voices are the real reservoirs of knowledge that I wish to tap into and my role as a researcher is to capture their voices through verbal and nonverbal dialogues. I needed to make those voices heard, to represent and unravel the layered meanings of their words and put those meanings in a written form a complex end-product that requires coherence and readability (Boyle, 1994; Muecke, 1994).

As noted in Chapter 1, the aim of the research was to investigate the 'self' of the six women (parenting alone who returned to adult education), and examine what learning participation meant to them and if it had positive or negative effects on the 'self'. The purpose of my study was to clarify what shapes the 'self' in adult education what influence habitus plays on the 'self' from a historical, social, economic, and political stance (Bourdieu, 1980). My main goal was to gather the women's stories, examine their narratives and uncover the patterns that repeated. My own self is tested through engaging with the women throughout the study. As I embraced their stories, I found strong parallels that reoccurred for me. Habitus (Bourdieu, 1980) was a critical theme throughout the study (see Chapter 3). I was able to categorise some of the concepts that emerged from my findings with labels that other researchers had coined to explain similar phenomena. Themes such as class, gender, psychology and culture became entangled, and while they had separate discussions/ analyses, I decided to adapt and adopt Bourdieu's (1980) concept of habitus and weave it with other important themes. Society is a multi-dimensional space, and Bourdieu categorised each space into fields. For this piece of research, the field I focused on was the field of adult education (Bourdieu, 1980), but this educational field connects with other social fields which are explored in detail in Chapter 3.

As a researcher, my inclination was to enter this field: to get to know the women as people with real lives looking for resolutions. I was attracted by the challenge of finding out if education is the great 'remedy' in their lives. Did it give them hope for a better future? How did they view themselves now? Is education a positive experience, feeling? How did others relate to them as they continued on this new journey? By comparing their past to their present, many positives did emerge, but there were also issues of injustice that concerned me. Their own home circumstances could often dictate if or when they could continue on this new educational journey. The women in the study were the main carers in their households, both

to children and older adult parents. I had to rely heavily on participant observation to learn about this familial culture, as this is the medium of communication by which people acquire, reproduce, or transmit most of their cultural knowledge. By listening to the women's stories, their 'lived' experiences, their social realities and also the issues they raised concerning social injustice, exclusion and borderline poverty, I was able to put together key elements that shaped the 'bigger' picture of their lives.

Given the critical *issues* that arose from the *observations*, I realised that my role had progressed from using Bourdieuian insights to digging deeper into them to illicit their various meanings and political implications. Instead of merely walking with the women and narrating their experiences, I felt it necessary to take a more critical approach to uncover the 'rough ground' and the political issues that began to surface over time (Carspecken, 1996). I needed to acquire a deeper understanding of their experiences and of their habitus roots (Bourdieu, 1980). I also felt it necessary to look back at the underlying critical theories discussed in Chapter 2, and to put these theories to good use and position them into action (Thomas, 1993).

4.4 Ethical Issues Concerning the Research Process

> Ethics in research should be an integral part of the research planning and implementation process, not viewed as an afterthought or a burden. (Mertens, 2010, p.12)

As a student researcher, I had to be cognizant of formal ethical issues. Before the study began, I made an application to the Board of Ethics in UCC to begin my study, and approval was granted (see Appendix 1). Before the women enrolled for the study, they completed a consent form. I now realise the importance of this beyond its form filling function. It informed the women of their voluntary involvement: of the possible risks involved; the potential harm to them; the benefits, their rights; the purpose of the study; and the length of time the study involved. The form provided all the information using simple language that was easily understood by everyone participating in the research (see Appendix 2). Ethics is not just about research protocol. In the critical tradition, it is a through point – a means by which to rationalise the research, guide my position as a researcher with the women in the study group and, ultimately, seek to use the research to inform action and facilitate change (Mertens, 2010). This is the significant and noble task that lies at the heart of critical

ethnography. This approach is not without its challenges, dilemmas and concerns for the researcher herself. I reflect on the subjective nature of the inquiry in a personal reflective piece, below. Critical ethnography begins with an ethical responsibility to address processes of unfairness or injustice within a particular lived domain.

> By 'ethical responsibility', I mean a compelling sense of duty and commitment based on moral principles of human freedom and well-being, and hence a compassion for the suffering of living beings. The conditions of existence within a particular context are not as they could be for specific subjects: as a result, the researcher feels a moral obligation to make a contribution towards changing those conditions towards greater freedom and equity (Madison, 2005, p. 5).

Mishler (1979) states that the researcher is: "intertwined with the phenomenon which does not have objective characteristics independent of the observer's perspective and method" (p. 10). From my experience, I realised that the ethnographic approach was human, holistic and subjective, as it engaged in the lives of the women in the study; and the critical ethnographic approach was about subjectively engaging and citing change with the women in their lives. Van Maanen (1995) asserts that the task of the ethnographer is not to determine the 'truth' but to reveal the multiple truths apparent in others' lives (p. 6). A reflexive and critical ethnography was applicable to this research study. As stated earlier, I too was once like the women in my research, since I identified with their struggles, doubts and fears. Some may argue that my involvement with them undermines the objectivity of the research, but I would disagree. I believe that my sharing of their journeys enabled me to gain access to their experiences, and it enabled them to be more expansive with their contributions and to share their innermost thoughts, as far as possible. Having gained the trust of the women (e.g. by means of our shared inheritance), I could relate to them when they spoke about their life events and how their upbringing had influenced them. I felt myself crossing over and back between subjective and objective positions, and as I reflected on these overlaps, I realised that I had to constantly reassure the women of their privacy, anonymity and confidentiality (Sieber, 1992, p. 52).

As a researcher, I had a moral obligation to the women with respect to their wishes and, therefore, the basic stance for me to adopt as the researcher was to take precautions to ensure anonymity (Mertens, 2010). Earlier I spoke of the values that are essential in research, e.g. trust, accountability, mutual respect, and fairness, and also keeping to my promises and agreements, as well as striving for consistency of thought and action. I also spoke of my

position as an emerging ethnographer and having to have a constant awareness of my own experiences, prejudices, and culture, and how this could interject occasionally and possibly bias the study. I was sensitive I hope to safeguard the stories and to avoid any intrusion or undue influence on the study.

4.5 Research Methods

> I might say: if the place I want to get to could only be reached by a ladder, I would give up trying to get there. For the place, I really have to get to is a place I must already be at now. Anything I might reach by climbing a ladder does not interest me (Wittgenstein, 2000, p. 382).

According to theory and my own experience as an emerging ethnographer, ethnography gives a descriptive account of what is 'lived' and understood as a culture. Culture is a circumstantial practice that is ongoing, subtle and is in constant modification and should be concerned with social behaviour outside as well as inside the site of research (Wolcott, 1975, pp. 24-25; Denzin 1971, p. 58). Van Maanen (1982) reminds us that ethnography is not identified by the methods it employs, but rather by its aims, "to discover and disclose socially acquired and shared understandings necessary to be a member of a specified social unit" (p. 103). Ethnography acts as a portrayal of a culture over a long period of time, and it develops an intimate relationship with the study. Its qualitative approach is interested in the 'what and why?' of the research and it seeks to understand and define the imagery it captures to describe the happenings and the stories that emerge throughout the study (Faulkner 1982, p. 32).

4.5.1 Participant Observation

The first and most valuable element of my data collection was my involvement in the research as a participant (Cooley, 1930; 1969; Znaniecki, 1934, pp. 157-167). The observations were recorded daily in my diary and all the activities in the classroom setting were written up. This gave me the opportunity to reflect on the unique experiences of the women in the study. When and where possible, I entered short notes in my diary on issues that arose and subjects that were touched on and other matters that came up during the research. To illustrate this here is an excerpt from my first observation:

> I met the women for the first time today. Some of them appeared very relaxed; others looked a little fearful, anxious and nervous. I must admit I felt slightly nervous myself

(new group new year!) It is scary and fearful to come truly to know yourself or is this indeed possible? Another challenge. This year was different, though; there were no males in the group. It was all women; all parenting alone. I hadn't experienced a class like this since the early 2000s, shortly after the Irish government introduced the white paper on Adult Education. At that time, there was a huge surge to create social inclusion in education and training. However, the effect was not what had been intended. Now almost 10 years later I stood with a group of women, and I questioned had we evolved as a society? I had seen the hardships women faced with little second level education and the impact this had on their independence and job choice … I discerned that some of the women looked at me in a peculiar way and were wary of me. All their lovely faces looked older than their chronological years would suggest, some had more lines than others, and some seemed drawn and pale. I found myself grieving inside for another cohort of women struggling for identity in Irish society. I found myself looking at the women and locating features that I perceive relevant to insecurity and lack of confidence and the topographies that I believe support hardship. I began to ask what motivated these women to return to education. I was curious about their reasons and timing for returning. I wanted to find out about challenges they faced on their return and how they felt about themselves as women. Was I using these women as data sources or was I supporting them to seek emancipation and become transformative adult learners? (Yelverton-Halpin, Journal Extract, 26 September 2012)

Stories can reveal a wealth of information. Some groups in society are more privileged than others, and those with more capital and power can apply a coercive force over other groups. The forces of habitus and field are subtle. Each position within the field of practice is determined by the person's habitus, their past experience, skills, education, social class and upbringing all have their influences. When the habitus of an individual matches the social field (and in this study the field of education is addressed), everything runs smoothly and instinctually, however, the opposite occurs when the field of play is unfamiliar to the agent (Bourdieu, 1994, p.179). Because of this I had to be constantly aware of what I observed and wrote down. I had to ensure that I presented my observations as objectively as possible, yet I found I was very much subjectively involved in the research and had to be constantly aware of my views and self-interests. After gathering a range of observations, I further described and analysed them, especially in light of theoretical concepts such as habitus which I have spoken about earlier in this chapter and in depth in Chapter 3.

As borne out of the literature, participant observation is historically associated with anthropology but is now used as a tool for gathering data in a multiplicity of qualitative research methods, and over a shorter timeframe (Bell, 2001, p.157). Anthropologists went out into the field for years at a time to work with people in communities and this approach is in contrast to more current trends in the anthropological field (Tyler 1985; 1986; Clifford 1986[a], 1986b; 1988; Crapanzo, 1986; Van Maanen 1982; 1988; Atkinson 1992; Ashmore 1989). Ethnographers acknowledge their subjectivity in research, as well as the diverse nature

of their interpretive observations. In critical ethnography, the idea of using subjectivity in its texts enhances the research (Smith, 1978; Olesen, 1994). Ethnographers also acknowledge that their own predisposition in the transcript, and they highlight that they have tested this to make an authentic statement on the subject of the enquiry (Coffey et al., 1996, p. 4.2). The cyclical process of analysis provided me with a way to examine the culture of 'self' from the inside out. This type of 'thick description' gave me the opportunity to understand the phenomenon (Geertz, 1973, p.6). Participant observation allowed me to check the definitions and terms that the women used when speaking; discern the events that some of the women may have been unable or unwilling to share; and be sensitive to, and observe, situations described in interviews. As stated before, I spent three days a week in class with the women. I came to know them personally during this time, and I could see how their habitus had limited their expectations of sharing worlds of privilege and achievement. What they had come to accept (as part of their cultural capital) was not helping them advance in the new culture of education. In other words, Bourdieu (1990) would describe this as 'the subjective expectation of the objective probabilities' (Jenkins, 2002, p. 28). In other words, what we have experienced formativiely through habitus is what is meant to be. It is an acceptance of the ceiling of our expectations of 'self'. This is key psychosocial positioning and a way of mediating habitus (Jenkins, 2002, pp, 27-29). The fear and challenge of education was on the one hand uplifting, but on the other was challenging their conventional views of themselves. Would they be able for it? How could they cope financially? What would other people think of them?

The questions were illuminating as I could see that although the women retorted in a positive light, their body language and tone of voice at times contradicted their responses. As an emerging critical ethnographer, I attempted to step into their shoes, to question reality from their perspective. I too would have questioned my own ability on my own introduction to adult education and also felt the insecurities the women felt. I recorded a detailed account of everything I saw and heard in my journal since, according to Spradley (1980), the second tool in ethnographical research is pen and paper (p.284). I adapted multiple roles to move back and forth between facilitator, listener, observer, reporter and synthesizer. Robson (2002) notes that moving back and forth when gathering and analyzing data is the art and science of interpretation, and this nonlinear approach is considered 'commonsense' – indeed, it is a good device when trying to understand the complex (pp.193-196). Critical ethnography is a

continuous process of doing, thinking and reflecting, and its cyclical approach to research is holistic and humanistic. One of my tasks as an emerging critical ethnographer was to speak to others on behalf of the women in the study as a method of empowering the women. I also believe that having this support and backup encourages the women to be more confident in expressing their opinions. Feeling their opinions are valued frees them to contribute more and gives power to their voices. A further task was to invoke knowledge and action for social change:

> Critical ethnographers celebrate their normative and political positions as a means of invoking social consciousness and societal change they use their work to aid emancipatory goals or to negate the repressive influences that lead to unnecessary social domination of all groups. (Thomas, 1993, p. 4)

The reflexive nature of critical ethnography is the act and process of thinking about one's own values and beliefs which are similar to the features of interpretive ethnography:

> Critical ethnography refers to a reflective process of choosing between conceptual alternatives and making value-laden judgments of meaning and method to challenge research, policy, and other forms of human activity. (O' Maolchatha, 1989, p. 147)

The observations were made two days a week from September 2012 to June 2014, during class activities, coffee breaks, lunch and cigarette breaks, and they prompted further conversations and activities at successive interviews. The observations lasted on average for two hours at a time, but this could change due to the women's various family responsibilities and childcare functions (especially during their children's school holidays). In 2012/2013, the women attended college from 9.30 am to 2.30 pm to gain a FETAC level 4 accreditation, and the observations were made between 10.30 am and 1.30 pm (my class time with them). In Year 2 (2013/2014), the women had longer class contact time and the observation times varied from morning to afternoon, which also created a very different dynamic. The classroom setting was informal, and the women soon felt comfortable. The relaxed environment assisted me in gaining rich and deep information from the interview responses. The women shared in-depth stories and critical events in their lives in relation to where they came from to being parents, their relationships with their siblings, partners and school. Their life stories were filled with traces of melancholy.

4.5.2 Semi-structured Focused Interviews

The second method of data collection was an ethnographic style interview which is also termed a 'long interview'. This means that it is not an interview that takes a long time, but one that incorporates participant observation (McCracken, 1988 cited in Robson, 2002, p.281). This study employed four qualitative data methods to answer the guiding questions already highlighted. The semi-structured interviews were conducted intermittently, as part of the general observation schedule. I felt that each method worked hand in hand between interviews, field observations, notes and journal writing. The interviews were conducted at key intervals in the study. For example, the women chose to be interviewed when the study began; midway through Year 1; and on completion of Year 1. This pattern was repeated again in Year 2 of the study, thus allowing the women a certain freedom of choice, and also giving them the confidence to participate and to have some ownership of their being recorded voices. The stories were captured using field notes, a recorder, and extra notes were entered in my research journal. The interviews were later transcribed and kept in a safe file. The questions were designed to encourage and probe the women's personal experiences during their time in adult education (see Appendix 6, 7 and 8, proposed Interview schedule and questions).

The first interview was held one week after meeting the women in September 2012, and subsequently, after the 'fear in a box' activity (see Chapter 1). The agenda was to elaborate and talk about the issues and fears that arose out of the activity. As mentioned earlier, the women completed an informed consent to agree to be interviewed as part of the research process. I felt that this approach gave the women the power to contribute or not. I felt that the interviews were an opportunity for the women to tell their stories and experiences with a sense of pride, even emancipation, and to share and celebrate who they are and what was their contribution to humanity. Each interview was tailored to the specific periods of time when the interviews were held, and the questions were based on previous responses from previous interviews. A 'funnelled' 'deepening' approach was used, consistent with critical ethnographic approaches (Mertens, 2010). Earlier in the study, I highlighted that social realities are created and shaped by the social, political, cultural, economic, and racial/ethnic systems of values that are prominent. This indicates that power and privilege can also become a reality in a research context. I had to be continually aware of what could be perceived to be

my own position of power and influence throughout the study. The women decided democratically that the interviews should last between 45 minutes to an hour, and they were happy to be interviewed in the adult education setting as they felt the environment was casual, and they felt relaxed. The methods of data collection supported me to represent the women in the study as honestly and accurately as possible. By being compassionate and driven to change a system, I was aware my thinking could potentially become skewed, but I believed that we could keep the resulting data as truthfully intact as possible when we analysed it against reality. And as stated earlier, Thomas reminds us that critical ethnography is a reflective process – a procedure that observes human activity without making judgements (Thomas, 1993, p.4). For many, translating how they came to know and behave in a certain manner is difficult to articulate because imitation is often a nonverbal influence. Nonetheless, the transformative paradigm encompasses issues of equality and receptiveness by determining and identifying diversity, discrimination and oppression in the world, and in the research (Mertens, 2010). It is the habit of practising habitus that is learnt through observation and imitation of the cultural practices of life (Bourdieu, 1980). It was the experience of limited prospects and opportunities that had an in-built inheritance for the women and for them to discover this through the interviews helped them to form a varied and more in-depth view of their own culture (Van Maanen, 1995, p. 6; Denzin, 1997).

4.5.3 Field Notes

The third method of data collection I used was field notes as it was an opportunity to record and take extra notes that would enrich the findings. It was also a chance to compare and contrast the data results. Writing the field notes was an opportunity to represent a condensed version of what actually transpired throughout the interviews and observations. It acted as an extra support to look for the familiar and unfamiliar patterns of behaviour, words, phrases and body language the women used. I was also aware that I can only write what is humanly possible and it was vital to expand on my notes after each observation and interview. To assist me with this I adapted Spradley's (1980) 'ethnography interview record' template to suit this study and the outline was very helpful particularly when I attempted to flesh out my field notes (see Appendix 7). Spradley (1980) informs us that using field notes is essential in the development of quality analysis. They support ethnographers to attempt as far as possible to interpret the data which may otherwise be lost. The field notes also helped in

affirming what was observed and recorded throughout the interviews and observations (pp., 68, 69). Spradley (1980) also reminds us that an ethnographer should always keep a journal.

4.5.4 My Reflective Research Journal

The fourth research method in the study was a reflective research journal, which gave me the chance to reflect daily on the following questions:

- What did I learn?
- What did I see?
- What did I hear?
- What critical incidents occurred during today?
- What were my thoughts and feelings on these issues?

Writing the information daily in the journal gave me the opportunity to step back, dig deeper into my 'self' and draw parallels with the women's selves, and examine my own values and beliefs, and consolidate my thoughts in a critically reflective manner. I was mindful that the role of the critical ethnographer "is to make inferences about what people know by listening carefully to what they say [and] by observing their behaviour" (Spradley, 1980, p.11). This is why ethnographers must participate as well as observe. As Spradley (1980, p.51) maintains: "participation allows you to experience activities directly, to get the feel of what events are like, and to record your own perceptions". The research journal prompted me, as the researcher, to write and reflect on my experiences and observations:

> Reflecting on my experiences as a tutor, facilitator, researcher and a woman, and all my members are women, I feel I am at times more subjectively involved in the study than I had originally anticipated. I have issues, concerns and opinions about stepping inside/outside the role of researcher, tutor/facilitator and observer. I have desires at times to become emotionally involved with the women's stories as some of them trigger off sensitive memories from my own 'lived' experience of life. Stepping back and looking at the stories from an objective view helps me, to assess and discover the hidden meanings in the narratives; it also helps me to interpret the information that is concentrated on the research questions and what is not. The journal is my objective data gathering tool and using it daily is my prop. Using Bourdieu's lens of habitus, field and capital is like a magnet that prevents me from getting out of focus, and frequently writing helps me to decipher my thoughts and extract the key and critical information that comes to the surface of each observation and interview. (Yelverton-Halpin, Journal Extract, 18 February 2013).

4.6 Data and Analysis

The Critical Ethnographic Cycle; I perceive the critical ethnographical cycle like this:
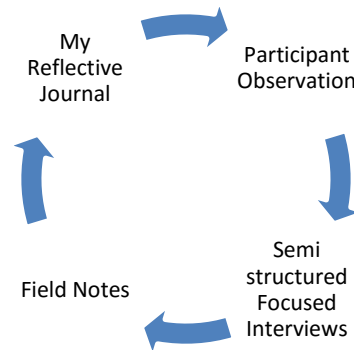
Figure 9: Critical Ethnography as a Cyclical Process (Four Methods) [Yelverton-Halpin 2014]

According to Geertz (2005), an ethnographer must present a 'thick description' which is composed not only of facts but also of commentary, interpretation and interpretations of those comments and interpretations. My task, therefore, was to extract meaning structures that created a culture, and for this Geertz believes that a factual account will not suffice for these meaning structures are complexly layered one on top and into each other so that each fact might be subjected to intercrossing interpretations which ethnography should study (Geertz, 2005, p. 256). Mertens (2010) recommended that data analysis involves reviewing a set of field notes either transcribed or synthesised in order to scrutinise the information meaningfully, whilst keeping relationships between the parts intact. In this study, I used interviews, observations, field notes and a research journal as methods of qualitative data analysis, as they provided ways of comparing and contrasting and interpreting meaningful patterns or themes. The theoretical themes and concepts from the literature chapters provided a key function and a measure by which to illuminate and explain the phenomena and the critical events, as they empirically unfolded in the research field. The various types of data were gathered throughout the research process, all of which shared the common characteristics of 'thick description', thus distinguishing the study from the quantitative analytic approach of data collection. There are four main stages to this study's research analysis: (1) a critical examination of the literature; (2) a critical analysis of qualitative data

regarding the educational experiences of learners; (3) a critical exploration of their lives, e.g. their socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, and how their life experiences impact the 'self'; and (4) the gathering of all the data from the semi-structured interviews, the participant observations and my research journal. The process was dynamic and intuitive and included the creative process of inductive reasoning, reflection, and theorising (Merriam, 2009)**.** All cultures are intrinsically temporal, and all relationships shift and change over and through time in a gradual way (Clifford, 1986a, pp. 10-15).

Critical ethnography is perceived to be a more authentic methodology which can tell 'what is really going on out there', and rich, in-depth data is necessary for a valuable study, while each study is unique to its site (Rist, 1983, p. 177; Wolcott, 1975, pp. 48-49). Considering what to include and what to omit was initially a scary task for me, and writers such as Spradley (1980); Robson (2006); Mertens, (2010) all bring to light the fact all ethnographers begin their writing with inexhaustibly rich material relating to the cultural system they are dealing with. Although you begin with a great deal of knowledge about the 'lived' culture of your study group, you also learn very quickly that there is so much more to know. I found that each time I transcribed the data and created codes, I would quickly recognise other nodes of data that seemed impartial and incomplete, and the revision of the data would start all over again. In the process of writing, I discovered hidden nodes of information that became more explicit through the practice of transcription. A decision had to be made as to how much description to include, and Mertens (2010) suggested that sufficient description and direct quotations should be included to allow readers to comprehend fully, the research setting and the opinion, feelings, beliefs and values of the individuals represented in the story. The entire study included reports from the interviews and observations about the various encounters these adults had with educational practices and settings (Fetterman 1998, p. 1). Culture is of central importance. Culture is the system of shared beliefs, values, practices, language, norms, rituals, and material things that group members use to understand their world (Spradley, 1970). This micro study gave me the opportunity to study the culture of the women learners in a classroom setting. It also offered connected insight, with the Irish women's 'lived' culture.

Mertens (2010) states that the researcher is the main instrument in qualitative research and that she/he has to accumulate the data and organise all the information into a meaningful and

reduced format (p.366). The data 'reduction process' is an assortment of knowledge that needs to be converted into patterns and relationships that appear after writing up the field notes, interview transcriptions and the journal extracts (p.384). The open-ended format of the questions allowed each participant to express their 'lived out' expressed version of 'self' and their experience in adult education, and how it impacted their lives in general. The analysis of the field notes began at the same time as that of the interviews and observations, as this gave me the opportunity to identify problems and connected concepts which appeared. It also helped me to make sense of and understand, each new situation as it arose. The provisional stage consisted of my writing reflective notes and diagrams to relate themes and concepts (Nespor, 2006, p. 298). Each theme is connected to Bourdieu's notions of *habitus, field* and *capital,* and this is a helpful process as it highlights 'who' the speakers were and the social relationships they had with their peers in the group (Nespor, 2006, p.299). The notes and data assisted me in the way described by Nespor (2006, p. 300), in that "the things that seem marginal at first can become important" (2006, p. 300). In addition, I found that my field notes needed to make events 'more available to thought'.

Ethnography allowed me the means of representing the study from an emic perspective (the participants' viewpoint) and also from the etic perspective (my perception) (see, Spradley, 1979). The opportunity to inter-relate and investigate all aspects of the research, instead of always breaking the whole into parts, enabled me to observe the whole in the context of this particular research study. Ethnography supported me in understanding how the participants used space, how they related to each other: it offered windows into the social context of events, as well as the women's thoughts and actions, all of which were essential in the interpretation process. Gathering the data was an iterative and reflexive process that continued throughout the study, and when the study had ceased (Stake, 1995). The process of reading the data and interpreting it continued throughout the research. I wrote memos to myself to assist in sorting and coding the findings, usually writing an average of a page at a time. I found that this process assisted me in the representation of theoretical insights that emerged from my engagement with the data in my field notes. As time passed, I began to listen and observe in a more selective way, focusing on events that I thought might bring life to my investigation. The constant reading and observing of the information created a kind of dialogue with the data, sifting out ideas, comparing new concepts with the 'reality' that I faced and later with writing, and making sense of the data.

The problem I faced initially was deciding how I would thematise the data. It was a difficult task as I had interview transcripts, observation notes and journal extracts. They were hard to decipher. Having read the information over and over again, I began to see the direct links to the literature chapter and the key theorist Bourdieu. It was at that point, that clarity appeared or a 'light bulb' moment happened. The graphs and pictures I made when reviewing the data began creating a clear picture. The fog of information that I waded through began to make sense and had a lovely link to theory. Suddenly all the research seemed worthwhile and began to form the 'auld triangle' (O' Brien, 2011). Clear information began to present itself with practical 'lived' examples from the women's lives and backgrounds, and this was particularly highlighted in the interviews. Deciphering qualitative data through a critical lens was daunting on occasions and the dilemma of evaluating and assessing was at times unclear and not easily obvious. I struggled with my role as researcher, facilitator, communicator, listener, and emerging ethnographer. (Yelverton-Halpin, Journal Extract, 21st August 2014)

Making sense of the data involved my being analytical in detecting patterns and commonalities during the study that could help to "make sense of what [was] going on in the scenes documented by the data" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, pp. 209-210). I was also conscious of (my journal entries) "what we call our data are really our own constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to" (Geertz, 1973, p. 9). According to Van Maanen (1979), the 'first and second-order concepts' in ethnography are processes whereby you continually seek to differentiate, understand and present. The researcher draws on the first-hand experience with the setting, informants and documents to interpret the data (Bogdan & Bilkin, 2007; Merriam, 2009; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Mertens (2010) notes the researcher enters into data as text and exits with an account or narrative (p. 424). The data analysis is said to be a vital aspect of qualitative research, and through the analysis, I gained a deeper understanding of the interpretations (Mertens, 2010). I organised the data into file folders, journals and computer files. The initial raw data had to be selected and organised to become prospective information and this required selective extraction to create a legible file. Each file was analysed and themed to represent the 'self' of the adult learner and to illuminate the other themes that were uncovered during the study (Mertens, 2010). Coding or encrypting the data was a process that revolved around the emerging questions. The data was analysed inductively building meaning from the interpretations, and themes of oppression, domination, and power relationships came to the forefront. This is consistent with a critical ethnographic approach, and such theoretical ideas are drawn upon in this study (Carspecken, 1996, pp. 146-153). The data analysis was an interpretive process moving from the descriptive, reflective (e.g. journals entries) to the observable events that I

witnessed in and out of the classroom (field notes). It took some time to unravel the women's stories and find themes to generate from each piece of data. The language and discourse the women used in the research was multi-layered, and certain words had double meanings, which was in keeping with the women's background and their relation to the field of education and forms of capital, or lack of them (Bourdieu, 1980). I read all the gathered data together as one piece of work. I then examined each individual piece of data. I read the data a number of times highlighting different phrases and themes that were related to the research questions. Each theme was divided into categories under the heading of habitus, with other patterns and phrases that reoccurred within the data. The data was subdivided and coded again; the process was cyclical and became more refined after each cycle of reading and categorisation (Mertens, 2010). My diary, on the other hand, was personal, and it was used to jot down the highs and lows and emotional interludes in the study, and this was kept separate from other field notes (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p. 391). My own view is that ethnographic results can be influenced by the study if the ethnographer is trying to shift the results in a certain way. Many of the women in my study had observed from a young age the lack of opportunity afforded them and were acutely aware of financial straits within the family. This result/finding was inevitable.

4.6.1 Inductive and deductive reasoning

As part of the research process I used inductive reasoning as it allowed me to begin the research with detailed observations of the study to form more generalisations and ideas. This process gave me "the power to define and transmit reality" (Thomas 1993, p. 9) which is seen by Spradley (1979) as "almost friendly conversation" (p. 9). I found by following an inductive approach which began with the topic of 'self' in adult education I was able to develop empirical generalisations and identify preliminary relationships as the research progressed. In effect, I was able to build and look into the women's experiences (as far as possible). This helped me to create rapport with the women without compromising the data collection process (Seidman, 1998). There was no hypothesis at the initial stage of this research and I had no idea of the type of findings until the study was completed.

> inductive reasoning is often referred to as a "bottom-up" approach to knowing, in which the researcher uses observations to build an abstraction or to describe a picture of the phenomenon that is being studied (Lodico, Spaulding, ans Voegtle, 2010, p.11).

I read the literature first to gain an inductive logic and to gain experience. I then participated, listened and recorded the experiences of the women and data to assist me in the understanding and background of the study. As time progressed and the data was gathered and analysed I could see and describe the theoretical implications of what I saw and heard (the findings to follow in the next chapter).

4.7 Validity of the Findings

The main research questions in this critical ethnographic study focus on generating greater understandings of the 'self': What aspects of the 'self' change? evolve as adult learners return to the field of education? Can we explore, to some degree of certainty, if such changes are viewed by the participants themselves as positive, negative, or both? The ethnographic approach allowed me first-hand knowledge from the women's perspectives, and it assisted me in obtaining intricate details such as verbal and nonverbal feelings and experiences (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Qualitative research can be generally defined as "any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 17). It produces findings from real-world situations where human experiences occur naturally (Patton, 2001, p.39). In qualitative research, each interview is unique, and it may be difficult to replicate the results in another setting (Bell, 2001, p.104).

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, a case study was used in the educational site which is exclusive to this piece of research. I believe that the study is valid as it set out to understand the lived experiences of the women's 'self'. While the data revealed the 'self' as an evolving entity in adult education, the investigation also indicates that the women are culturally driven by family and family commitments which restrict them from taking the next step to higher education. As I stated earlier, in being an emerging critical ethnographer, I have lived with and involve the women in the 'planning, conducting, analysis, interpretation and the use of research'-this was affirmed as I became part of their culture (Mertens, 2010, p.33). Therefore, in order to sum up the validity of this research, I was guided by Kirkhart's (2005) five justifications of multicultural validity:

1. Theoretical: The cultural congruence of theoretical perspectives underlying the study, the evaluation, and assumptions about validity.

2. Experiential: Congruence with the lived experiences of participants in the study and in the evaluation.

3. Consequential: The social consequences of understanding and judgements and the actions taken based on them.

4. Interpersonal: The quality of the interactions between and among participants in the evaluation process.

5. Methodological: The relevance of measurement tools and cultural comparison of the design and alignment of research methods (Kirkhart, 2005, p.23).

The data was analysed holistically and the five justifications above guided me. As mentioned earlier, the methods used include interviews, observations, field notes and a research journal. I am interested in observing verbal language but also the women's body language, hand gestures and displayed facial expressions (non-verbal cues). These coincide (in a sensory manner) with the responses to research interview questions, for example, the interviews were not video recorded, so I had to make memos/full notes to indicate when and where certain body language accompanied certain responses to the questions. There were times when I was unclear about some of the facial expressions and gestures, and I discussed these with the women to gain greater clarification and make sense of them. The women spoke openly and shared their stories and their own habitus experiences thus "creating an integral connection between the validity of human relations in the research setting" (Mertens, 2010, p.34). Ethnography is difficult to replicate because it takes place in a natural setting and cannot be reproduced (Mertens, 2010). One of the problems dealing with validity in ethnographic research is that the research is carried out in a natural setting such as the classroom over a long period of time and observation; where the people feel comfortable in their surroundings (Mertens, 2010). Although there are limitations when using an ethnographic approach, there are also benefits, as each of the four methods discussed earlier in this chapter can be seen as a story in itself as each story is interconnected to each other and to the theme of 'self'. In addressing the limitation of internal validity, crystallisation was used, this involved the confirmation and validation of the qualitative data analysis, as it considers forms of representation in order to tap deeper into the data (Richardson, 1994, p. 522). Crystallisation is a tool used in merging the various ways of doing and writing. Crystallisation also 'reflects externalities' they also 'refract them within themselves' (Richardson, 2000, p.934). The image of crystals captures the way reality changes through

multidimensional shapes and angles and also how I, as an emerging ethnographer change the methodological angle or perspective with which I look at crystallization. It provides me with a deeper, complex, and effective approach to richly describe the findings as I "encounter and make sense of data through more than one way of knowing" (Ellingson, 2008, p. 11). Ironically we know more and doubt what we know (Richardson, 1994, p. 522). If the data is not consistent with the research questions or hypothesis, then it is insufficient. My ontology or the 'nature of' my 'reality' and my epistemology 'the nature of knowledge' I believe reality is not fixed or stable (Clifford, 1986). It is an evolving and dynamic social inquiry of movement description and complexity. The 'reflect' and 'refract' processes continue until all the data has been examined, and patterns and claims emerge from the data that are meaningful and can be well articulated and substantiated. Using crystallisation has helped me to "see myself as the women see me which is eye opening; to see the women as sharing a nature with myself (ourselves) is the merest decency" and to see how light prisms reflect the different perspectives of 'self' and data (Geertz, 1983 p. 16).

My personal investment in the lives of the women could be viewed as a limitation of the study, but my interest in this research began many years earlier when I worked and facilitated similar groups for shorter periods of time, and I found their stories interested me greatly. Critical ethnography is inherently 'self' interested (in other words my subjective position doesn't mean 'saying what I want' or 'unduly influencing the results') which is a central part of critical ethnography which still seeks to be scientific. In 2012, a teaching opportunity arose with a group of women in an adult education context. The timing was impeccable, and the programme ran for two years. I viewed this as a perfect opportunity to investigate my research interest. It was a small group consisting of six women, but participant observation also reduced the 'reactivity', or the women acting in a certain way when they knew they were being observed. Geertz, (1988, p. 140) and Linstead, (1993, p. 54) argue that all voices do not have an equal hearing. I felt I addressed these limitations through their *voice* and *choice* (and through the use of crystallization). As I move forward as a teacher and learner on this research journey, teacher-research may not give us all the answers we crave, but it will help us find creativity and joy in living our questions. The women wanted to partake in the research, and they made all the decisions around place and time, which I addressed earlier in the chapter.

4.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have introduced the reader to the six women in the study, to their socio-cultural and educational backgrounds. I have also given the reader a brief introduction to my ontological and epistemological positions. I have explained the critical ethnography research approach employed and engaged with the relevance and benefits of specifically employing a critical perspective. I have discussed my role as a researcher, the methods used for data collection, and the study's data analysis approach. The issues of ethics were always seriously considered, alongside questions relating to validity and the limitations of the study. Chapter 5 now introduces the reader to the findings of this investigation which is peppered with the women's narratives from the interviews and observations. The chapter then presents the analyses of 'self' in adult education.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS: Section One: Bourdieuian insights into the transformative possibilities of adult education

5.1 Introduction

The research questions for this inquiry sought to search for the 'self' of a group of women who returned to the field of adult education. The 'self' began to manifest itself through the interviews, the observations and through social interactions in the group, as well as through me as an emerging critical ethnographer. The data for this study were accessed by using qualitative research methods (i.e., interviews, observations, field notes and a reflective journal) and the results from the data are best interpreted by presenting a series of themes and thematic narratives obtained from the analysis of the data (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002; Wolcott, 2008). The 'self' was revealed through habitus, capital and field, illuminating the lives of the six women in the research study from the start to the end of their two-year adult education programme. By addressing the questions, the work informs the reader of the subjective perspectives and social realities of the women's 'self' as they return to education. Each of the women came from diverse background. Some of them had a lot of life experience, others had less, some had larger families and some were rearing just one child. Some had a higher standard of education than the others and there was a distinction between their economic statuses. As time progressed, they became friends and companions, all sharing their similarities and differences. Their individual stories became more of a collective narrative. Some of the modules on the course were delivered by 'four other tutors' who were 'all female'. Glimpses of these tutors' teaching styles are captured through the voices of the women as their stories unfold in the findings.

This chapter is divided into three sections. Section 1 groups the findings under different thematic categories - namely, habitus, capital and field (though these are all inter-related concepts). The supporting vignettes for those themes are also presented in this section. I also believe my responsibility as a researcher is to present the discovered findings in an organised manner, with a connecting narrative. I seek to let the women speak with a bare minimum of interference from me as the researcher. Section 2 explores historical themes of 'self' such as early school leaving; geographical location; religion; missed opportunities; the relationship between working class and education and hope and determination. Section 3

discusses my own pedagogical approach to teaching and learning and its influence on habitus. This makes use of critical literacy and how I show how facilitating critical literacy impacts on the perspective of 'self' and social realities and it summarises the findings. In Chapter six I will discuss the data and the overall implications of this study.

5.2 Class Habitus

A reoccurring theme in the study is that of early school leaving. In Chapter 3, the literature on Bourdieu shows that habitus is central to the social origin of 'self'. Most of the women left school young, worked in factories or in the service industry. The six women in the study all come from a similar class habitus; they have a lower socio-economic status, and live in disadvantaged areas where college participation is not on the horizon. They are all aware that where they come from matters to both their 'self-expectations', as well as what others expect of them. Parents did not generally put much emphasis on educational advancement, and the women were expected to leave school and take up employment to help secure the financial stability of the family. The actions of their parents had a direct bearing on how many of the women saw their worlds and understood their own futures. They felt an onerous responsibility as younger women to help out at home and to see their place in life as nurturing others, sometimes to the detriment of themselves. In the late 1980s, Marge's father lost his job, as Dockers were no longer perceived as a necessary part of the city's local workforce. Irish culture and society was slowly shifting to a more sophisticated and technical way of doing things, and this meant that a lot of lowly skilled jobs were being lost. Marge's father was hanging around the house for some time doing nothing and eventually social welfare informed that he would have to attend a FÁS (now SOLAS) course or else he would lose his social welfare allowance. Disheartened and disillusioned at the idea of attending a course in lieu of his social welfare entitlements, and with the fact that there were no other jobs in the city, he became dispirited with life in general. Marge felt that he did not 'play the game' the way the other course members did. Instead, he took regular days off and each day that he missed led to him losing a day's pay. "Dad lost a lot of day's pay. He hated the course and hardly ever went at all". He said that it was 'boring' and that they were all treated like 'fools'. At one stage, they were meant to be learning about computers, but they had no keyboards and they had to pretend they were typing! Most of the men on FÁS courses were occupied by tidying up public buildings and community facilities. They were charged with

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duties like cleaning up graveyards and cutting the grass in places that were normally neglected:

> Dad used to say that the men on these courses felt humiliated and undermined, and they didn't like how the supervisors treated them. This had a knock-on effect on the family and Mum was constantly stressed because Dad was always hanging around the house drinking tea and complaining about something, but when he went out, he forgot to come home. [Marge]

Marge reflects at that time and the difficulties it created for the family:

> My mother was always struggling, and money was always a problem in the house. There never seemed to be enough to go around. The minute we finished our Junior Cert we were shoved out the front door to get a job. It was nearly easier working; it was an escape away from all the rows, the anger, the fighting and the caring for my smaller siblings. [Marge]

Marge's story is similar to many of the women in the study group and to people who come from similar circumstances. For the past 20 years, I have facilitated courses all over Munster and the South East of Ireland. There is a recognisable pattern in women's lives. Most seem to have been affected by challenging family backgrounds, parental unemployment and financial struggles. Moreover, I have seen how many women have been denied opportunities that were afforded to other women in more progressive advantaged homes. Much of what they have had to endure has been foisted upon them, leaving them somewhat world-weary and unfulfilled at an early age. Anne's story is similar to that of Marge, though her father Michael left her mother when Anne was a very young girl. Her father suffered from alcohol problems which led him to lose a succession of low-paid work. Although he was not a huge contributor to the family's finances, what little he did bring in was of some support. Anne's mother was an early school leaver herself, and she never had the opportunity to develop a career or have a nice job:

> We all followed in my father's footsteps. We got jobs and brought home the bacon. The law in our house was you handed up half your wages to Mam, and the other half was mine. If you got a job in a shop, you were considered as having a good clean job. Chippers and shops didn't close down as quickly as factories or so my Father said. It was hard though because you always knew that your lot was limited. [Marge]

> Mom came from a large family of five girls, and three boys and little or no emphasis was placed on the potential of the females in the family. When my father left home and abandoned his responsibility as a parent, my mother found a job as a dishwasher in a local hotel. [Anne]

Through the interviews and observations I discerned that this type of work was common for a lot of the working class women especially when the father left the family home. This may also have been the case for women from more middle-class backgrounds who had to seek work in more menial positions due to a spouse's alcoholism, gambling or other social ills. These types of jobs seemed attractive to low skilled workers as they were paid after each working shift and it was 'cash in hand'. Anne recalls that "it was good in one way as there was a few quid coming into the house everyday but it was never enough". Anne felt that her parents' separation and the transition to a one-parent family left her with strong feelings of abandonment and she carried these emotions with her all her life. She also felt that her parents separation had adverse effects on her sibling's well-being in the short and long-term (the transition of moving from a two to a one parent family) and also had a more enduring effect that persisted into adulthood:

> I lost touch over the years with my two brothers who went to England, and my mother was very upset when they didn't get in contact with her. Then sometimes I would meet my father in town when he had a few drinks on him. He would give me some money and ask me how I was getting on. I still loved him, but then I wouldn't see him for a good while. I don't know where he went. He seemed to move around a bit in the end, but one of my friends told me she heard he was in England for a while. Then he came back but I didn't really see much of him after that. I suppose he just forgot about us. [Anne]

The spaces and the influence of the environment where the women grew up also had an effect on them, and this was another recurring theme in the formation of 'self'. Even from an early age, the women were aware that their addresses and backgrounds could prove to be a disadvantage. The place I grew up in, in Limerick also had a negative reputation and I too felt my address carried with it a stigmatisation (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 2007). My address was perceived at that time as the tainted side of the city. It carried a sense of dislocation and the people there felt a type of rejection toward other parts of the city. The women in the study also experienced disenfranchisement in their place of residence and they also felt that where they lived was tainted with high unemployment, high social welfare dependence, derelict houses and high crime rates. Moreover, it impacted on how they viewed themselves, and was compounded further particularly when they applied for jobs in larger well-branded stores and positions of management. Job applications are often left untouched when the address of the applicant is seen to come from a particular part or area in a town or city:

My younger sister did her Leaving. She was very intelligent, and she applied for a job as a legal secretary, and she was well able. She got a regret to inform you letter in the post, and she knew it was her address that stopped her getting the job. A few weeks later she applied for a similar job and used my uncle's address in the country, and she got the job. [Marge]

The women felt that their postal address prevented them from participating in education and also from achieving decent jobs with worthy promotional opportunities. The participants shared the belief that their housing estates exhibited common features of neighbourhoods of low socioeconomic status and long-term unemployment residential cohorts. All of this reflects and influences their membership identity, and expectations of social mobility. The subjective perceptions of the area they lived in were a contributory factor to their composition of 'self' identity. They lived in places of perceived high anti-social behaviour and significant disadvantage, which disconnected with ideal forms of positive social capital:

Sometimes I was ashamed to say where I was from. I knew that it would get a bad reaction so if I could at all I wouldn't mention it, or I might say it was near somewhere else just to keep the comments down. You were definitely judged if you said you were from a particular place. That could be good for some, but it wasn't for me. [Rosie]

This represented the stigma of coming from a perceived disadvantaged area and the cultural labelling of people from this area. An ethnic division was being supplanted on one's identity because of one's geographic location.

When I first started working in the factory and when I made new friends I would pretend I lived in town and give my Nanny's old address. I didn't want to be associated with some of the tough people that lived on my street. People didn't want to come into our housing estate they were too scared by all the stories they heard in town. After a while when I felt safe in the friendship I would tell them the truth and it was always such a relief, I hated pretending I hated feeling ashamed of where I came from but it was the reality of growing up in my housing estate. [Joan]

Living at the top of the town was a nightmare there was a family living there that had a terrible reputation and were well known to the cops. Every night the sirens would roar past our house because there was always a row going on there. The brothers were always fighting with each other with bottles and knives and the screams from the house was too much to take at times. My Mother used to say if she won the sweeps she'd buy a small house in the country to get away from all the noise. [Vicky]

This reflected the demonization of a whole area because of a significant but low level of social breakdown and the lack of perspective in judging a person by the actions of others.

I was so ashamed of where I lived; nearly everyone on the street was on the dole, no one worked. I thought it was weird because we were called working class. Everyone was poor and struggling and I wanted to live somewhere with a nice garden and have a nice house. Like the movies they showed on TV. People looked and dressed nice. [Karen]

They possessed a lack of self-worth and sense of self because of an inherited inferiority deriving from what others are saying about them. Feeling lower and less self-assured, when mentioning where you come from, owing to the pejorative way that area is generally viewed, was another reoccurring theme.

> Our estate is a massive place there are thousands of people living there and it is miles away from the city centre. Its kind a funny really Cos it's close to the industrial estate and the college but hardly anyone in the estate works and no one in our street went to college ha ha![Marge]

This explained the ironic cultural divide between inhabitants of a certain area and the educational institute within a stone's throw of this area.

> Our estate wasn't too far from the town centre. It would take you about 15 mins. to walk into town. All the teenagers hung around in gangs and different gangs would fight each other. The cops were always walking around at night keeping an eye on things but they were never there when the real fights broke. [Anne]

There is the sense of hopelessness and lack of purpose that pervades when an area is abandoned by society. The participants at times felt so overwhelmed by the negativity surrounding their housing estates that they were convinced that education was their only way out. The idea of 'trying to better oneself' and 'giving oneself some sort of future' was very much reflected in their statements. The women used derogatory terms for their place and space (of residence) and demonstrated the broad social divisions that they experienced from the rest of the locals:

> We were born on the wrong side of the tracks. The wrong side of town. You'd hear people calling it 'Dodge City' or something else that wasn't nice. I didn't like it, but I suppose I couldn't disagree with some of what they were saying. Some of the carry on in the estate wasn't good. [Rosie]

> I grew up in the 'Naked City'. The place had such a bad name that friends from other parts of the town never came to visit. I'd have to meet them in town 'cos their parents wouldn't let them out my way. When a place gets a bad name, it's impossible to get rid of it. It was only a small part really, probably only a few streets, but the whole area got tarred with the one brush. [Joan]

> Where I live was nicknamed 'Knackeragua' in the late eighties; the estate was practically out in the middle of nowhere miles away from town, and the bus service was the pits. At one stage, taxi drivers and pizza deliveries wouldn't even come out there. There might be a few young fellas throwing stones at them and in one way I suppose I couldn't blame them. One week the bus and all wasn't coming out. That was a nightmare. [Marge]

If you came from the inner city or 'top of the town' people looked down their nose at you. You were a real townie I grew up near the convent and next to our place was a place nicknamed The Flat Roofs. [Karen]

People used to be afraid to walk by the houses there 'cos they might get picked on, robbed, abused or attacked. The houses were lovely when they went up first because they were different to all the other streets in the city. But for some reason there was always trouble there a lot of unemployment and colossal families. We were completely outcasted by everyone in the city. Some people took pride in their homes, but others didn't bother because it could be burnt out or broken into. Living near there was hell. [Vicky]

The social structures of Irish society shape feelings of disenfranchisement and the women in the study felt cut off from the service providers - they were very much socially excluded. They felt that going back to education gave them the opportunity to improve themselves and to provide them with real options to get a proper job and become more competitive (to use a language that they had internalised) in the employment market. With noticeable cutbacks, many of the government's own strategies appear untenable, including the current social inclusion strategy, which has quietly fallen under the political radar of recent times. Its overall aim was to "build viable and sustainable communities, improving the lives of people living in disadvantaged areas and building social capital" (Government of Ireland, 2007, p. 60). The strategies were intended as a medium to a long-term programme of work to redress inequality and improve public services. Rather than being protected and being offered consistency in times of change, other policy issues and are areas affected by the economic crisis took precedence over the people. The government intended to target disadvantage and other real people issues such as housing and education yet European economics superseded the real life issues on the ground that perhaps should be addressed before bank debts. All the above stories indicate feelings of abandonment, disillusionment and vulnerability. Joblessness and financial stress contribute to deteriorating living standards (ESRI, 2014). Bourdieu finds that the basic dichotomies of gender and age are deployed to express or reinforce distinctions of cultural dominance. So, for example, one has to contest between immature/mature against youthful/aged, and all the disputed markers of structured oppression that infiltrate and articulate the language of oppression in society and in the world in general. The social practice of gender is so much part of who we are and how we understand ourselves and others to be, that it is invisible yet so acceptable and intertwined with cultural and racial power relations (Bourdieu, 1986). Each of the women felt a strong personal connection to their working- class backgrounds and were aware of how their values and beliefs had formed their lives as women.

A strong Catholic ethos was also part of their working-class habitus, and religious doctrine was part and parcel of the working-class culture. They also highlighted that in growing up as a working-class woman, there was little emphasis on education, and if someone on the street went to college others had little tolerance towards them - they were often called 'snobs' and laughed at. A few spoke of the importance of a two-parent family, with an emphasis on the popular (Irish) belief that 'family should always come first'.

> My grandmother always said that family was the most important thing in the world and women were responsible for keeping the family together. It was the woman's role in life. The crazy thing about it was that time if a young one or young fella got into trouble with the law or had a baby. The parents never took responsibility. They always said it was the crowd they got involved with. I always thought it was a bit mad really if family was that important then why were the kids disowned when they did something wrong. [Joan]

This reflects the community spirit that ironically can be fuelled when a community perceives itself to be under attack. The pride in the area can flower when people feel that their backs are against the wall and they need to strike a blow to show pride and some hope in the future. Main areas were regenerated by the drive and application of the local people who were not prepared to lie down and die.

> My parents were sound really cos half of us came home pregnant and they helped us as best they could. It can't have been easy for them when I think back. A house full of children and grandchildren; don't know how they did it. I knew other girls that got pregnant when they were teenagers and they were sent up the country that time cos their parents were ashamed of them [Marge]

All the women gestured in agreement as Joan and Marge spoke, they laughed and shook their heads nodding with a sense of pride. Their body language revealed the cultural relationship they shared and the inherent understanding of their working class backgrounds. They all said that they felt safe in their own areas with their own families and friends. Marge nodded and said: "Yeah I think it was because we were all into the same thing, as we kind of got each other, and we didn't have to prove anything". The women felt that working hard and perseverance were inherited traits and part of being an Irish woman:

> I think that Irish women are survivors really because Ireland was under England for hundreds of years, and Irish women were always put down by the church, politicians and men. I feel that Irish women have learned to stand up for themselves more and to rely on nobody. It has made us strong, and I can see how we have so much to offer because we have suffered so much. [Karen]

In the 1970s, free secondary education was introduced in Ireland. Before this, second level education had been fee paying and very few children got the opportunity to attend secondary school, particularly girls. At that time, it was felt that girls did not need an education. Secondary education was unattainable financially for most working class and large families. Unlike their mothers before them, all of the women in the study had attended second level education in their local convent secondary schools. Most of them succeeded to Junior Certificate level (Intermediate Certificate), and two went on to do their Leaving Certificate. Marge left school after her Junior Certificate, but stressed with great delight and animation how much she enjoyed it when she was there:

> I loved school. It was great having fun with people my own age and not worrying about stuff that went on at home. I loved learning and rarely got bored of it. My favourite subjects were English, Art and Geography … It was an, all girl's convent school set close to the city centre and most of the girls' that went there were from much posher housing estates than mine. Some of them were nice enough, but others looked down on you a bit. I didn't care too much then as I just wanted to be in school. [Marge]

Some of the other women hated school. They found the teachers boring and felt they were never going to get anywhere in life unless they had money and were independent. Rose said: "I thought I'd never get a job, start earning real money, be able to help my Mam with the younger ones and buy some nice clothes and make-up". Vicky spoke about how her own mother had to leave school young to help out at home. Vicky's grandmother used to say to her mother "Women don't need an education as they'll be stuck behind the kitchen sink for the rest of their lives". Marge worked in a local factory in the 80s, and she told the younger women in the study that:

> The pay for women doing the same jobs as men in the plant was lower, until equal pay for women came in, in 1976. Even when it came in, some bosses wouldn't pay the same wages until they were forced into it by the workers and unions. [Marge]

The lives of the women in the study crossed at an intersection known to all of them as 'adult education'. Their histories and life journeys came together, unknowingly offering experience and knowledge that spanned over four decades of political and educational transition in Ireland. The dialogue between the women gave important insights into their thoughts, values and beliefs and the challenges they faced during their lives especially the current period of transition they were experiencing into adult education. All of the women in the study had a belief that there is a higher power than them. Rosie said that she was raised as a Catholic, and her parents were very strict when it came to religion. They had to say the rosary every night

after the Angelus. The TV was switched off, and everyone had to kneel down on the cold lino to pray. She felt that there was something very cruel about it all. Her mother's approach was starker than that of her father when it came to prayer:

> At the time, the rosary was part of the daily duties in every Irish house. It was a way of bringing the family together. There were a lot of processions and masses, and I suppose the older people thought it helped at the time. I didn't mind the first few times, but I got bored with it fairly quickly. My mother loved it, and you'd be punished if you didn't kneel down and say your prayers. My father was a bit easier going about it though and just went along with it I think [Rosie]

Joan's experience was similar to Rosie's, but she added:

> If my mother was in a bad mood, we would have to recite the full rosary and then an act of contrition as an extra penance [Joan]

The older women in the group seemed to have a stronger faith than some of the younger ones. Perhaps because the church was never challenged when they were attending school their continued deference to the church and what it represented remained unquestioned. They would have had religious teaching them from an early age and despite some bad experiences they still appreciated the efforts that the religious had made in disadvantaged areas. The Christian Brothers were founded by Edmund Rice to give poorer children a chance to be educated and this ethos was analogous to other religious educational orders. The younger women in the group believed that the religious thing in Ireland was just a habit. It was something you did and got your kids to do, but it was of no great importance in the bigger scheme of things. They were happy to let their kids make their Communion and Confirmation for the experience. They had no great respect for the church or the government, especially as they saw that the church and state had been exposed by their own corruption cases and had lost a lot through their abuse of power and low trust of the people:

> Well, I don't know how I feel about it actually. When the kids made their communions and confirmations, I thought it was a lot of money. The dresses and now it's all big meals and photographs. It's nice to look back now but at the time I thought this is all a waste of money 'cos I didn't go to mass. [Karen]

> The church wouldn't be high on my priorities. After all the news about them on the telly and the newspapers you'd think they'd be disbanded. But they're more powerful now than ever. They're still going and there's not as much about them anymore. I don't know why people still go to mass, but I suppose it's an Irish thing. We just follow like sheep. [Rosie]

> I was a mass goer for years. Going to the church was a place you could just meet up with people or have a chat afterwards. I think it's a habit all right but when you're reared

on it, you just go. Over the past number of years, I haven't gone as often except for funerals and weddings. I know they've done a lot of wrongs, but they also did some good. The church set up youth clubs in our area, and they weren't all bad. [Anne]

The women's values, however, differed from their religious beliefs. All of the women valued their families. Vicky also spoke about the fact that she was lucky that she was born in the 1980s because the contraceptive pill was not available legally to married couples until 1979: "And you couldn't buy condoms without a prescription until 1985, and they were only legal to 18-year-olds". These historical moments were relevant to the entire group. The age range of the women in the study spanned four decades in time. All of the women felt that getting the opportunity to return to adult education was a positive thing. They wanted an education. They wanted to feel empowered and to be no longer oppressed by a patriarchal society. They all valued the opportunity of adult education as they felt that it would support them to end their 'oppressed' lives as a group of women too tied to state benefits. The opportunity could give them economic and social mobility and the ability to empower their daughters and other women to educate themselves. They appreciated the prospect of becoming role models for other women and the chance to enter the world of work as well qualified individuals:

> Women aren't valued in Ireland. They are seen as minders, and they are only respected by men when they have a proper career. And even then they aren't treated with the same respect as men, because if they go on maternity leave they find it harder to get promoted. From what I have seen over the years when women bring home a wage they seem to be more valued. [Rosie]

Marge underlined the theme of the love of education when she recounted how happy she had been in school:

> It was good. I felt like it was what I wanted to do. I loved school when I was going there and was very disappointed that I never got my Leaving. Some of my friends didn't want to do it, but I did. School made me feel like I could be someone and when that fell through I drifted and didn't seem to know where I was going. I had children then and I never really thought about going back to education or nothing' like that. My other friends had kids too; some were married or with their boyfriends, but they had jobs in shops and chippers, and I never thought about doing anything else. Then when I got the chance I couldn't believe it. Nobody could. It was out of the blue, and I just said I'm not messin' this up. This was my way out of always being short of money and trying to make ends meet. The college was great, and there were different ages of women. I didn't care. Everyone seemed sound, and I just got on with it. [Marge]

For Marge going back to education gave her a 'lift':

> I felt like I had something to look forward to, something to aim for. All along I was just struggling through every day and not wanting to know what was around the corner, and you just didn't feel you had anything to look forward to. But now it's different. I get up early, and I'm out to the course. You just feel different in yourself and that today is going to be a good day. It's something I haven't felt like in a long while. [Marge]

Marginalisation and society's ageist attitudes were further themes emphasized by Joan:

> So far they have been mixed but overall I suppose quite okay. I had no confidence when I was offered a place on the course and didn't know if I wanted to take it. My kids were grown up, and I thought I might be too old. I'm nearly 50, and when I was young, you were over the hill at 40 never mind 50. I found the nights very lonely at home and didn't have many friends. I rarely went out except to the shop or maybe once in a while to the pub. Life was just one long stretch with nothing to do. I did the best I could, but I think I just lost interest in everything. Sometimes I'd just wish I didn't wake up anymore. It sounds awful, but that's how I felt. Going back to education seemed weird; at my age? Who'd want me? I'd look stupid in a class full of young wans. What's that old one doing in here they'd be saying. And I couldn't blame them: "Tis saying her prayers she'd want to be". I know that's not what they said, but old habits die hard. That's the old way of thinking. When I got talking, to the other women it was grand. God, I couldn't believe it. It didn't seem to bother them. What was I moanin' about? So I just said, that's it I'm getting on with it, and it's been somewhere to go and I'm starting to get the hang of it. I'm feeling a bit better about myself too and the last assignment I put in I got very good marks for. [Joan]

Rosie underlined that sometimes exclusive family responsibilities are placed upon Irish women, which can lessen their progress in securing a fulfilling life for themselves. This can have the sense of lowering the feeling of 'self' and blurring their view of positive self-identity:

> I never finished school, so I didn't really want to go back to it. I thought it would be exactly the same, getting given out to, detention and all that stuff. I never even thought of adults going back to school or college. I have a few children so getting them minded was a big thing. I had to know that they'd be okay if I wasn't there when they got home. It picked up after that though and since then things are a lot better. Sometimes I just felt that this isn't the thing I want to be doing, but then I thought, I don't have much choice so I'll just keep going. [Rosie]

Rosie's father led an unhealthy life, and this is now reflected in her taking on a role of responsibility. Almost all of the women in the study felt that they had missed out on the better job and educational opportunities and would have had a better life if they had come from a wealthier background. They felt that coming from a lower socioeconomic background, with the combination of low and no income, or unskilled work as their occupation, was a prominent feature of their households, so much so that it prevented them from moving in a 'bigger circle'. Bourdieu (1980) conceptualises that social standing or class of an individual or group can impact the 'self' positively or negatively and this can be predisposed by economic

capital, symbolic capital and cultural capital, or lack of it. Each social class views life through their subjective lens and it is through that lens that privilege and power can be perceived and experienced. The women believed and recognised that having an education would provide them with security and empowerment and having an increased income would also give them self-confidence and help them find their voices. The women looked forward to achieving higher levels of symbolic capital through their FETAC awards certification. Working in different social capital/ cultural capital environments too would only enhance their new found academic capital (Grenfell, 2008, p. 103) (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 37). This would help the women advance in life and gain further economic capital. In Bourdieuian terms, one form of capital would exchange for another and capital accumulation would be enabled where once capital distribution remained but an ideal.

5.3.1 Female Gender and Habitus

My own teaching journey originated when I began facilitating literacy courses for adults. I wanted to enable adults to enjoy the wonderful world of reading and writing. It was during this time and via other courses that I taught on, that I became aware of gender habitus. Having come from a large family, I reflected upon this and could see that I too had been influenced by my gender habitus. As a young girl, I could remember how my mother placed an emphasis on women working in the home whilst my brothers were exempt from many domestic chores (even those requiring a good deal of strength like lifting buckets of coal in from the shed) This memory was shared by Anne:

> It was very hard for all of us and all the adult chores were left to me as I was the eldest girl in the family. Although I had two older brothers, the same wasn't expected of them, and I couldn't understand why. They didn't even ask me did I need a hand or nothing. [Anne]

> My own experiences of being a young woman were mirrored by the women's stories relating to their gender. They too felt discriminated against in the family home undertaking chores that their brothers weren't expected to do. This affected and influenced the women's sense of 'self' and identity. I also identified with the women's early school leaving as I too left school early, worked and eventually returned to do my Leaving Certificate. I remember this time as being confusing, as I felt that I had to contribute to the family income and yet, at the same time, I was upset because all my friends were still in school. I wondered, 'was I doing the right thing'? Did I have a choice? And would I regret it in the future? My experience of being born into a large family in a provincial city shared many correlations with the women's recollections of their own formative years. (Yelverton-Halpin, Journal Extract, 11 May, 2013)

The findings here coincide with Bourdieu's insights particularly his thoughts on cultural reproduction, utilising concepts of field, capital and habitus, to explain how the environment in which people are raised, their conditions of cultural and material existence, shape their attitudes, their means of interpreting the world, and their capacities to engage with academic discourse (e.g. Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Gender habitus contextualised within Irish identity is exemplified by the struggle of women to achieve their educational rights which had been denied to generations of Irish women for decades. Education for Irish women has never been seen as a prerequisite by the Irish authorities, a charge that was led by the Catholic Church. Women were submissive and carers, whilst men were the bread winners and women carefully obeyed their rules of power. The value and belief systems of the women were influenced by their working-class upbringings, their large Irish families and the influence of extended families neighbours and friends. Joan felt that being Irish and a woman was a strong identity in itself, and she was proud of it. She highlighted the joy she felt in 1990 when Ireland had commissioned its first female president:

> When I saw Mary Robinson becoming President of Ireland, I was very proud. It was a bit of a shock at first 'cos I don't think she had an easy run of it. But when I saw it on TV I was delighted Irish women finally are being acknowledged for all the work and support they have given over the years. I saw older women like my mother and her friends working for the tiny amount of money with no great education but all the knowledge in the world. Then seeing Mary McAleese and a whole pile of other women doing well made me feel that maybe I could do it too. [Joan]

Female presidency is a positive fete for Irish women and possibly for women worldwide. World figureheads such as Mary Robinson and Mary McAleese have represented women in a positive light however, these positions can take from the reality that much larger swathes of women and racial minorities, remain disadvantaged. Gender habitus is changing, and it is now enabling Irish women to see themselves in a more positive light and indeed the feminisation of certain professions (nursing careers/primary school teachers still hold a strong female presence) would lead one to believe that many positive changes are now happening for women. Yet, despite the landmark achievement in Ireland of having had two female presidents, it is still unclear as to the role of women in the management of most Irish companies; indeed in academia (where women tend to have lower roles). In general, more Irish women have pursued education and managed to move into more male dominated environments, but when it comes to promotional opportunities, they find it harder to climb up the ladder. One of the underlying issues of concern for management is that women have

children and take time out of work to parent and nurture their babies. When they return to the workforce after maternity leave or parental leave promotional opportunities become restricted, and they remain in a static position for some time before they are considered for higher ranking positions. At times, I question if women are punished for having a family in the corporate and academic worlds of work. Joan and Marge both felt that Irish culture was still very patriarchal and that the difference between how awareness and sensitivity are handled between Irish females and males should be a political issue in addressing the political plight of male and females in Ireland. Rosie said:

> It seems to be that there's a need to keep up the pressure. Men are still running the country. Every time I turn on the telly it's another man in government talking about what they're going to do. I don't know if women would be any better, but I think they couldn't be any worse. Women need to support each other more though. [Rosie]

Again, as noted in chapter 3, Bourdieu (1980) records that the gender balance in society and the workplace is so patriarchal (ingrained in the dominant culture), that we live through it without fully noticing it. The phenomenon of the feminisation of medicine has been a hallmark of the medical profession in Ireland since the 1990s (women still outnumber men in the field of nursing). Whilst this is to be welcomed, there are some more varying trends in the distribution of female doctors across the medical specialties, under-representation of women doctors in senior medical roles, and a greater likelihood of less-than-full-time working among female doctors compared to males. Women can reach certain levels in medicine, but not always at the decision-making level of boards and hospital administration (McAleese, 2013). Recent years have seen a huge number of women enter medical practice in Ireland and these high numbers are reflected in statistics from many countries in the (OECD, 2015). Female doctors under the age of 44 years are highly represented in the medical sector. However, this dominance is not reflected well in medical management and supervisory roles and the route to progress seems slow. Moreover, hierarchical management positions in most sectors tend to be male dominated. With the present rate of age specific exit rates from the health service the participation of these women doctors in the health service may change as they get older. Planning for health care and changes in workforce participation through the life-course may represent choices made to optimise work-life balance. However, it is also important for policy-makers with responsibility for shaping the workplace environment to value diversity and to ensure that it

enables all doctors (male and female) to fairly and equally fulfil their potential in pursuing good professional practice (Medical Workforce Intelligence Report, 2012).

5.3.2 Cultural Habitus

Vicky shared her belief that her upbringing influenced her at many levels (culturally, socially and emotionally) and felt that her parents, her background, and her parents' backgrounds all shaped who she had become in life. All of the women felt that their culture was kind of a 'mishmash' of their values, beliefs, and all the things they did together as families and friends. They felt that where they grew up and the people they hung out with when they were young girls influenced how they acted, talked and dressed. They also spoke about other girls from other parts of the city and country. They felt that other girls spoke, acted and behaved differently to them:

> It's kind of funny really, but I always noticed when you were with your own group of friends, and you met another group of girls when you were out, you'd wind up getting a bit uncomfortable and try to change your accent and pretend you lived in a different area. [Vicky]

My own cultural capital would resonate with Vicky's, as there was (see Chapter 1) a distinct division in the provincial city of my youth between the middle class and the working class. The city seemed to be divided into very definite geographic lines and even when it came to sport this divide was most pronounced, with the middle class playing rugby whilst the working class played soccer. The schooling too reflected this divide, as the middle class gravitated towards certain convent schooling, where cultural capital played a powerful role in how friendships were forged, where class systems were in play. Marge's words resonated deeply within me:

> The school I went to was an all girls' convent school set close to the city centre. Most of the girls that went there were from much posher housing estates than mine, and some of them were nice enough, but others looked down on you a bit and didn't mix too much with you in school. I always felt that they just wanted their own group and people like me were not welcome. At first I was a bit upset but when I found my own group I didn't care too much then. I suppose I just wanted to be in school 'cos being at home wasn't great, and school kinda kept my mind off things a bit. [Marge]

When it came to early school leaving, I identified with many of the women in the study as they came from similar backgrounds to my own. Marge's educational journey was similar to

mine, but she did not have the privilege of returning to school. Anne also concurred that education for women was not uppermost in her own cultural habitus:

> My mother was an early school leaver herself, and she never had the opportunity to develop a career or have a nice job. She came from a large family of five girls, and three boys and little or no emphasis was placed on the potential of the females in the family. [Anne]

The cultural habitus of early school leaving has left a longing in the women to return to education: It is like picking up the thread of a dream once thought to have been long lost.

> I always felt that I had lost out when it came to education. I left school too early and always believed that I could have done much more at school and achieved something. [Joan]

Joan's ambition when she was at school was to have been a nurse:

> Looking back to when I was small my father always used to say to me that I'd be a nurse. Anytime he got the flu or was unwell I'd be fussing over him with tea and toast. That's where I got it from I suppose. I even got a costume of a nurse's uniform for Christmas one year. My father's dead now, but I always think of what he used to say to me. [Joan]

The cultural capital inherited by the women was one I could completely empathise with. Their stories as young girls were similar to my story as a young girl, and I could sense their frustration at leaving school early and not being able to challenge themselves in the manner they yearned for. Not feeling good enough was not their default setting, but it was one foisted upon them by financial pressure, parental discouragement and the debilitating feeling of not being from the right area. The women expressed that their habitus or sense of 'self' was akin to the 'standard' for their family background, their beliefs and values and social groupings. They pointed out that habitus had deep historical, family and biological roots that were unique to each one of them. As a group, they felt that their family history was a powerful way of understanding who they were and their place in society. It also affirmed their beliefs and values, and the influence of Catholicism while they grew up in Ireland, as well as their sense of connection to the church. I believe that knowing who we are (as far as we can know this question) greatly influences how we behave and how others behave towards us. A shared cultural habitus was conveyed in many of the responses. The women would nod in agreement to some anecdotal responses, and Marge would usually laugh aloud and gesture with her shoulders saying "yeah that's me you're talking about". According to theory, shared identity within groups of people has been a powerful shaper

of human action throughout history (Collins, 1981; Giddens, 1984; Touraine, 1985; Bourdieu, 1998; Turner & Reynolds 2010). Bourdieu's (1977; 1980; 1986; 1991; 2000) works are primarily concerned with the dynamics of power in society, and especially the diverse and subtle ways in which power is transferred, and how social order is maintained within and across generations. He used the term habitus, referring to how we personify our social assets or 'cultural capital', which are the deeply ingrained habits that we inherit and are rooted in. His concept also informs the skills, characters and personalities that we may possess due to our life experiences (Bourdieu, 1986). Habitus is a product of our history and it produces shared and individual practices created by and through the history of our family's cultures and communities. It safeguards past experiences with present ones through patterns and perceptions of how we see ourselves and others, and how to act in certain practices; and it is by continuing those practices over time that societal norms are created (Bourdieu,1990a).

5.3.3 Psychological Habitus

The way we feel about ourselves is very much influenced by our familial circumstances, and events that have shaped us are deeply psychological and can be long lasting. Many of the women in the study spoke of childhood distress being a mitigating factor in how they view themselves. I can relate to their feelings of having the pressures of financial worry, emotional upset and confusion about their place in the world, as I too, as a young child, would have been exposed to these social issues. I have observed that a certain reluctance to speak up in class, or instigate communication, is indicative of the 'self', where individuals were not encouraged as children, were not valued enough, or told enough how much they were loved. Likewise, the loss of a parent can be deeply affecting. Anne expressed the feelings of abandonment in her own words and in her own voice. She spoke with strong emotions when she discussed that losing a father figure was a blow to how she felt about herself and her family. As a child she never really understood why her father had left:

> Sometimes I used to dream about my father coming back home. I used to imagine that he was coming off the bus on the quays and that I'd be there to meet him. I'd run into his arms, and he'd give me a big hug and an Easter egg. He would be smiling and laughing. But that was just a dream. [Anne]

The feeling of abandonment was not confined to childhood memories, but also linked to the adult experience of the women. They spoke movingly of how being let down by their partners

through secrets, lies and death had a huge bearing on their sense of 'self', and had affected their lives:

> After my fourth child was born my husband just didn't want the responsibility and left the family home. He used to give me some money at first but then he met someone else, and the money just stopped. I wasn't going to chase him for it, and I just decided to get a job myself. I didn't have time to think about education 'cos I just soldiered on and did my best. Later on though I started to think about the years that had gone and I felt a bit bitter. [Joan]

Joan's husband leaving her for another woman impacted hugely on her confidence and how she felt about herself. She attended some counselling sessions to assist her with the anger issues she experienced about her life and how it treated her. These sessions were very beneficial, and she felt a lot stronger afterwards. She believed that gaining some educational qualifications was essential to improving her life and giving her the chance to try again. One of Joan's core childhood memories was the memory of her Dad telling her she would make a great nurse and this impacted on her psychologically. Psychological habitus is of course part of cultural habitus, shaping the habits, beliefs and values of the women. All these habitus forms (gender, cultural, psychological) make up the habitus. Rosie reflected on a memory and reviewed her life. Most of the people on the street were fairly well-off, but all the fathers worked in local companies for small money. Rosie's eyes fill with tears as she recalls her very young days as a child:

> My Dad cycled to work every day and came home most evenings at 6 pm but Fridays, ah they were special, because Dad got paid, me and the younger ones would run to the corner of the street and wait patiently for Dad. We'd see the big black bike coming around the corner, and we'd all run along the path to race him home. When we got there, he would get us to close our eyes and put out our hands and each one of us got a small bar of Cadburys chocolate. It was the highlight of the week. [Rosie]

As the years went by Rosie's father lost his job, and he had terrible problems trying to find another one. "Dad was great at his job in the brewery, but he wasn't able to do much else". As time passed, money got tighter, and things got harder for Rosie's family. She never had money for clothes or makeup and her parents did not have it to give her as they did not have it for themselves. Rosie got a job in a local fish-and-chip shop and became pregnant and married by the age of 17:

> That's the way it was back then. You got pregnant then you got married. I didn't think about it too much. But looking back I was too young. I just wanted to be working and having fun. But I was looking after a child and my husband. He didn't seem to care and everything was left to me. [Rosie]

The theme of social and emotional self-awareness was common throughout the study. Observing the women and reflecting on their stories helped me to empathise and understand them at a deeper level. The women demonstrated a lot of contrasting emotions and feelings in their return to education. They felt that they had been affected emotionally by their class and backgrounds and it influenced how they felt about themselves. Karen recalls:

> My mom and Dad worked really hard for me to stay in school to do my leaving they were so proud of me because I was the first of a whole generation of my mothers and fathers side to remain in school. They felt that I was going to go places… but by the time I did my leaving the lack of jobs in the country created a situation that you needed a degree to get a nice job. I still wound up working in a shop and most of the other girls working there had left school at 14 or 15. I felt very disillusioned from it all. [Karen]

A lack of jobs in various forms of work can dictate the level of qualifications necessary to gain employment, and it is the people that struggle harder to achieve an education who find it difficult to catch up and get ahead of others. In chapter two it was noted that Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital can be impacted upon by feelings and emotions and can be related to feelings of 'not been good enough'. These feelings influence people in accepting a certain place in society and in not 'rocking the boat' at the cost of their own feelings. Feelings of isolation were also common as they lacked significant cultural support from their family members when they returned to education. When our feelings and emotions are not in alignment with the goal we wish to pursue, progress is infinitely more difficult. Self-doubt and fear can take over in an emotional vacuum. Feeling good about "ourselves" is a habit which is cultivated from a young age. Marge, one of the women, said: "To go deeper and understand everyone's perspective on life and adult education you have to be really honest and open up and not be ashamed of your background". Joan, described the conversations she had in the group as "opening up her heart in a safe place and sharing and listening to the other women in the group is a profound and truthful experience". The women also felt that gestures like body language, laughing and eye movement were considered equally important as the words they used to describe or discuss issues or feelings. Karen felt that "a safe place to express your opinion and to listen to others without distraction helped to improve my sensitivity and my awareness of others". The women did not have this educational experience in the past and they felt it was a nice way to get to know and understand each other. Their habitus was constantly invoked telling them that they would not amount to much. To achieve our potential, we need to feel good about ourselves and not be constantly assailed by outside forces. Having a feeling of being emotionally balanced needs

to be constantly nourished, and this can be difficult enough to sustain without outside forces attacking it. To be more, we need to feel more, to feel worthy, loved and good within ourselves. The women felt that it was up to them to become more resilient and to not be emotionally swayed when things were not going well. Although not being practised in separating and compartmentalising their feelings from outside influences, they had to learn to do so. They could not allow their emotions to devalue their journey upon returning to education. Having a clear path was essential in their return to education and visualising their success (as far as possible) gave them grounding and provided emotional balance. An important aspect of this theme is that of empathy, and this was considered throughout the study. Karen remembers:

> The day I started the course I was so scared and uncomfortable as it was the first time I had done anything for myself since Tony died. The first day that I walked into the class I was felt so nervous, and then the tutor introduced herself and made me feel so welcome. The other women smiled and nodded and of course Marge turned to me and said "you'll be grand girl, here sit down next to me". All of the women were very understanding and supportive. I felt safe and comfortable. [Karen]

With respect to the observations, interviews and class contact hours, I found that the themes described here resonate with the work and concepts of Pierre Bourdieu (1980; 1986; 2000). According to Bourdieu (1980), being conscious of your identity allows you to manipulate it, and to change how others perceive you and your behaviour. Having a strong awareness of our identity is essential because it helps us make our way in and through the world. The evidence that arose from the primary evidence (as outlined in the excerpts above) is valuable to the study, as it reinforces the knowledge claims of Bourdieu's theories and concepts that were presented, explored and analysed in Chapter 3. I believe that habitus simply means 'who you are as a person', and this is based on your upbringing and the people and situations that have influenced you as you were growing up. Bourdieu (1980) uses the term to describe human relations and why we are who we are. Each individual has his/her own set of naturally acquired characteristics, such as, habits, beliefs, values, tastes, physical postures, feelings and thoughts, and these are socially produced through our dispositions in life (Bourdieu, 1980). While habitus is perceived as reasonably permanent and rooted deep in our psyche, the study revealed that dialogue and communication can awaken the consciousness of the participants, providing them with the opportunity to at least reflect on their habits of habitus. They realised that they could given the right circumstances slowly change the norms of their habitus by putting their feelings into action and begin as far as

possible to experience a new type of cultural capital. The literature indicates that our worlds are socially constructed and constitute a preordained view of social structures in society, that fluctuates from the perspectives of objectivism and subjectivism. On the one hand, people are perceived as objects of culture and knowledge and, on the other hand, they are seen as subjects of culture and knowledge. The positivist view of social control relies specifically on scientific evidence, such as experiments and statistics, to reveal a 'true' nature of how society operates. And it is this type of social control that is prevalent in the dominant powers and structures of society. It imposes the ideologies of the governing class, and this helps them to maintain social control (Bourdieu, 1986). Bourdieu believed that all actions and meanings are personal and subjective, and that forms of capital are exchanged in different fields to amend people's social standing or dispositions. He (1980) also reminds us that each kind of capital has its own value, which can change and shift individuals, and as they move through the fields, their habitus becomes interconnected and fluid. What is more, people do not just passively receive habitus from being from a certain society. Some might inherit a social class location along with various material and symbolic resources that make the accumulation of societal presence relatively easy. Others may begin life with little, and struggle feverishly for a meaningful life for themselves, and in the eyes of others.

Findings Section Two: 5.4 Historical themes that arose in the Study

As I spent time with the women during the interviews and observations it became clear over the two year period that habitus is a collection of individual trajectories. For example a female/mother/learner is an individual habitus, it is also part of a collective habitus, reflecting the idea that female/mother/learners occupy similar positions in a social space and have aspects of similarity that are not identical (Bourdieu, 1998). The constant interplay between past histories and present circumstances played a strong role in the development of durable habituses (Jenkins, 2002).The theme of geographical location was one that was exhibited emotionally when it came to the forefront as I noted earlier in section one of this chapter. The women's narratives, uniquely displayed the upset and negativity surrounding their place of residence. Yet, they also felt a sense of connection a sense of sameness and a sense of belonging to their homes and housing estates. The women's early life experiences were ones of little financial security, money was the number one issue in most of their homes. This was reflected in the type of livelihood their Dads had secured, as labourers

and dockers in the City. Cultural capital and gender also reared their ugly heads and all these themes linked to habitus (Bourdieu, 1974, 1982; Holt, 1988). The three forms of capital are highlighted throughout the findings and are articulated in the women's stories embodied (tastes, skills, and dispositions), objectified (their cultural possessions), and institutionalised (certificates and degrees).

5.4.1 Social Class and Education.

The effects of a person's social class on their educational prospects often tend to be financial. Access to a good education is often predicated on ability to pay for this education. Those from lower social classes may not have the means to continue their education to the standard they aspire to. The women in the study identified with the notion that coming from a lower socio economic class, can lead, to early school leaving and can result in, intermittent if not complete states of unemployment. They felt that coming from a poorer background necessitated them as children to do more work at home or take up a job to help with family circumstances. In the interim their studies suffered accordingly and their over-all education amounted to early school leaving. The risk factors associated with limited educational achievement and low income was also highlighted in the study. Lack of educational achievements had restricted the women from having a better quality of life. The literature in chapter two and three reminds us that educational qualifications and social class are closely linked to habitus and cultural capital. The study also elucidated that the parents of the women in the study were early school leavers themselves and they survived on low level incomes. This also impacted on their educational progression when they were school goers themselves. Attempting to gain access to and participate in adult education has been highlighted as an area of progress in life for the lower social classes. However a lack of understanding of access to information and dealing with social issues has meant that entry to education is more in favour of the middle classes and not the working classes.

The neoliberalist discourse expressed for dealing with issues such as 'lower socio economic background' is a relabelling of the term 'poor' and the women in the study demonstrated this through their stories. However, the close link between economic stratification and social exclusion is not new to Irish people; it seems clear that social exclusion is an ongoing occurrence in society. In chapter two it was verified that the gap is

widening between the rich and the poor in Ireland. Working class students make educational choices on their working class habitus or an embodied sense and in the study the women had a tendency to focus on careers in the field of care. In chapter three Bourdieu (1987) reminds us that social class is constructed by economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital. Social stratification compose groups of individuals who inhabit similar positions in social space, "are subject to similar conditions of existence and conditioning factors and, as a result, are endowed with similar dispositions which prompt them to develop similar practices" (p. 6). The literature also reminds us that economic capital is central to all actors followed by cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984, 106; Swartz 1997).

The findings also indicated that the use of language in education assists in the maintenance of social exclusion and creates a position of them and us - a sort of exclusive club that few can afford to enter. Yet for the women, it was the place where intersectionality took place a place, they felt would change their lives from being dependent to independence. The maldistribution of wealth in the "free" market impacted on the lives of the women as the political agendas reinforced inequality through the change in legislation (single parent now known as job seekers allowance). Inequity in society creates inequality, and it widens the disparities between the privileged and the disadvantaged. Economic attitudes in Ireland have strongly reinforced a competitive culture of neoliberalism and they compose barriers to educational equality.

5.4.2 The Influence of Gender and Religion on Habitus

Through their stories the women captured the married lives of their parents and the hardship their mothers experienced. They highlighted that their mother's main role was to attend to their Dads needs and that of the expected large family. Married life for working class women in Ireland was one of intense labour with a strong patriarchal dominance from the church and state. As revealed in the narratives, the Catholic Church had a strong say on the lives of Irish women and they were treated as second class citizens. Furthermore, the stories suggested the influence the Catholic doctrine had on the lives and education of Irish girls and the subjects taught in schools were leaning towards domestic skills, with a belief that they would only work in the home as mothers and wives. Contraception was forbidden in marriage which was another form of oppression for Irish women. The introduction to free

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secondary education was another historical moment that was mentioned in the findings and again the women saw this as a positive move for Irish girls. However, whilst the standard of education was increasing, girls from working class backgrounds were afforded little opportunity to go on and have a career and an independent income. The general implication of these findings is that achieving gender equality requires challenging social institutions, and that doing so is crucial to address interlocking deprivations which result in poverty – not only for women, but poverty more broadly. Women's access to better paid, more secure jobs is not only beneficial to them and their families, but also to the growth of the wider economy (Freire, 1970).

5.4.3 Determination (the trajectories of habitus)

The complex dynamics of the women striving among their working class habitus assumes that the women shared similar life trajectories. We are reminded by Bourdieu in chapter three that the concept of habitus explains the reproduction of social categories. Habitus is a way of acting and behaving and thinking, that is developed in childhood and that provides each person with an implicit view and sense of the world and how the world works and our place in it. Habitus is personified in a history that is dynamic and interchangeable to new settings habitus is the social 'self' and it why individual behaviour reproduces social structures (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). The psychological entity of habitus was one that arose in the findings and is perhaps a distinctive quality that operates amid social and cultural capital. The construction of habitus has been demonstrated through the women's vignettes, past histories, childhood memories, lost parents, moving homes and economic deprivation. Through their psychological habitus the women's sociocultural identity was shaped, practiced and embodied.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the women in the study were initially motivated by economics. They also found when they returned to college that it was something to do and somewhere to socialise. Yet, as time progressed, and through self-reflection and the examination of 'self', their lives were slowly transforming as they began to see and experience things differently. They wanted to change their sense of 'self' for themselves, rather than changing it for others. It was as though the learning deepened the meaning of their lives, and changed their original economic purpose for attending the programme. The women

also displayed their struggle for respectability from the tutors through the stories and they also demonstrated a strong determination to continue with their education and finish what they started. The women began to travel on an upward life trajectory from a social past of economic deprivation to their new life in education and training.

5.5 Findings Section Three: The Women's Educational Journey Begins

When the women first met in September 2012, they were all quite cautious of each other and the tutors. There was little to no conversation shared. I knew they were terrified of this new journey, and I presented the activity 'fear in a box' (see Chapters 1 and 4). This 'broke the ice' and created a mutual atmosphere of confidentiality, respect and ease. Marge said she had not slept a wink the night before, and thinking about walking into a classroom again after years made her sick with panic. All of the other women laughed and nodded in agreement with Marge's comment, as they too had comparable feelings. The women were made feel very welcome by all the tutors, and they felt they were treated with dignity and respect.

Ground rules were decided and agreed and some of the key issues to support the women were as follows:

- A support mechanism for childcare (if the women needed to leave early because of childcare issues there would be no deductions from their weekly payment).
- The tutors [should] speak one-to-one to the learners and not look down on them.
- Time flexibility (Doctors' appointments and other confidential issues to be considered).
- Getting support with their assignments, if needed.

Putting the rules in place gave the women a sense of ownership and security in the educational process and in the research itself. From my experience, the process and the content of women's education can be interwoven into the fabric of their lives. Dewey (1916) considered learning as a form of democracy, societal development and empowerment. He makes a distinction between the:

> Traditional" approach and the "progressive" approach in education, which he calls the
> "new education". In the traditional approach, "the subject-matter of education consists

of bodies of information and of skills that have been worked out in the past; therefore, the chief business of the school is to transmit them to the new generation (Dewey, 1938, p. 17).

Proposes a progressive model, called the "new education." The underlying philosophy of this "new education" is that "there is an intimate and necessary relation between the processes of actual experience and education (Dewey, 1938, p. 20).

Therefore, the pedagogy and the curriculum should be directly linked to making the journey more plausible. An environment of caring and nurturing is necessary when people have been away from the field of education for years. The theory of adult education should be interwoven into the pedagogy and the curriculum with a clear relationship between a particular way of teaching and learning and the programme content. The general consciousness that was created in the classroom in this study was on enabling discussions. Giving the women freedom of voice and choice, which initiated self-reflection on their behaviours, values, and responsibilities to family and community; and it also assisted in identifying paths for future 'self' action. I believe that transformative learning takes place and happens in a safe place and space where there is room given for thought and freedom of expression. At an early stage in the study, I became aware that dialogue amongst the women in the setting was not just interpersonal communication: (where they spoke of economics, employment and values) but it was deeper and more intrapersonal. The verbal exchanges between the women at times involved deep sharing and inquiry (a deeper spiritual dimension). I try as often as I can to ask my students: 'What does that mean to you?'; 'What do you think of this theory?'; 'Can you apply this to your everyday life?' Getting students to present their thoughts and ideas to a class is a wonderful way of enhancing their sense of freedom. By giving them some co-ownership of the class, I can see their sense of 'self' soar. As a facilitator of learning, I encourage my learners to use critical thinking skills, and support them to develop the ability to read scripts in an active and reflective manner. I encourage them to question their social realities in order to better understand power structures and inequality in society and in life in general. My teaching practice has allowed me to be creative in the delivery of communications, study skills, personal development, professional practice and curriculum development. As a young child, I was very inquisitive and questioned everything always asking, 'Why? What? How, I was told not to question but accept life as it is. This, however, encouraged me to question more, read more and learn to understand more. When I first met the women in 2012, my brief was to deliver a communication module, and from day one I began to encourage the women to start to think critically. I put this picture on

power point and asked the women to decide three titles for the picture, and to explain why the titles were appropriate.

1. Where could this picture have been taken? Why might you think that?
2. What is happening in the background? What are they talking about? What makes you think that?
3. How do you think the boy in the front feels? What makes you think that?
4. What do you think happened just before this picture was taken?
5. What do you think will happen next?
6. What time of year could this be? What makes you think this?
7. There are four people in this picture. Pretend to be each one of them and describe what just happened and what you are thinking.
8. If you were a bystander observing this family and knew them well, what would you say?
9. If this picture was the cover picture for a book, what might the book be called?

This activity promotes critical thinking and awareness, and it encourages the learners to see things from multiple perspectives. All of the women felt that because they were motivated to attend the course, do their homework, get involved in classroom activities and show interest in the subject area, it was easier for the tutor to engage with them. They also said that they loved the practical learning activities that took place in the classroom, because they were able to draw on their prior skills and knowledge:

> I feel so intelligent when the tutor starts a class off with a discussion on something, and I'm able to connect the new information to my past experiences. I get filled up with a great sense of pride. It also makes me want to work harder and do well in my exams 'cos I know that I am capable and not stupid as I was told in school. [Joan]

> Karen loved the fact that when she started the course one of the tutors did a learning style questionnaire with all the women in the class, and she discovered from her responses that she was a kinaesthetic learner:

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> You know that in all my years in school I always felt kinda thick because I needed to see things done before I could do them myself. The teachers would always get annoyed with me, but now I know that this is how I learn. [Karen]

The women also relished the various techniques that some of the tutors used to help them to understand a topic. For example, when one of the tutors was teaching research skills, she explained first of all what research was and how to go about researching an item. She then played a YouTube clip on a piece of research that was carried out at Stanford University in the United States in 1961 on 36 boys and 36 girls from nursery school. All of the children were aged between three and six years old. The research was an investigation into child social behaviours and the theme was 'can aggression be acquired by observation and imitation?' This video verified how the research was performed by Bandura, a social psychologist, and it also demonstrated that young children's behaviours are learnt, from their social environment. The tutor then followed this demonstration with a power point and a discussion. The benefits of self-empowerment were obvious to Rosie:

> What a lovely way to learn about something that is so much a part of our lives, she made us realise that we were all capable of doing research and also how important research is in life. The way the whole thing was put to us was helpful and by the end of the class we all felt we can do this. [Rosie]

However, not all their experiences were positive, and this was reflected in response to the question when the participants became aware that they had responsibility for their own learning, and that the tutor was perhaps as much facilitator as a teacher, as Marge explains:

> I liked the video on imitation and I like this new way of learning but I find some of the tutors are a bit strict and snobby and not very flexible. Even though 'student centred learning' is the new buzz word some of the comments that they pass make me feel small and not 'good enough' I feel that they are maybe 'putting it on' and not very sincere at all. Some of them brag about being 'working class' yet, they act so different to me and the girls [Marge]

5.5.1 Responsibility for learning

The theme of being responsible for your own learning became clear to Rosie when again she had to overcome her past fear of her schooling experiences. The students had different reactions when returning to education as adult learners. Fear, of the unknown and bad memories of schooling were common themes:

> I was very nervous at first and I wanted to quit after the first week, but I stuck it out, and so far it's been okay. Some people had no trouble getting back to learning, but I was shy as

I didn't do great in school and was afraid of the teacher. The other students have been nice too, and we talk about what we have to do at home when we get assignments. One or two of them I didn't completely understand but when I talked with the other students, they helped me get it. [Joan]

Even though I never thought I'd go back to education, I was always reading books, and so I kept my mind occupied. First it was fictional books, and then I started to look up books on psychology and stuff like that. It helped me understand what I was thinking about myself and sometimes I could get negative and down in myself for not having a good job. Learning as an adult is good for me because I need to do something to motivate me again. I had no goals before I started the course and I didn't know where I was going. I think education is helping me feel better about myself. Meeting other people and listening to their stories is also great, cos, I now know I'm not the only one thinking the way I do. Being able to share your problems with the women in the group and some of the tutors helps you to realise that other people feel like you too. It is also an escape away from the drab walls of my house and it gives me some time for myself. [Marge]

5.6 Transformative moments in the study

Rosie spoke of her difficulty and her feelings of discomfort as an older woman returning to education and some of the other women nodded in agreement:

Strange I suppose to have to be going to class every day and doing homework again. I hadn't done much at school, so this was a significant amount of work for me to be doing, with housework and minding children too. The kids were amazed I was doing it and couldn't figure out how someone of my age was sitting in a class behind a desk again. I was telling them that it's never too late to do anything that you really want to do. They were asking me what the homework was like, and I was telling them that we had to have thousands of words written down and that kinda scared them. Then they were very encouraging to me but my partner wasn't too pleased and kept saying what was I doing that for, and I'd never get through it all. I thought he'd be more up for me to do it, but I just said to hell with him and gave it everything I got. I wasn't going to let him and his comments put me off 'cos he was never very helpful to me in the past so what did I expect. [Rosie]

This theme of transformation was also shared by Marge, Anne and Joan:

Yeah! I can't believe it either; I never thought I'd do something like this in my forties. Imagine me! I always wanted to do my Leaving cert and here I am now doing a FETAC level five and its equivalent to the Leaving. I never thought I'd see the day. I feel good about myself but sometimes sad that it took so long to get to this place. I think my life would have been a lot easier if I had been educated when I was a young girl. [Marge]

Me too, my kids are very proud of me though, and that makes me feel like I am doing something positive. My own childhood was hard and I always had be responsible for my young brothers and sisters. Going to school wasn't very important to my mother and it became less important when my father left home. I am surprised at how high my grades are cos I never thought I was clever. [Anne]

Look at me! Here I am 50 years old, I look old but nothing is going to stop me from moving forward. I feel more confident now than I did in my twenties, thirties and forties. I never thought I'd get an opportunity like this at my age. When I finish my

FETAC level 5 I'm going to go to third level and fulfil my dream and become a nurse.
[Joan]

As an observer I noticed the comments were significantly transformative and were clarified and illuminated by the other women in the group. I also became aware that the emergence of shared positive feelings, created a positive rhythm in the group with a nice sense of warmth and solidarity. I became aware early in the study that listening actively made the transformative moments possible. The women's desire to commit to their education and to continue on their new educational journey is captured in the narratives above. And although there were powerful messages of transformation which will be further discussed in Chapter 6 there were also obvious moments of power and politics in the classroom.

5.7 Power and Politics in the Setting

The women felt that some of the teaching environments were cold and described two winters in a row when the oil ran out in November and was not replaced until March. The building was so cold that the women had to leave their coats on in class and when they moved from one room to the other "it was like walking from the stable into Siberia" (Anne). This did not compute with Anne's expectations of adult education provision and had more in common with some of her experiences in primary school. She expected that basic comfort needs would be provided and this was a shock to her perception of the level adult education was operating on. The lack of heat in the facility made the women feel like second class citizens, they felt that if they had been in a real college this would not have been as issue. From November to March, both years there was a problem with the heat and most of the women had to leave their coats on all day to stay warm. Some of them would arrive in class with colds and flus and have to sit in the cold for the day and if they didn't show up for call the next day they were docked from their single parent allowance. This again left the women feel marginalised and upset and at times they were living below the economic threshold.

In Chapter 2, I spoke about some of the theory that influences adult learning in Ireland, one of which is the theory of 'andragogy' a phrase developed by Knowles that means adult education. He believes adult learners become self-directed once they have developed a sense of self-concept and are directed and scaffolded along their journey. A critical incident occurred in the study, and it highlighted that some individuals needed more support and

nurturing than others: This was when I noticed that some students developed them 'selves' as self-directed, while others needed more nurturing and support. The incident happened when one of the tutors discovered the theory of self-directed learning and decided to apply the concept in their classroom (Knowles, 1978, p.56). The women were given their assignments briefs at the end of semester. They were informed by their tutor to have them completed by the deadline date. This was announced without any support, guidance or direction on how they should approach the assignments. When they did ask for support and guidance this was not forthcoming. They were told, "You are a self-directed learner you need to figure it out yourself". This response created uneasiness and reinforced feelings of being stupid and 'not good enough'. The misappropriation of theory and the absence of scaffolding and instructional support seemed to impact negatively on the women. Having lived with the women through their ups and downs, I began to notice a tension developing between the tutors and the students. Now faced with the difficult dilemma of being a tutor and a researcher myself I was uncomfortable with this information and felt it should not go unnoticed. I reflected deeply on the episode and I decided to support the women with their assignments first, to put them at ease, and to recreate a safe learning environment. When the class finished that day I spoke to the tutor in question and informed her of the women's feelings and insecurities. I expanded on Knowles concept of 'self-directed learning' and Vygotsky's 'zone and proximal development' and clarified that instructional support may be beneficial if the women were given a new and difficult task. These women were already at a disadvantage starting out because of their socioeconomic backgrounds, their habitus and their coming to terms with acquiring a new type of capital (education). Their reactions created feelings of inferiority and at times it tainted their view of education. I observed a culture of dominance and power; slowly develop into a 'them and us' scenario. In Chapter 2, Bourdieu (2000) speaks about how we as individuals acclimatise to the power of habitus and to the actions of people supporting the power of various social structures. In this situation, a solid example of the relationship between habitus, structure, and agency was highlighted. Just as we should not say that a window broke because a stone hit it, but that it broke because it was breakable, one should not say that a historical event determined a behaviour but that it had this determining effect because a habitus capable of being affected by that event conferred that power upon it (Bourdieu, 2000, pp. 148–149). An adult learning environment that creates division, separation and competition may impact negatively on the 'selves' of the learners and

may generate a selfishness of the 'self' (Brookfield, 1990). Moreover, the core theme behind self-directedness is the process of collective action, peer support and emotional sustenance that feed into the 'self' in an affective and effective way (Knowles, 1985).

My task as a tutor and researcher became more difficult when these issues of power were raised through the women's stories. Another critical moment evolved when it was highlighted that one of the women in the group had the aptitude and confidence to master her learning tasks easily, and the tutor was very impressed with her ability. The tutor used Vicky's capacity to measure the aptitude of the other women in the group. Vicky herself was embarrassed by the attention and felt that she was being singled out, particularly when the tutor would come into the class hugging her saying "you are the only one who followed my instructions and got what I was saying". This is described by Foucault (1990) as normalisation, a traditional assessment in schooling conforming to power and discipline. The 'self' is complex and fragile but when it gets compared with other 'selves' it has a tendency to evaluate and judge in a negative way. The above incident was felt by Anne as an exercise of "divide and conquer", she recalls:

> When I was in primary school there were four rows in the class A, B, C and D. The girls in row A were the most intelligent and were given higher readers and the girls row D was the slow girls. When I started in secondary school it was almost the same but this time A, B, C and D were all in separate classrooms. When I went into 2nd year in secondary school they changed A, B, C and D to saint's names. St Marys etc., it was stupid really, cos we all knew the classes where the girls had the low grades. I hated it I was in row C and in class C and then in St. Bridget's. I didn't think I'd ever have to experience that again. [Anne]

The five other women looked on feeling abandoned and ashamed that Vicky was used as a stick to measure *their* ability. A feeling of discomfort developed within the group. The women were afraid to ask for help, and they also felt that they were incapable of achieving the same grades as Vicky. I found this to be particularly upsetting, and I felt the issue needed to be addressed as it was creating a split within the group. Each member of the group was dependent on the other. As mentioned earlier, in Chapter 2 Bourdieu (1980) gives a solid example of power and power structures and how they impact and govern accessibility within the education sector. The community and further education sectors in Ireland are 'officially' designed as a fairer model of adult education for social inclusion. However, differences of 'intelligence,' 'talent' and measuring of 'intelligence' was determined by this figure of authority. She may be said to be powerfully fuelling social exclusion (Bourdieu, 1998, p.178).

These women's diverse ways of learning were not taken into account at all. Observing the women's distress, I again felt it necessary to approach the tutor and her particular line manager in question.

I explained to her that the women were very distressed as they felt that they were not getting the necessary support to help them understand their assignment, and at times the words were lost through use of academic jargon. The response to my concern lacked empathy for the learners, and again it was reinforced that the women should be 'self-directed learners' even though the concept of self-directedness was not clearly understood. I was also informed that the learners were graded through the achievement of the learning outcomes, and the results were matched against a bell curve which is standard practice in all further education sectors. I believe that the misunderstanding and adoption of Knowles' individualised concept of self-direction was used as a magical tool to avoid engagement with learners and their *real life* experiences and situations (Hanson, 1996, p. 103). The women quickly learned to separate the 'self' from the *lived reality* of this new but (poor) version of adult learning engagement. Disassociation was used as a tool to protect the psychological 'self' from the hurt, pain and isolation that was all too familiar to the women. Their past experiences of disenfranchisement came to the surface once more and highlighted the challenges of power in education. Even though the women begun to see education as emancipatory and an opportunity to move forward and gain more cultural and economic capital, they did however find the environment challenging and intimidating on occasions. Trying to change the system was a continual concern for me as a tutor/researcher, where a system of power and dominance ruled within the confines of the programme and resisted the passion of free thinking and supportive learning (Habermas, 1987). A primary goal of adult education is not just:

> equipping learners with knowledge, understanding and skills, but also empowering them with the readiness to take action in society in the defence and promotion of human rights, democracy and the rule of law (Council of Europe, 2010, p.4).

A strong relationship with power and the elements of power began to materialise within the educational structure. The management and the tutors began to demonstrate hierarchical positions through the use of language and superiority using a top down approach to management. Moreover this created a 'culture within a culture' emphasising the origins of symbolic power in education and also creating a 'them and us' scenario (Bourdieu, 2000). In

year, two of the programme the course leader endorsed that 'self-directed learning' should play a key role in learning. However, because of the diverse background of the women, some felt independent to work alone whilst most of them needed to be supported and mentored. As I mentioned earlier in chapters 2 and 5, adult education ought to be interactive, inclusive, supportive and dialogic to promote transformation. The misuse of, 'self- directed learning' maybe 'self' threatening to the adult learner as the key principle of 'self' directed learning' is centred around positivity, nurturing and student productivity, it is visual provocative and interactive (Knowles, 1980). Becoming a 'self- directed learner' is a process that takes time. Some learners, particularly those who have experienced failure in the past may initially need more teacher direction to support them to manage their learning responsibilities. One of the women filled in her CAO application form and had a difficult time accessing her application and information online. One day, in class, Vicky approached me and asked me to help her. When I asked her why she had not gone to someone in management, she answered:

> Fear: One of the tutors, would have put me down. She accused me of plagiarism before, and all the work was my own and not plagiarised. She always gave me lower marks than the other women. One time I questioned her, and she brought my results down by 5%. I was shocked at the level of power she had, and I learnt very quickly not to question her again. When we all started back on year two of the course in September 2013, one of our new modules was an introduction to social care, and we had a discussion with the same tutor about the different types of class structures in Ireland and how they operate. We spoke about working-class people, middle-class people and the rich, wealthy people. The tutor then asked the group what class we thought we were from, and we all believed that we were from a working-class background. But the tutor told us that we weren't that we were the 'new underclass'. We were all shocked and looked at each other wondering what she meant, so I asked her 'What does that mean?' She said "none of you are working and that all of you are a group of single parents living off the state". None of us had ever heard the expression before, and it felt like she was saying that we were all scum and that our lives were bad. She always bragged about coming from a working-class family herself but yet she spent most of her time talking and looking down her nose at us. That day we were all kinda depressed and thought that there was no hope for us. [Vicky]

As time progressed, some of the women felt a level of discomfort with some of the tutors. They observed a sense of insincerity and intolerance, and at times they felt 'in the way of the tutors' and were scared to ask for help. The development of critical awareness assisted the learners to question the hows and whys in this situation, and why things are the way they are. An important aspect of my teaching methodology is 'dialogue':

> Critical literacy… points to providing students not merely with functional skills, but with the conceptual tools necessary to critique and engage society along with its inequalities and injustices. Furthermore, critical literacy can stress the need for students to develop a

> collective vision of what it might be like to live in the best of all societies and how such a vision might be made practical. (Freire, 1970, p.51)

I noted that my teaching style differed from some of the other tutors. And there were times, when the women felt undervalued, even though the ethos of the teaching organisation was built on Knowles' (1980) theory of andragogy. The relationship I developed with the learners was more horizontal in nature, and the roles of facilitator and learner became more interchangeable, relaxed and democratic. This methodology promotes free talking and thinking, 'posing' problems and exchanging life's experiences. Dialogue allows problems within the group to surface, and through group discussion the problems can be resolved (Freire, 1970). The women said that there were a lot of things going on in the place that they were not very happy about but did not feel they had the power to say anything. The building was cold, the rooms were too small, and some of the computers never worked. They also felt that on the surface everyone was nice but underneath there was a lot more happening. There were issues of favouritism between the tutors with certain women, and the women who were seen as the favourites were uncomfortable about it all:

> At times, some of the tutors used the comment 'suck it up' and that's exactly, what we did, we got on with it. We had come this far we were going to keep going until we got our certs. [Karen]

The women confirmed their personal drive to achieve their educational goal. Their commitment to each other and the course was expressed in the narratives but the hurt they felt was demonstrated in their tone of voice and body language. This trend reflects the women's long struggle to achieve an equal playing field. For sure, the field is still far from equal— from the persistent pay gap to the disproportionate burden on women to manage household chores and childcare. Although what is clear from the stories is the often superficial portrayal of the working woman does not apply. The working woman is complex and has nuanced views about work, especially across generations. Women celebrate societal advances and their growing role as breadwinner. Yet they also need affirmation of their hard work and newfound status as an economic force to be reckoned with and at the same time may need acknowledgement of the traditional values such as the role of mother and homemaker. When the women returned to adult education, they expressed the need for the challenge that we as human beings all require in our lives. Freire (1970) calls this natural challenge 'the ontological vocation of man [woman]'. They also demonstrated that as older women they now

knew that they were actually better than what life had previously shown them, and were capable of much more. This acted as a motivating factor for many of them. The theme of missed opportunities was also exemplified in their responses. These opportunities were missed since, as younger girls and 'selves', they lacked a positive sense of 'self' and did not feel quite good enough. Marge recalls her love for learning:

> I loved learning in school, and though I couldn't do my leaving, I thought I would have done well at it if I got the chance. Then I just decided I'm going back. I'm going to college and this time I'm going to finish. Maybe I just felt fed up but I said I can't go on like this and so I just got myself an application form and filled it in. When I had it filled in I looked at the page and wondered for a second but my mind was made up, and that was it. I had to promise myself to stop putting things off. [Marge]

However, self-doubt was also a constant companion on their current educational journey, and the teaching methodology of critical dialogue tried to at least alleviate and respond to this. The women were friends and their camaraderie, aided them on their journey. Their inclusivity was very much to the fore: as adult learners, the women realised that they were not alone in their journeys. By being involved with other people with similar life experiences, they felt more empowered, realising that what they had undergone already in their lives was an invaluable learning process on its own. Marge said:

> The best thing about it is you are up every morning and out of the house. You have to study okay and sometimes the assignments you get are hard, but you have just to plan it out and give yourself time. I only had to ask for an extension once when the child was sick but so far so good. Some of the people on the course are complaining' about getting too much work to do and why can't we do fewer words but I'm sticking' by what I'm asked to do. I know what it's like to miss out once, and it's not going to happen again. [Marge]

Vicky agreed with Marge and said:

> I like when we can all talk about things in class. It makes it much easier when other people know what you've been through. Sometimes you can feel isolated going home with your work but when you come into class again, you realise that other people are going through the same thing. When we talk about how we're feeling in class, I don't feel so cut off. You forget that you know a lot of things already, and college just reminds you. [Vicky]

Having the daily routine and a time schedule was something that the women commented on, as they felt that the routine got them motivated, and they seemed to be able to do their homework and study and still do their normal house chores. The themes of hope and determination were also highlighted as the women realised that things were possible (Freire, 1994). And they felt optimistic about their futures Karen said:

> At the moment, I'm struggling' from week to week but hopefully when I'm qualified I'll have the job I need. One of my friends graduated last year, and she's already working in a beauty salon, and she hopes to open up her own one. So yeah there's definitely work out there if you look at it. [Karen]

The women demonstrated full commitment to the value of adult education. Perhaps previously sceptical of its appeal, due to some unfortunate experience in their primary and secondary educations, they now saw that adult education was what they valued most about their current life status:

> I'm not sure about jobs after this, but I think I'll be better off in the long run. You have to have qualifications nowadays and every job you go for they want to see your cv, and I didn't even have one before I came to the classes. Now it's there, and I know a few girls who got jobs after doing courses so I hope I'll be like them and will be able to earn some decent money. [Rosie]

The women's transformative process was dominated by an economic necessity which placed the attainment of *'a job'* above how adult education might be changing them. By seeing education as a means to an end they were buying into the internalisation of power and how this power was dominating their thinking. I could see how desperate they were to do well so that they could gain financially and to feel safe with a secure job. This drive for financial security was perhaps impeding their sense of reflection on how education might be powering their transformative experience. The education-economic discourse was sometimes lost in this all pervasive goal of secure employment and Bourdieu states:

> ..advanced societies is the product of two fundamental principles of differentiation – economic capital and cultural capital – the educational institution, which plays a critical role in the reproduction of the distribution of cultural capital and thus in the reproduction of the structure of social space, has become a central stake in the struggle for the monopoly on dominant positions (Bourdieu, 1996, p.5).

Although the women focused on academic achievement and monetary gain, they also began to experience a positive 'self' belief. On a macro-level I could see the women's sense of 'self' elevate and liberate though critical reflection and dialogue. However, on a meso-level the educational structure was more conducive to power, politics and neoliberalism. I noticed great moments of transformative possibilities in the study. I observed the women question the way things are in life and also demonstrate an interest in challenging the status quo. I reflected on the following as I observed the transformative possibilities: What merits would they bring with them if they were placed in a position of power and how would they wield this power? Had adult education given the women power to transform their view of

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ourselves? What can be achieved was still very much to the fore with the women and although they had their material needs, their pride in their achievements was clear and this transformation was enhanced through dialogue and reflection (Freire, 1970 and 1994).

> When I returned to learning, I felt inferior and cautious and found it difficult to engage with lecturers. The feelings of discomfort prevented me from expressing my opinion in class and from getting involved in group discussions when the lecturer was present. From my perspective, the lecturers were people of superiority, and I felt like a lesser person. Their choice and use of linguistics made the experience, even more, unsettling, and it widened the gap between them and me. It was unclear as to why they did not use simple terms to explain complicated concepts, and establish an inclusive practice. Instead, it was debilitating for me, and it took me some time before I felt comfortable in participating. When the study began in 2012, I observed that some of the women in the course practiced a similar emotional frame of reference that to me, and they too lacked the confidence to voice their thoughts. This heightened my awareness of the depth and distance which socio-economic fields and capital play on the 'self' [Yelverton-Halpin, Journal extract, September 2012].

The findings also highlighted other areas of dominance in the composition of the tutor-student power structure. This relationship can be fraught with danger if the tutor assumes that adults should easily assimilate knowledge that the tutor wishes to dispense (Freire, 1970). The tutor's internalised feeling that 'you're adults' can be anathema to holistic communication in an adult education classroom. This sense of dominance and condescension can unhinge the delicate balance between a knowledgeable tutor and somewhat nervous adults who may revert to the childhood version of themselves as students when returning to education. Rosie, in her reflections, mentioned some comments the tutor made in class which she found unhelpful and which affected the dynamic within the class as a whole. 'Did you not read the question'?, 'The answer is in the book', ' I don't have time to show you now', 'The other group are further ahead than you', 'You're falling behind', all displayed a lack of empathy on behalf of the teacher and an absence of patience with the students. This can be very unsettling for a class who may be new to each other and who may be attempting to form a unit of support and trust. This divide and conquer approach may leave students feeling isolated not knowing who to trust, either fellow student or teacher. As mentioned in Chapter 3, different groups in society hold unequal status: some tend to be privileged while others are disadvantaged. And power and privilege can manifest in all cultures, and manoeuvre its way into any structure with positive or negative influences. Labels are used for groups in lower power positions to make us feel more powerful, and the results can lead to prejudice and discrimination. The formerly oppressed can become oppressors themselves and the women found it difficult at times working with an all-female tutor roster (Bourdieu, 1986). They felt

isolated by their fellow women and couldn't understand why their concerns were not being met. A general air of disinterest was prevalent and they complained that many times they felt on their own and lacked the support they needed. The interesting thing about this study is that it was a female occupied management team, yet the managerial style adopted was autocratic and seemed unfit for the social group and the ethos of adult education and counter-normative for women leaders.

It is evident from this study that the magnitude of data into the inquiry is consistent, as it was apparent that the women revealed their dimensions of 'self'. It sees the social meanings of 'self' from the subjective perspective of the participants, and it also highlights the 'self' as a product of cultural and political conventions that are constructed through the habits of habitus. Although the 'self' in habitus is twofold, it is when we get the opportunity to step back and reflect and critically analyse our identity that we as individuals partially refine and improve 'self'. The self-image of many of the women had become blurred. As children, many of them had to be too responsible for their years, and as adults they again had to become responsible for their children, leaving little or no time for 'self' reflection or dialogue. Many of them had almost discarded themselves in their daily struggles, and finding the courage to see their perceived true 'self' again was a huge effort. Their 'selves' had been subsumed by the daily grind of life, disappointments and not feeling good enough. Forgoing themselves on a constant basis had left many of them feeling unworthy and scared of the future. With no great direction, and a fractured sense of 'self' they were perceived as just existing. Adult education gave them a daily purpose, a routine and most of all a new found confidence in themselves. They were not weak; they had just misplaced their strength and functioned well in a supportive and nurturing environment. Although the tutors at times failed to support their learning needs, knowing they had one person they could rely on made the road a little easier. Although they knew and appreciated themselves and were far more self-aware they also knew they would still have to battle as life is full of rough and smooth ground (Dunne,1992).

5. 8 Conclusion

This chapter has given a voice to the women in the research. All of whom came from lower socio-economic backgrounds with early school leaving and early motherhood a

dominant feature. It reflects their life stories before their educational journey began. It portrays the important issues that arose for them during their educational journey and it reveals their perspectives of power and dominance in the educational setting. It highlights their outward and inner struggles to unshackle themselves from a negative ingrained sense of 'self' that was limiting and stifling. An initial view that *this is as good as it gets* was very dominant in their backgrounds and support was not forthcoming from family members. This echoes Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, capital and field emphasising a lack of cultural and social capital is a major disadvantage for many. The chapter also looked at the affect and effect of habitus *forms* in the women's stories; gender, culture and psychological habitus all of which make up the habitus (Bourdieu, 1985). The chapter also looked at the embodiment of gender and the intersectionality of habitus and life trajectories. Having seen their parents and elder siblings follow a certain path of low academic and economic achievement the women felt themselves propelled in the same direction through their habitus. When these forms of capital are absent or severely diminished the sense of 'self' is low. The chapter also looked at the idea of motivating the learners through emotionally-driven content. And it was demonstrated that if they feel emotionally connected to the subject matter, they may feel engaged with the information and absorb it. Using images and graphics that are powerful and relevant, also evokes a certain feeling and opens up doors for discussion. Positive emotional elements can also serve to inspire and motivate learners who may initially feel disconnected from learning. Critical literacy encouraged the women to question the *status quo* and to experience transformative possibilities and moments of enlightenment. Although these transformative possibilities may be challenged by economic need, it was obvious that a change was taking place within the 'self' of the women. They were beginning to gain cultural capital and felt stronger in the new field of education that they were operating in.

Chapter 6, the concluding chapter, explores the transformative possibilities of the women in the study and it gives a brief account of the women's journeys a year after the study concluded.

Chapter 6: Transformative Possibilities Explored

6.1 Introduction

This chapter draws together the key findings on transformative pedagogy. It looks at the contribution this study can make to knowledge and future research in adult education. The study set out to investigate the 'self' of six Irish women who returned to the field of adult education. My enquiry was guided by three questions which I addressed in chapter 1 and chapter 4 as follows:

1. What Bourdieuian insights into transformative possibilities can be deduced from the critical search for the self?
2. What aspects of the 'self' change and evolve as this cohort of adult learners return to the field of education?
3. Can we explore, to some degree of certainty, if such changes are viewed by the participants themselves as positive, negative, or both?

The study was carried out over a two-year period and the methodology used was a critical ethnographic approach. Critical ethnography becomes the "doing" or the "performance" of critical theory. Critical ethnography integrates reflexive inquiry into its methodology. As a researcher I found that this approach was intrinsically linked to the women being studied and therefore inseparable from their background. As an emerging critical ethnographer I found it involved speaking on behalf of the women in the study, while at the same time attempting to express my own perspective and also acknowledging my position and preference. As I discussed in chapter 4, critical ethnography is "critical theory in action", it is used as a means of interpretation (Madison, 2004, pp.14-15). It is the act:

> of critique [which] implies that by thinking about and acting upon the world, we are able to change both our subjective interpretations and objective conditions. (Thomas, 1993, p. 18)

Critical theory in action is helpful in identifying the underlying assumptions in the work I do as a researcher/ teacher while also helping the women in recognising their own 'self' progress and change. Dialogue and communication are key elements of the study as they create a sense of engagement and act as interplay among the women and myself. The women sought to become more employable by returning to education and gaining qualifications, and the study encouraged them to question their social realities through critical thinking and questioning.

As a group, the women felt that they were fairly represented as they were all working class, all single parents and all shared similar life experiences. This created a sense of self inclusion, safety and familiarity with their peers and they shared the same determination for a better life. This chapter provides an overview of the themes of transformation that arose from the study. It will look at key Bourdieuian insights into transformative possibilities via use of the concepts of habitus, capital and field. The chapter then proceeds to consider some key pedagogical factors that arose in the study. It particularly examines Bourdieu's concept of habitus as a 'root' implication and a visual diagram of 'the tree of life'. It then looks at my contribution to knowledge and some implications for future research in adult education. The chapter gives a brief account of the onward journey of the women in the study and closes with a final conclusion.

6.2 Bourdieu's insights into transformative possibilities: Demonstrating the power of Habitus, Capital and Field.

Reflecting on Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field and capital is central to understanding the social origins of 'self'. The women's sense of 'self' was severely impaired and yet through their experiences of adult education they began to reclaim them 'selves'. The stories in Chapter 5 support the following findings with regard to the research questions. It was obvious from the findings that habitus is a set of attitudes and values defined by class and culture. The women all came from a working class habitus and they had similar upbringings. Almost all of their fathers worked in low level jobs with low levels of employment and this impacted on the habitus of the women. Economics in all of their stories took precedence over education and the cycle of low level jobs continued for the women throughout their lives so far. The findings also highlight that the dominant habitus is a set of attitudes and values held by the dominant class. Yet there is some hope to be found in the fact that:

> Social fields and the habitus can be changed by changed circumstances (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 116).

The women's first transformative moment arrived when they took the leap and returned to education. It was a new challenge for them. They had to step outside their comfort zone. Education brings with it many transformative possibilities and the women experienced

many of these on their journey to date. However, the pervading neoliberal context unduly manipulates the culture of education and imposes the beliefs and values of the dominant culture; bringing with it a ruling-class worldview ('education is for job advancement, not for knowledge gain'). This worldview is globally imposed and is increasingly accepted as a cultural norm in Ireland. It sits with the dominant ideology that justifies education as a social practice (political agenda) for economic growth and development. The women bought into this neoliberalist agenda as they equated education with better employment prospects, instead of seeing knowledge as a means of personal and social growth and development. This perpetuation of job success through education is part of the Irish *status quo* and is, I believe not beneficial for everyone. Indeed it is largely artificial in its claims and benefits the dominant culture of power predominantly. When the women began writing their assignments there was an initial negative reaction to the word count and time allotted and some displayed an 'I can't do it' response. Vicky adapted to the writing process very quickly and felt proud of her own progression and felt a positive sense of 'self' from the challenge. Rosie, on the other hand, found the task a little more difficult and needed extra support with her structure and writing style. After some time she too experienced some transformation in her writing. The depth of transformative possibilities varied for each of the women. The areas of transformation were identified by the women as: stepping outside their comfort zone; writing and reading more often; knowing their learning style; and also becoming aware of their capabilities as adult learners and appreciative of the social aspect of returning to education. These transformative instances demonstrated an evolution of 'self' and the positivity that this incurred. The women's frame of reference had changed as they wanted to move on to third level education once they completed FETAC level 5. The findings demonstrated that the women became more confident and even more assertive with some of the tutors. However, Rosie felt a strong sense of fear; she felt *she was not good enough* and still may not be able to keep up with the other women on the course. She was concerned about the lack of support and this situation brought back some negative school memories. We are reminded by Bourdieu in chapter 3 that habitus can be altered by knowledge or education as it "is embedded within everyday actions, much of which is subconscious" (Bourdieu, 1977; p. 430).

The negative feelings Rosie felt through the lack of tutor support removed the sense of liberation that she felt earlier in the study and this impacted on her 'self' autonomy.

Habitus can move back-and-forth between past experiences and present circumstances that were previously learned and replicated elsewhere (Reay, 1998, p.521). Adults who return to education with the 'wrong type' of cultural capital may develop a lack of 'self-certainty' in their [new found] 'habitus' (Reay, 1998, p. 523). Watching parents and older siblings continue along the accepted norms of early school leaving, menial job acceptance and diminished expectations was all pervasive. This formed the women's sense of 'self' as indeed it formed the lens through which the women viewed their own prospects. 'Know your place' and 'accept your lot in life' was a fatalist mantra that was, for many, impossible to overcome. Authority was viewed as the natural preserve of the privileged and well off. But in returning to education, although not perfect in many ways, the women felt encouraged to view their life from another perspective. By viewing it through a different lens they could see that life can change and be different from the one they had lived to date. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) proposed that the field of education can provide a setting in which people and their social positions are located and education is:

> ……in fact one of the most effective means of perpetuating the existing social pattern, as it both provides an apparent justification for social inequalities and gives recognition to the cultural heritage, that is, to a social gift treated as a natural one." (Bourdieu, 1974, p. 32)

During the study the women became more proactive when dealing with family life. In the findings Rosie spoke about the lack of support from her partner and how she stood up for her new life and her new journey in adult education. Marge highlighted the social aspect of the course, meeting new people, sharing similarities which made the learning easier. These moments of transformation are scattered throughout the findings. In many ways learning about 'self' supported the women to acknowledge their skills and knowledge leading to a transformation of the 'self'. The women described these moments as helpful and empowering. All of the women initially came from traditionally patriarchal homes. However, job loss and low skilled work created financial insecurity in the family unit leaving the families disadvantaged and marginalised and leaving them with little or no economic capital and little existing cultural capital to reclaim their independence. These obstacles were common themes that arose throughout the study and the basic human needs of food and shelter were prioritised over educational achievement (Baumgartner, 2001). Bourdieu contends that within each field there are struggles and forces that are all part of the human condition influenced by habitus (Bourdieu, 1986).

6.3 A review of the literature: A main focus on transformative possibilities

Transformational learning takes place when our view of 'self' is enhanced. Freire (1970), Brookfield (1980), Boyd and Myers (1988) Mezirow (1991) and Dirkx (1997) all write eloquently about this. Great emphasis is placed on dialogue between the student and teacher, with mutual respect and a willingness to review both their roles in the learning process. This is the truest sense of transformation and is reflected in Freire's notion of conscientization–developing consciousness, but the consciousness that is understood to have the power to transform reality' (Taylor, 1993, p. 52). By transforming their reality students are encouraged to look at the political forces that influence this reality both globally and locally (Freire, 1970, Shor, 1996, Welton 1995). As a critical learner/educator I could appreciate that access to adult education freed me to consider how class distinction is formed and how these cultural roles are practised (Bourdieu, 1997 p. 214). This empowered me to encourage the women in my study to consider their own ability to affect change and to embrace liberation. Their sense of 'self' was immeasurably enhanced on occassions (as far as I could see and observe). I could see the benefits for the women of this heightened sense of awareness; how 'self' belief is empowering and transforming. Observing the women speak with confidence and discuss political issues openly was transforming. In chapter 2, Freire (1970) emphasised education as a culutral representation of 'self' and a cultural act of empowerment and social change. Adult learning has been appropriated by social and political movements that aim to be personally uplifting and that aim to promote a positive form of political and social empowerment (Antikainen et al, 2006; Chrabolowsky, 2003; Gohn, 2008; Mayo, 2009). The transformative power of learning for students in adult education has been viewed worldwide. Millions of adults have reaped the benefit of re–engaging with exciting fields of study. This has seen learners encouraged to question their reality, to replace and re-frame any negative experiences they may have encountered (Brookfield 1987, 1991).

However, adult education is far from being a seamless process as the women at times may have internalised the relationships between themselves in education and objective structure of education itself (Rudd, 2003). There were times when the women felt oppressed and put upon and also felt fearful of losing their only form of income (single parent allowance). Adult education has a dual agenda; on the one hand it claims to be liberating and transformative and, on the other, it seems to be framed by a strong neoliberalist agenda which

is very much to the core of all further education programmes. Our unconscious mind can also shape our thoughts, feelings and beliefs leading to our daily actions (Boyd, 1991). For Boyd, adult education is emotional and spiritual delving from the interplay between how we feel about ourselves and our unconscious mind. This blending of conscious feelings and deep rooted unconscious impulses are what drive us to finding our own voice (Dirkx, 2000 p 1). Transformation of adult learners can develop deeper than personal autonomy concerns as it delves below the surface of 'self' in an exploration influenced by compassionae interactions leading to a process of individuation (Dirkx, 1998). In my own experiences of adult learning, I have experienced many different 'selves' which are subject to an engagement with, and an ongoing dialogue between my conscious and unconscious 'self' (Dirkx, 1997). Whilst some 'selves' may appear more private and concealed than the 'self' we display to the world, but all are true in themselves. Dialogue and reflection are essential in the transformation process and in the exploration of 'self' (Mezirow, 1997). Bourdieu reminds us that changing habitus is a process of training and counter-training, and this involves repeating activities and critically questioning the status quo (Bourdieu, 2000, 1997 p. 172; Freire, 1970). Rudd (2003) tells us that 'class habitus' is not simply a condition of being but is dependent upon *practice* arising from dispositions and choices influenced by both subjective and objective relationships within structures (Rudd, 2003). In other words, social class and other terms such as gender and race are not attributes of individuals, but instead represent 'generative forces of action' (Drudy and Lynch, 1993, cited in O' Brien, 2004).

6.4 Some key pedagogical factors to critically consider from this study

Bourdieu (1985) developed the concepts of 'habitus' and 'capital' and 'field' to help us understand how social inequality is reproduced through the education system. He believes that the dominant class can have cultural advantage and are exposed to the *right* kinds of cultural dispositions. They are subtly trained to move in the right social circles and to take advantage of their status. For others, habitus can be seen in cultural deficit terms. From the onset of the study the six women demonstrated disadvantage and marginalisation, and this was an ongoing theme throughout the research. Bourdieu reminds us that capital can be used as a "weapon and a stake" (Bourdieu, 1986b, p. 247) by those that have the knowhow. For the women in this study, they had to learn the game and develop 'a feel for the game' of education (Bourdieu, 1977, p.72). When the course began they were excited, nervous and

fearful of their new educational adventure and their induction onto the course was positive and they felt supported. Here we are reminded by Bourdieu that habitus is developed through socialisation and this can determine and shape the learner. If the experience is positive it promotes greater comfort and ease and assists the learners to adapt to the new learning environment.

As I mentioned in Chapter 3, Bourdieu (1986) writes that habitus is not a 'structure' but a durable set of dispositions that are formed, from birth, through our environment and our social relations, and influences our human behaviour. Again the women reinforced how their habitus had limited them and how the lack of financial and cultural capital had prevented them from moving in the right circles. As habitus is internalised and embodied (and not often articulated) moving into the unknown can create a social distance between the *game player* and the *novice game player*. The women in the study eventually learned to *play the game* to a proficient standard at this level of education. They got their assignments in on time, did their work experience, socialised with their networks of career interest and planned their progression route to third level. It was their original feelings of exclusion that drove them and presented them with the possibilities for/to change. Like all games they learned the rules and these rules were adhered to vigilantly. The women were determined to progress in life, to provide a better life for their children and to be good role models for them. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) propose that the field of education offers a site where social positions are located. Bourdieu further reminds us how middle classes "move in their world as a fish in water" (1992, p. 108) as they have the knowledge and know how to do so. Bourdieu's theory, advocates that educational capital is a vehicle of social mobility and a key component of social reproduction. I did question however to what extent the women were obedient/ compliant over- and- above them being transformed/liberated. I discovered throughout the study that although the women were following the 'rules of the game' they were also gaining skills and 'self' Knowledge and reintegrating this new knowledge into their lives and perspectives (Mezirow, 1991 and Freire, 1972).

Freire had a deep respect and humility for the less well off in society and believed that their contribution to society was of equal importance to that of the dominant culture (or the powers that be). He believed that being respectful and humble, nurtures a learning

environment that is participatory, active and reflective. He created a pedagogy that starts out from 'lived' experience of the learners and evolves from there.

> ....This does not necessarily mean that the oppressed are unaware that they are downtrodden. But their perception of themselves as oppressed is impaired by their submersion in the reality of oppression (Freire, 1970, p. 45).

Freire saw the teacher as a 'facilitator' using a horizontal approach to teaching and learning instead of the top down model described in chapter 5. The facilitator supports the learner to think critically about their gender, culture and habitus. This problem-posing model of learning explores the problems the learners find themselves in and it is a form of transformation. As I highlighted in Chapters 2, 4 and 5 of the study, I use Freire's model as part of my own teaching and learning approach. The results from the study indicate that the women found that this mode of learning to be beneficial to the 'self' and they discovered that their world was open to transformation. They were encouraged to question the dominant ideology, and specifically neoliberal thinking and instead of *accepting* they began to *question* (Freire called this *conscientization*) (Freire 1988, p.404). As demonstrated in chapter 5 when the women in the study experienced issues of power and dominance the problems were posed in my class and we found solutions through dialogue and critical reflection. I have discovered from this study that transformation in education must be rooted in the ethos and culture of the organisation if personal growth of the 'self' is to happen. The thinking and behaviour of the tutors must largely determine a transformational culture. It is my belief that transformation in education should focus on the practical tools of critical thinking/literacy through the life experiences of the adult learner. This I believe will support the learner to identify, create and maintain a culture that is positive and empowering for them. If adult education focused more on the individual 'self' instead of primarily the labour market it would harness a people with enriched knowledge and positive 'self' awareness.

In the findings the women demonstrated that they were moved by certain aspects of their learning. Knowing their learning style was an empowering experience for them. This was further highlighted in the findings when the class content involved real life situations that matter to their world and matter to women in general (such as the use of case studies). They were able to connect deeply with these topics and they felt through analysis and discussion that they had the opportunity to make a difference. We are reminded by Mezirow (1990) in chapter 2 that real learning happens when the learner starts to re-evaluate their lives and see

things from different perspectives and to change and re-make their lives (1990, p.4). Bourdieu reminds us that social fields, and the individual habitus can be changed by new circumstances (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 116). Social capital represents social relations and the social group you belong to (family or class membership) can also assist in, or act as prevention in the access of, education and knowledge production (Bourdieu, 1986). The findings indicated that the women's habitus was central to their level of educational achievement and we are reminded that:

> … pupils of working-class origin are more likely to eliminate themselves from secondary education by declining to enter it than to eliminate themselves once they have entered, and a fortiori more likely not to enter than to be eliminated from it by the explicit sanction of examination failure." (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990, p. 153)

In Chapter 3, Bourdieu mentions that habitus is durable and evolving and has to adjust continuously to new situations and contexts (Bourdieu, 1984). When the six women returned to adult education they too had to change slowly to adapt to a new and different situation; and they had to create their own subjective dispositions (Bourdieu, 1977). The new "*opus operandum*" for the women was education (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 36). They were all determined to gain a FETAC level 5 qualifications and move on to a better life! While there were moments of insecurity and issues of power and dominance that appeared throughout the study, the women's involvement in the field of education began to shape their habitus, which in turn began to shape their perceptions and actions and this led to a reproduction of the rules of the field of adult education (Crossley, 2001, p. 101). It was through Bourdieu's writings and from observing the women that I discovered, habitus evolves and changes when a person moves into a new field of practice such as (adult) education. I also discovered that Freire's notion of critical consciousness can support them on their educational journey. Although critical consciousness (conscientização) is a distinct concept in itself, I believe that it may be able to assist in the process of 'self' questioning, and promote critical thinking in adult learners.

The following figure was designed when I began to decipher and thematise the findings as it attempts to make visual the workings of Bourdieu concepts.
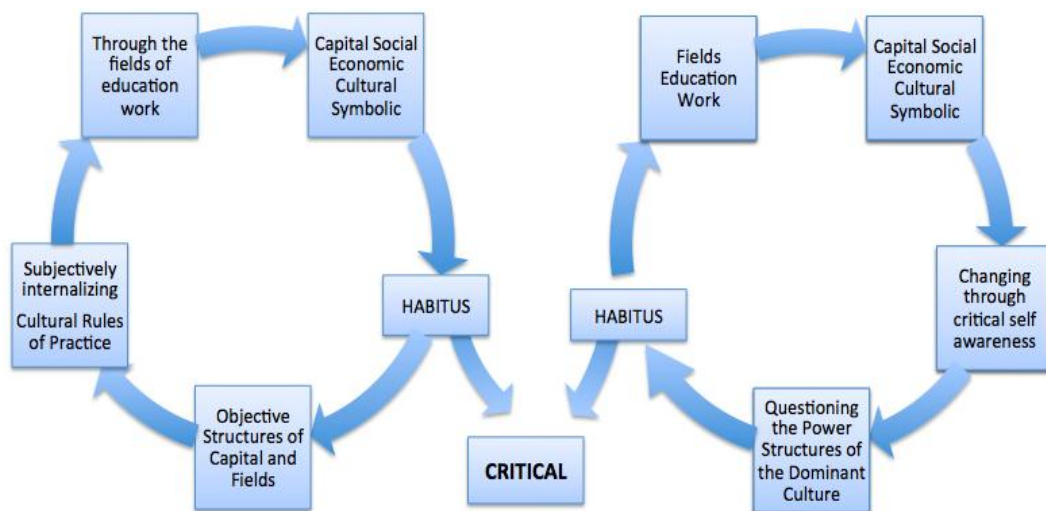
Figure 10: Critical Consciousness is the Bridge that transforms the 'Self' to Question the Objective Structures of the Dominant Powers and Cultures [Yelverton-Halpin, 2014]

The figure above revisits Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field and capital. A fundamental part of Bourdieu's work focuses on social class (class habitus). I have used his concepts as a tool to enable me to identify (as far as possible) and plan (as far as possible) a subtle means of altering what I consider the deep seated roots of habitus. The above figure is a representation of the theory/ data, interplay from this study. It captures the relational aspects of the 'self' and habitus and it attempts to display the overlapping characteristics of the subjective and objective structures that reside within the dominant powers. This study found the inner and emotional part of 'self' is developed through critical literacy bringing with it a deeper sense of 'self' awareness. This nurturing of the 'self' assisted the women in this study to develop the skills to 'play the game' intuitively, as well as question their social realities (instead of accepting the structures that are put in place by the principal powers and the neoliberal thinking that encapsulates our present society). The most basic tenet of 'self' is to take time for yourself. The women in this study were given time to take stock of their lives and new educational journey through reflection. Stepping back from normal reality is time off and it supports us to be more competent when we return to the task at hand. Critical consciousness is integrated with reality and dialogue creates an attitude of trust, respect and empathy. With a lack of awareness that we are the oppressed can for the most part leave us experience the effects of living in a repressive state. We can become accustomed to this as a cultural and social norm. The

tool of critical literacy assisted the women in gaining an understanding of human liberty. Drawing from the bridge of critical consciousness is the basis for my suggestion of a renewed and dynamic sense of habitus. Educational habitus is deeply embedded in the subconscious of the Irish people, as knowledge ascribes to success and symbolic capital (Inglis, 2004). The women in the study have lived through many changes in their lifetimes, socially, emotionally, politically, and culturally; they have moved through a cycle of domination to semi-independence, and are currently striving for independence. The social system and the life history of the women is an aggregate to the survival and the part success and part failure of their changing awareness. For Bourdieu, habitus is marked by its earliest mode of acquisition acquired through family, schooling and class, which tends to control the agents' life course, "because most people are statistically bound to encounter circumstances that tend to agree with those that originally fashioned the habitus" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.133). A feature of habitus is that individuals are previously disposed to act in specific ways, follow definite paths in life, work in certain fields, and live with explicit values and beliefs (Bourdieu, 1991, p.16). Within each field, there are power struggles that fluctuate and change, depending on the social contacts (or lack of), accessible to each individual, thus highlighting the significance of social capital. The connections the women made through attending the programme were generally positive, and reciprocity and trustworthiness became part of the learning process. Bourdieu believes that social capital is acquired and the lack of it can also restrict individuals from progression (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992. p.134).

Freire considers that critical consciousness through dialogue helps to overcome the force of authority and its restricted limitations, and allows people to transform instead of being objects of tyranny (Freire, 1970, p. 93). It is my belief that the linking together of these two concepts can further nurture human transformation. Education is seen by most as indispensable to people from all classes and cultures and can be the most accessible form of cultural capital. The study highlighted that the role of the educator and facilitator is fundamental to adult education. Teaching must happen from the inside out with the collaboration of the educator and not the usual top down model approach (Freire, 1975). The teaching form I used took the life situations of the women as a starting point to raise consciousness and break down barriers and to view these obstacles as self-goals. For most adults returning to education the system mirrors the oppressive society as a whole;

students are oppressed by being completely denied the opportunity to think for themselves. Therefore their growth and progress is dependent on the levels of the model of critical consciousness they possess. As mentioned earlier in the literature, one of the visions of the *Learning for Life White Paper on Adult Education* (2000) was to provide learning opportunities to the diverse educational needs of adult learners and to create social inclusion in educational sectors (2000, p. 9). As noted in Chapter 1, the economic downturn in 2008 had an immediate impact on education, particularly in the community sector. It precipitated cuts across all levels of education from primary and post-primary to higher education funding and cutbacks on a range of schemes. The figure below demonstrates the cyclical nature of the strength of 'self' reflection that leads to and promotes 'self' awareness and critical consciousness.
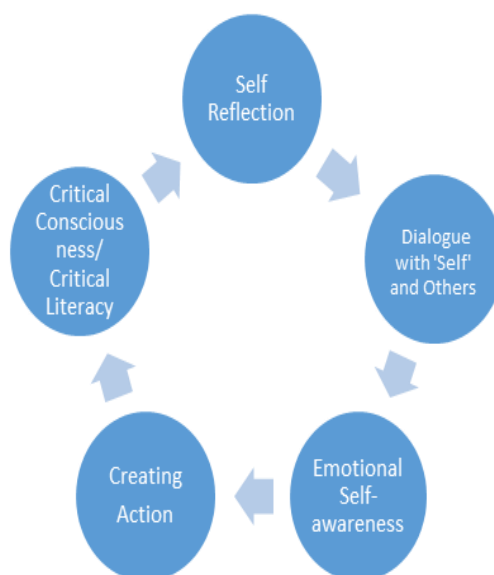
Figure 11: Transforming Habitus through Critical Consciousness [Yelverton-Halpin, 2013]

I perceive transformational education, then as a metamorphosis or change in the 'self'. In Chapter one I introduced the reader to my own educational journey and as part of my continuing journey I trained in a therapy named the metamorphic technique (MT). The therapy recognised the whole 'self' as an agent of change and the process involved renewal and moving forward in life. Later, on my educational path, I discovered that academics call this a 'paradigm shift'. MT is a concept of re-birthing and letting go of past negative

behaviours, it is a process of challenging, changing and evolving in life. While education may be seen as a catalyst for 'self' change, emancipation and social transformation. It ought to be about the person not primarily the institute or the job. MT in education really encapsulates the importance of having human contacts and human relations in the educational process. This could mean that teachers break large classes into smaller groups and allow peer tutoring and collaborative learning to take place. When a learning environment is human-scale, teachers can be more sensitive to learners' diverse learning and other needs and the learning environment is more supportive in nurturing and catering for learners' interests and growth.

This highlights once again the importance of reciprocal human relations in the educational context. It also assumes that learning is in itself a journey of enquiry for all, and that the teacher's role is, in effect, to accompany the learners' and support them to overcome life's challenges, and in so doing, the teacher him/herself will learn and grow. This study was not designed to oversimplify the six female adult learners in a further education setting, or indeed all Irish working-class women parenting alone. Rather, it was envisioned to provide a snapshot of the lives of the women and their experiences and their view of 'self', and, in particular, to offer insight into how adult education settings can be improved for future groups of women from similar backgrounds who wish to return to education. In light of the findings from this particular study, I would like to recommend that adult and further education providers adopt a teaching model that encompasses all aspects of 'self'(especially when designing educational programmes and courses). While the FETAC model is largely behaviourist and prescriptive, learners still need support and care, and, as mentioned in Chapter 2, and Chapter 5 Knowles (1980) theory of andragogy was misrepresented and misunderstood and scaffolding was not provided for the women. As also noted earlier, some learners certainly need a more nurturing environment to survive educational attrition. Tutors and educators need to be mindful of learners. As those who know they can act as facilitators to support, listen and converse with them. They can instil in them the potential to shine, rather than letting them feel abandoned. Furthermore, tutors and facilitators can serve as a support and advocacy network to provide care for these learners, which I believe is a critical aspect of adult education. The opportunity for dialogue is a vital component of thought and reflection in adult education and should be strongly encouraged. The model of teaching and learning I propose for all female adult learners is one of critical literacy (Freire, 1970), as it is composed of dialogue, enables voice and choice, and empowers women rather than making

them feel powerless. This study suggests that the women learn best in an environment where their strengths and wealth of expertise are appreciated. The women cherished these conditions of learning particularly when they felt supported and their personal development and growth was enhanced. They also liked to get involved in practical activities that helped them to reaffirm their existing skills and knowledge. In particular, the women described as "unhelpful" the times when they were told they were 'self' directed learners as they felt they were not provided with necessary supports or basic information in order to become independent (e.g. how to plan or research their assignments). There were also times when the women felt that there was a "disconnect" between the teaching style and the realities of their lives as learners. They described this as *disempowering*. The study shows that the women's relationships with their peers and some of their tutors and mentors played a vital role in creating conditions conducive to transformative learning. The women felt during those favourable times they were able to share their ideas, experiences, and emotions. Critical reflection is crucial to transformative learning environments as it promotes dialogue and meaningful engagement with the women who felt marginalised when they first started the course.

Building on Bourdieu's concept of habitus, I have used an analogy of a tree to simplify and break down how rooted habitus is in the 'self'. I am fascinated by Bourdieu's socio-cultural analysis of 'self' and habitus, and the tree analogy allowed me to explore the key areas of his work. I did this initially by tracing the origin of habitus to the roots of a tree and observing how these heredities are related to the habitus of the self and contribute to how we grow and progress in life. Bourdieu (1997) believed that habitus and field exist together, and one cannot survive without the other. He also alleged that a field of practice is created by various individuals who work and partake in that field, and it is the involvement that signifies the exchange which moves the objective structures of the field into the subjective structures of action and thought of the agent. Bourdieu (1997) uses the concepts of habitus and field to demonstrate the relationship between subjective and objective perceptions of 'self' in a field of practice such as education. According to Bourdieu, symbolic capital is what all people strive for, and structures of economic and political power drive strategy for success (Bourdieu, 1980a p. 200). In the illustration, I have included feeder roots close to the soil which I believe represent Freire's (1970) notion of critical awareness (critical consciousness) – a mode of awareness that can be delivered through critical literacy, as it assists the learners

to critique the social phenomena of inequality and become aware of the social processes of reality. Freire (1970) claimed that critical dialogue requires individuals to think critically about their reality and to problematise life and society, questioning all forms of power. This process creates a growing understanding of one's own capabilities, and also assists in the recognition of oppression and how it occurs. It is through the feeder roots or critical consciousness that habitus begins to move from its stationary place in life's roots, and instead undergoes a process of moving forward in life's journey. I believe that from this small piece of research the women experienced a transformation which was aroused through persistent dialogue throughout the research journey and also in my class. Bourdieu's ideas are central to this piece of research though he may not have accentuated how critical awareness is key to changing individual habitus. Throughout the study, I witnessed change, and this was brought about through constant communication which supported the women to become aware of their own reality and develop some opportunities for self-change. Ideally it is hoped that they no longer feel like manipulable objects. They begin to question their realities through critical literacy and communication. For Freire in particular, dialogue speaks to the core of every human being. For both Freire and Bourdieu, human life is about living together in the world (Bourdieu 1980, Freire, 1970). The habitus of the women is instrumental to the women accessing and ultimately enjoying education. In the table below I have illustrated habitus from my own subjective perspective using the analogy of a tree to describe the 'self' I have named this 'The Root to the Fruit of 'Self'. A visual imagine of the tree of life is presented later in this chapter.

Habitus 'The Root to the Fruit of 'Self' in Adult Education

The Anchor Roots = Habitus: Family, Culture, Race, Religion, Ethnicity, Norms, Beliefs and Values
The Feeder Roots (Freire) = Critical Consciousness 'Self', 'Dialogue'
The Trunk = The Physical 'Self'
The Bark = The Outer Self (the self that is portrayed to the public) (The Persona)
The Branches = Fields (work, education, politics, religion)
The Leaves = The Various Forms of Capital (cultural, symbolic, economic)

Table 2: Habitus 'The Root to the Fruit of 'Self' in Adult Education [Yelverton Halpin 2015]

In 2012, the women's educational growth was sown. Previous educational experiences had made them feel disillusioned, owing much to their own lack of physical and emotional

economic and cultural capital. This 'self' image prohibited them from continuing their education; thus preventing them from achieving their desired and internalized goal of social mobility and economic stability. The roots of the tree will always affect the trunk, the branches, the stature and height of its status. If the roots are deprived of good nutrition, then its growth is invariably affected (see figure 11 at the end of this chapter). The women in the study were rooted so deeply in their own sense of habitus that economic capital was their motivation for survival. Ironically, this same lack of economic capital also drove their parents' survival, and this fact encouraged the women to leave school early in pursuit of economic capital and ironically in pursuit of 'official' demands on them (i.e. 'get a job'). This cycle of framing and deprivation prevented the women from ever reaching their goal of security, and they were always chasing the ever decreasing margins of economics. And it also prevented them from experiencing other forms of capital, such as cultural forms of education and positive (psychological) capital levels. Through my teaching methodologies and practices, that are inspired by Freirean thought, I discovered that when I used critical literacy in the classroom, the women began to step back and question their social realities, and think critically about their lives and the patterns of repetition they had created. Although habitus has the greater propensity to reproduce the social conditions from which it was developed, there are opportunities to choose between a series of options and to transform objective structures. The more capital increases the greater the chance of profiting at the game (Bourdieu, 2000a, p. 227).

> ...[T]his dialogue cannot be reduced to the act of one person "depositing" ideas in another, nor can it become a simple exchange of ideas to be "consumed" by the participants in a discussion. (Freire, 1972, p. 61)

I feel that the feeder root serves to imagine well the introduction of critical consciousness. It is a form of nourishment for 'self'. The women recognised that their habitus had restricted them, and yet it was a part of who they were. The feeder roots supported them to shift their perspectives, however slowly, and it helped them to see themselves from a more promising perspective. The composition of the tree is the metaphor I use for self/ habitus. The life cycle of the tree is conditional on many aspects for its reaching full potential for growth and fulfillment. The roots are composed of the major roots and the feeder roots. The major or anchor roots are situated within a few inches of the soil surface and are affected by the composition of the quality of the soil. If the soil is encouraging for growth and expansion the

roots will forge enthusiastically ahead, fearless and adventurous. This in our human growth is reflected by the encouragement and support we received ourselves as roots close to the surface of our habitual experience which forms our habitus. Our habitual experience is formed by family bonding, support and encouragement. Are we told that we may go so far and no more, or are we told that the future is boundless and that we can achieve whatever is in our hearts? Is the soil in our growth rich with nourishment or is it lacking in nutrients when we consider our ethnicity and religious background? As with the roots of a tree, freezing conditions can have a detrimental effect on young roots. Similarly with our roots as young people the freezing out of other religions and ethnicities can form a hardcore of non-acceptance within us, giving us a lack of empathy for other religions and ethnic groups. Feeling like this was a major form of division in the Ireland of my youth when the Protestant faith particularly was viewed with fear and trepidation. This fear was inculcated in the young roots of my schooling when the Catholic Faith reigned supreme and influenced the education system in Ireland and indeed the complete constitution when De Valera bowed to the wishes of the Catholic hierarchy in the composition of the Irish constitution in 1937. This all-pervading exclusion of one particular group or belief can leave us feeling isolated and it unnecessarily deprived us of the value of mixing with other beliefs and different ways of thinking.

This lack of human interaction can limit our life experiences and not leave us open to explore our full world view. Covering them with soil could cut off the oxygen supply to the fine roots in the soil below. This was represented in the human context when much of the roots of Irish life were suffocated by insularity and an overbearing religious intolerance that crippled the consciousness of generations of Irish people up to the very recent past. The effects of this attack on the young roots of an emerging country are still being felt to this day. The tree analogy is the equivalent of covering the feeder roots with too much soil which has the effect of cutting off the oxygen and damaging growth. This suffocation of one group within the confines of their own belief and value system has the effect of limiting horizons and developing a siege mentality when our environment becomes stifled and crippling. Our thinking is polluted by a small rate of growth and the belief that only so much is possible. The human spirit reaches for the stars as the roots reach for life above the earth in the shape of the tree. By cutting off the supply of what sustains us there is limited growth and our horizons are so much smaller. This was reflected by the six women as they recalled how their

view of 'self' and what was possible for them was formed by their surroundings of unemployment, early school leaving and early motherhood. Their own roots were placed under enormous strain before they could even begin to develop. They had to become adults before they could fully explore the joy of their adolescence. The soil erosion experienced by the tree was similarly experienced by the women when there was a sudden shift in how their lives were developing. Leaving school early was a major blow as they were taken out of an environment that had its challenges but was somewhat familiar and comforting. Now they had to experience a completely new soil environment and a new way of growing. Roots need the steady path of consistency. As with plants, roots, and trees, human beings need the oxygen of a comforting, safe and encouraging landscape to fully thrive. I use the tree analogy because it is one of nature's wonders. Here we see how a tiny seedling can lead to the greatest oak tree in the forest. Unhindered by freezing conditions, abrupt up-rooting and poor soil conditions trees can be the king of the forest, the masters of their own destiny. This is how I see life.

I see my personal growth in the tree. My tree was stifled for a long time. I believed I could only grow so tall. I believed this because of the root system I inherited and by the conditions my tree had to contend with. This is similar for me, the six great ladies in my study and for us all. How many analogies to life do we have when we consider the tree and its influences? "Little apples will grow again," representing the opportunity for second chances in life. "The apple doesn't fall far from the tree" is one of the best examples of the influence of habitus on our daily lives and how it can be determine so much of our future. "From an acorn to an oak", signifies how with the right nourishment and support the smallest can become the greatest. The other aspects of our "human tree" are formed by the roots. How strong is the bark of our consciousness to withstand the daily slings and arrows of everyday life?. What condition are our branches that represent our encounters in the field of human interaction with others? Are the leaves of our capital accrual glossy, bountiful and healthy or dull and sparse? By using the tree analogy for human growth and potential we can do a very clear sighted inventory of our own progress in the field. When I discussed this image of the tree and its meaning for the women they related to it immediately and it began many great conversations leading to moments of clarity for them all. We all have family trees and we all have trees of life. How we tend our tree and how we understand how it came to be is one of

the great discoveries of our existence. When you realise what you are is because of what you were, you can become what you will.
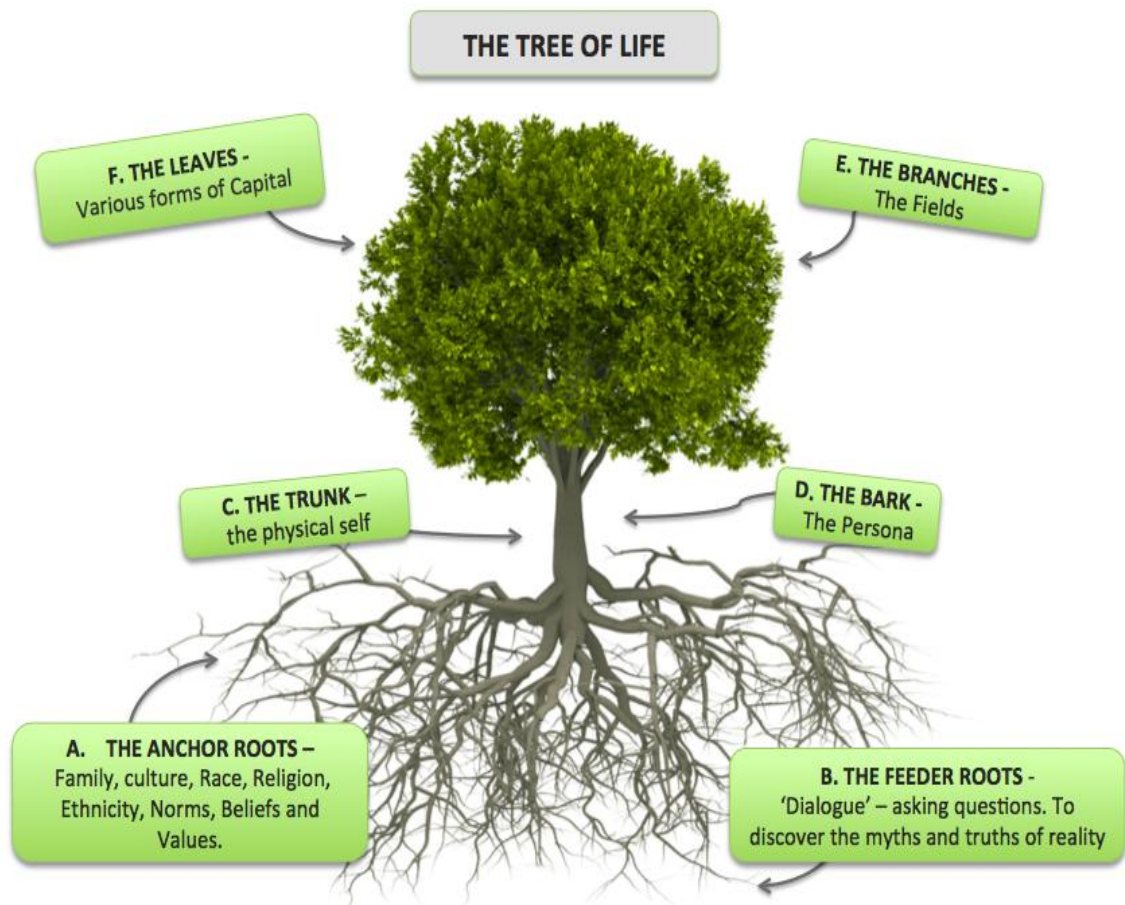
Figure 12: The analogy of a tree condenses Bourdieu's concepts to the roots of Habitus 'The Root to the Fruit'.

The tree above was designed to make simple the complex concepts of Bourdieus *habitus,*
capital and *field* [Yelverton-Halpin January 2015]

6.5 My contribution to Knowledge

The concept of habitus represents the social 'self' which will help researchers better understand the ways in which all social classes are lived and performed. This study highlights how the 'self is shaped through the social and working class practices of the women in the research. The findings suggest that habitus is dynamic and can change throughout one's life trajectory. The multiplicity of habituses depicted in the findings through the tapestry of the

women's stories display the 'structured structures' of class. Transformation through critical literacy was the catalyst to change, when the women questioned their social realities and understood the power structures they began to realise the importance of their contribution to life. Once the women began their educational journey they also commenced their education trajectory. The expression of social mobility also relates to habitus and in this study the women saw education as an exercise in becoming more mobile. A distinctive strand of this work is concerned with combining the strengths of critical consciousness with the concept of habitus. The study provides a unique contribution to knowledge as it utilises Bourdieuian concepts and theories, not only as theoretical tools but as conceptual tools for analysis. The study examined transformative pedagogy in the field of adult education and it offers important recommendations for future policy and practice. The study also justified the need to investigate the social self in adult education through the gap in knowledge. The use of critical ethnography as a research methodology had the unique ability to help me identify the importance of a meaningful and supportive space for adult learners.

6.6   Final Reflection

Writing this thesis has been both rewarding and challenging, and I feel so privileged to have had the experience of continuing my education to Ph.D. level. Coming from a working-class background, I never believed I would get the opportunity to research at this level, let alone be considered intelligent enough to go through the process. I chose to focus on a group of working-class women parenting alone, as I wanted to feel that there was at least the possibility for it to serve some wider purpose for future systems of education, and most particularly now, with the new academic laws of the market in ascendancy (see Chapter 1). I focused on the 'self' (what I know of 'self') as a central theme in the thesis, as I believe that in life we all view and experience things in a very subjective way. As a member of a large family with seven siblings, I learnt from experience that each of my siblings viewed the family unit differently and subjectively. Keeping this in mind, and using this vital information, I was also aware of the learners in the classroom, and how they viewed me as the tutor/facilitator in their own subjective way. Having this knowledge assisted me to understand the women more. They had been economically and educationally disenfranchised from society, and I believe education, and felt that education still gave them a voice. At heart, I am a humanistic radical and find it hard when I see power operating to destroy or

undermine people, most particularly in an educational setting. Education is crucial to all in life not just in terms of knowledge acquisition but in terms of enabling us to get to know the true 'self', which is critical to our empowerment. The research supported me in gaining a better understanding of the theorists (notably Bourdieu and Freire) and their theories of 'self' and their implications for adult education. The transformative process I went through myself was a source of great enlightenment. As I passed through the different stages of my educational trajectory I became more confident and my vision for my future became clearer. This was reciprocated for me in a similar journey I undertook with the women in my group. Their encouragement for me, as I undertook my Ph.D. was very real and hugely helpful. They would ask me how I was progressing and would say to me that they too were going to do a Ph.D. Doctoral studies are not for everyone, I would hear myself say, and it is more likely for those who have the requisite capital. Nevertheless I felt a great sense of pride when I heard this. My teaching I hope is helping to nurture change, however challenging, and was truly liberating them and me as we went ahead together. Many of the women I have worked with in this group and in other groups over the years have flourished in the field of adult and higher education. When I meet them occasionally they always refer back to our times together in class and how I helped them on their educational journey. This is very gratifying and when I reflect on what they have said I realise that education truly is a bond and a connection with people. My social capital has been immeasurably enriched through education as has my sense of 'self' and most importantly of all the transformative possibilities have transformed my habitus. I am no longer that timid girl who left school early, returned and undertook factory work. Like the women in my study my 'self' has gone through a complete metamorphosis and is ongoing. This wonderful experience of working with these women has changed my own view of 'self' and has given me the confidence to achieve levels of education previously thought unreachable. It has also reinforced my 'self' as a person, a woman, a mother, a sister, a daughter, a wife, as well as an educator and liberator. Freire reminds us that:

> Education makes sense because women and men learn that through learning they can make and remake themselves, because women and men are able to take responsibility for themselves as beings capable of knowing – of knowing that they know and knowing that they don't (Freire, 2004, p. 15).

For me the tree of life needs constant nurturing as I have discovered that education for me is an onward progression. My own 'self' has changed and I can see now that I am deserving of

every opportunity that has borne fruit for me. My roots now are stronger than ever and I can see myself branching out further than I ever imagined.

6.7 The Onward Journey of the six women in the study

The women's life journeys also continue. Karen, Vicky and Rosie are currently studying at third level. For the three other women, Joan, Marge and Anne although they aspired to do likewise, their life paths have diverged, through necessity, from their immediate educational goal. Anne had to defer her course on for a year due to the responsibility of looking after her elderly mother. This necessitates constant care on her behalf and she was unable to commit to the immediate study programme. Marge tragically lost her brother to suicide. She decided not to go to college for a few years but instead she got involved as a volunteer on a suicide intervention programme. Joan had to postpone her third level course owing to the birth of her grandchild. With the economic necessity of both partners having to work, her daughter has asked her to mind her new grandchild. She is happy babysitting for the moment but is determined to continue with her education at some stage in the future. I have witnessed a transformation in all the women. Their sense of 'self' has changed and it was gratifying to hear them speak about their current lives and their future goals. I believe that the use of critical literacy in adult education has been a catalyst in liberating them. Knowing their habitus and becoming consciously aware of the myths and truths of their reality has allowed them to feel a sense of satisfaction from their achievements in life to date.

6.8 Conclusion

The study set out to explore the 'self' of six Irish women who returned to adult education. The emerging thematic concepts that arose from this study presented in figure 11, *'The bridge of critical consciousness'* and the themes from the literature presented in table 2, have generated a hybrid of theoretical concepts to support the adult learner and the growth of 'self'. I believe it is imperative to seek opportunities to bridge the gap between habitus and critical consciousness in our pedagogical approach as teachers and learners. The women's stories and life journeys are ongoing as is mine. This piece of research is a snap shot in time of the six women. It has tried to unfold as many learning opportunities as

possible to make the world of these adult learners a space to foster dialogue, encourage 'self' growth and self- awareness.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Ethical Approval Letter From UCC

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Colliiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh, Eire
University College Cork. Ireland
Carol Yelverton-Halpin,
Adult & Continuing Education Depart Oifig an Leas - Uachtarain Taighde
agus Nualarochta
Office of the Vice President
for Research and Innovation

Urlar 4, Bloc E,
Aras na hEolafochta Bia,
Colalste na hOliscoile Corcaigh,
B6thar an Cholaiste,
Corcaigh, ~jre.
4th Floor, Block E,
Food Science Building,
University College Cork,
College Road, Cork, Ireland.
Dear Carol,
T +353 (0)214903500
E vpresearch@ucc.ie
www.ucc.ie

13th May 2013

Thank you for submitting your research (project entitled A Critical Search of the Self when Adults return to
Education: Through a Bourdieuian Lens #155) to SREC for ethical perusal. I am pleased to say that we see
no ethical impediment to your research as proposed and we are happy to grant approval.

We wish you every success in your research. .
Yours sincerely,

C/~~

Sean Hammond
Chair of Social Research Ethics Committee
Ollscoil na h~ireann, Corcaigh
National University of Ireland, Cork
Professor Anita R. Maguire BScPhD (Chern MRSC
Vice President for Research and Innovation

UCC Social Research Ethics Committee (SREC)

ETHICS APPROVAL FORM

Name of Applicant	Carol Yelverton-Halpin Date: 22 February 2013
Contact Details	Phone 086 818788 Email: carolyelvepin@hotmail.com
Department/Unit	Adult and Continuing Education Department, UCC
Title of project	A Critical Search of the 'Self 'when Adults Return to Education: through a Bourdieuian Lens

		YES	NO
1	Do you consider that this project has significant ethical implications?		NO
2	Will you describe the main research procedures to participants in advance, so that they are informed about what to expect?	`Yes	
3	Will participation be voluntary?	Yes	
4	Will you obtain informed consent in writing from participants?	Yes	
5	Will you tell participants that they may withdraw from the research at any time and for any reason, and (where relevant) omit questionnaire items to which they do not wish to respond?	Yes	
6	Will data be treated with full confidentiality / anonymity (as appropriate)?	Yes	
7	If results are published, will anonymity be maintained and participants not identified?	Yes	
8	Will you debrief participants at the end of their participation (i.e. give them a brief explanation of the study)?	Yes	
9	Will your project involve deliberately misleading participants in any way?		No
10	Will your participants include schoolchildren (under 18 years of age)?		No
11	Will your participants include people with learning or communication difficulties?		No
12	Will your participants include patients?		No
13	Will your participants include people in custody?		No
14	Will your participants include people engaged in illegal activities (e.g. drug taking; illegal Internet behaviour)?		No
15	Is there a realistic risk of participants experiencing either physical or psychological distress?		No
16	If yes to 15, has a proposed procedure, including the name of a contact person, been given? (see no 23)	N/A	

Appendix 3: Description of the Project

1. Aims of the Project

The aim of the study is a critical search of the 'self' as an adult learner, through a Bourdieuian lens. It is concerned with habitus, culture and capital and how this influences the 'self'. The 'self' is primarily psychological and sociological, and the two dimensions are dynamic. The psychological aspect of 'self' is concerned with the affective dimensions such as feelings, self-confidence, self-worth, self-esteem and self-identity. The sociological aspect incorporates social groups and norms as well as gender, race, demographics and socioeconomics. Bourdieu alleged that habitus exists in both the sociological and the psychological systems and that the systems are transferable and can shift in relation to specific contexts and over time (Navarro 2006, p.16). The research questions will be used to explore and understand the 'self' and the self-identity of adult learners when they return to the field of education. It aims to examine how Bourdieu's theories are influential in the evolution of the 'self', and also if these impact social, cultural and symbolic capital.

2. Brief description and justification of methods and measures to be used

The blueprint for my thesis is a qualitative approach, as I believe that qualitative research will support me to meet the aims and objectives of the study. The aim of the study is a critical search of the 'self' as an adult learner through a Bourdieuian lens. It is concerned with habitus, culture and capital and how this influences the 'self'. The 'self' is made up of psychological and social concepts. The type of study I intend to employ is 'critical ethnography'. Ethnography is a philosophy of research rather than a research method and it pays particular attention to culture and how people make meaning from their lives (Green, Camilli and Elmore, 2006, p. 279). I believe that this is the perfect fit for my study, as it attempts to comprehend culture in its many forms, and has a strong association with Bourdieu's theories and concepts (Bourdieu, 1984). The word culture points to very real experiences and in this thesis the participants may be experiencing culture shock through loss of work or returning to education.

As I believe that this study will generate multiple and in depth perspectives with the diverse group of adults returning to the field of education. Using ethnography will afford me the access to observe individual habitus, cultural capital, power relationships and the use of language discourse. It will also help me to understand the affective dimensions of 'self'. Interviews observations and fieldwork promote dialogue and unlock the voices of the participants, permitting freedom of speech. The questions that I will put forward and reflect on throughout the study will assist me in analysing and evaluating all of the above.

Participants: recruitment methods, number, age, gender, exclusion/inclusion criteria

The participants will be recruited from the south, the south-west and the south-east of Ireland. The study will focus on those who became unemployed and redundant from blue chip industries and construction companies due to business closures and downsizing. All of the participants will have returned to a third level institute or college to change career direction or cope with the ever-changing demands of work and labour in the global market place. The programmes they attend run at Levels 6-9 on the National Framework of Qualifications in third level colleges and institutes around the country. The courses are designed to meet current and future skills needs in Ireland.

All of these adults were classed as highly skilled and qualified in their previous work places and this educational initiative is to support them to become reemployed when the economy recovers. The participants will come from diverse cultural backgrounds, be of mixed gender and over the age of twenty three. The recruitment procedure will take place through social networking via, word of mouth, Facebook, email, newspaper advertisements and flyers. Prior to the commencement of the research, the participants will be presented with a letter outlining and detailing the study. Once the participants have agreed to partake in the study, they will sign an informed consent form, no pressure will be placed on the participants to participate in the research project.

When a society has to adapt to new concepts and laws imposed by political powers, it can produce real knowledge about the given context and can be used as a tool to enrich social emancipation (Bourdieu, 1984).

4. Concise statement of ethical issues raised by the project and how you intend to deal with them

Critical ethnography starts with ethical responsibility, as it aims to address the course of justice and fairness within one of life's domains. As a researcher, I have a strong interest in the liberty of individuals and groups that are governed by rules which create exclusion and oppression. Critical ethnography goes beneath the surface to gain an understanding of 'what is' to 'what could be' (Denzin, 2001; Noblit, Flores, & Murillo, 2004). An integral part of critical ethnography is subjectivity. However, dialogue inspires further dialogue and encourages multiple views and perspectives toward meaning making. This can be worthwhile and informative and can create a difference to the reality of others. Critical analysis is grounded in social theory; ethics is grounded in moral philosophy; and performance is both a practice and a theory.

5. Arrangements for informing participants about the nature of the study

Volunteer participants will enrol in advance of the study and those that partake in the research will have the satisfaction of contributing to real world research. Before agreeing to participate in any study, the investigator will give the participants a consent form that explains the study in detail.

6. How you will obtain Informed Consent

I will hope to gain the consent of the participants by asking them to complete a consent form. The form will outline the objectives of the study and will also explain that the confidentiality of the participants will be strictly upheld should they agree to contribute. As volunteers, they are free to withdraw from, interrupt, or refuse to take part in a study at any time.

7. Outline of debriefing process

 A short interview will take place between the researcher and research participants following their agreed participation in the study. Debriefings are verbal interactive sessions which allow the participants to speak freely and have the opportunity to ask questions. The participants will be advised that their feelings will be taken into account at all times and any concerns they have will be fully addressed. Debriefing is an important ethical consideration ensuring

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that the participants are fully informed about the study. The debriefing session is like a secondary consent, as it gives the participants a full understanding of the scope of the study. It will allow the participants the opportunity to decide if they want to include their data in the study. If the participants are experiencing any difficulties, they can contact the researcher, Carol Yelverton-Halpin on carolyelvepin@hotmail.com

8. Estimated start date and duration of project

The study will commence once consent clearance has been approved from UCC and the participants. It is estimated that the study will run over a nine-month period.

 Signed Carol Yelverton-Halpin   **Date** 22 February 2013

Applicant

Notes

1. Please submit this form and any attachments to Dr. S. Hammond, Chair, SREC, c/o Miriam Collins, Office of the Vice President for Research and Innovation, Block E, 4th Floor, Food Science Building, University College Cork, College Road, Cork. Please also forward an electronic copy to srec@ucc.ie

2. Research proposals can receive only provisional approval from SREC in the absence of approval from any agency where you intend to recruit participants. If you have already secured the relevant consent, please enclose a copy with this form.

3. SREC is not primarily concerned with methodological issues but may comment on such issues in so far as they have ethical implications.

This form is adapted from pp. 13-14 of Guidelines for Minimum Standards of Ethical Approval in Psychological Research (British Psychological Society, July, 2004)

Last update: 2011-07-19

Appendix 4: Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent Form

Title of the Research: *A Critical Search of the 'Self' in the Field of Adult Education: through a Bourduien Lens*
Researchers Name: Carol Yelverton-Halpin (Principle investigator)   University College Cork   Email: <u>carolyelvepin@hotmail.com</u>   Phone: 0868186788   **Credentials:** Master of Arts in Teaching and Learning   BA (Hons) Adult Education   BA Early Childhood studies   **Supervisor and Guide:** Dr Stephen O' Brien, UCC
Invitation to participate in the research study   You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information (contact details above).   **Purpose of the research**   The study will contribute to a PhD research thesis and its purpose is to identify key identity changes as adults engage with third-level education. Related enquiries include: Does the whole person evolve? Does the person change emotionally? Do the person's social groups and networks change? Does their use of language change? Will returning to education influence future career opportunities? All of the participants will be recruited from the south-east of Ireland. The study will focus on those who became unemployed and redundant from blue chip industries and construction companies due to business closures and downsizing. All of the participants will have returned to the field of education to 'upskill' and 'retrain', to cope with the ever-changing demands of work and labour trends in the global market place. The participants will come from diverse backgrounds and will be mixed gender and over the age of 23. The recruitment procedure will take place through social networking, word of mouth, Facebook, email, newspaper advertisements and flyers.
A description of your involvement

If you agree to be part of the research study, you will be asked to participate in a set of interviews. The interviews will be informal and will be guided by a set of questions. The interviews will last for one hour and there will be a series of two. The timeframe of the study is estimated to be two years.

Benefits of the Study

There are a number of tangible benefits to you as a participant in the research. The interviews will provide a rich source of information and will help to capture the different contexts of everyday life in returning to the field of education. The narratives and real-life stories will provide the researcher with an understanding of what it is like to be a student again, the study will capture the human voice of the participants. It will identify what people say they do and what they actually do, all coming together in a complete story. The perspectives and experiences of the participants will benefit the research and will influence and enable the creation of a 'distinctive' adult education system for a sense of place in society. That will support encourage and include adults when they return to third level institutes or colleges.

Risks and Discomforts

As a researcher, I will do my best to anticipate and identify potential risks in the study. However, some risks are unforeseeable.

The risks and discomforts may include questions that are sensitive and may make you feel uncomfortable or emotional or possibly angry. The researcher will handle these questions with care, consideration and empathy to avoid any form of distress. Supports will be put in place throughout the interviews: interviews will take place in a safe environment; the researcher will acknowledge the feelings, safety and confidentiality of the participants. Respect will be adhered to throughout the interviews and regular water breaks will be designated to support the participants in a safe interview space.

Confidentiality

I, Carol Yelverton-Halpin, plan to publish the results of this study, but will not include any information that would identify you. However, despite name changes, you may recognise what you said in the data results but only you will be aware of this. Your name will not be attached to any data, but a study number will be used instead. The data will be kept on a password-protected computer and the researcher will be the only person with access to the computer. All paper trails and written documents and records will be kept under lock and key and shredded three years post-research.

If you tell me something that makes me believe that you or others were abused or harmed or may be abused or physically harmed, I will have to report to the appropriate agencies the participants or the situation in which the abuse might be a possibility, or may have occurred (Appendix 3).

Voluntary nature of the study

Participating in this study is completely voluntary as is withdrawal. Even if you decide to

participate now, and to withdraw from the study later, the information or data you provided will be destroyed, unless you decide that you want it to be part of the research after you have left the study. All the information gathered throughout the study will not be linked to you either directly or by a code. All the data will be destroyed three years after the research is completed and written up.
Contact Information Name : Address 1: Address 2: Email: Mobile: Next of Kin:
Consent By signing this document, you are agreeing to partake in the study. You will be given a copy of this document for your records and written informed consent. One copy will be kept with the study records. Be sure that all of your questions about the study have been answered before signing the consent form. *I _____agree   to   participate   in   the   study:* *'A critical search of the self in the field of adult education: through a Bourduiean Lens'*
Certificate of confidentiality   *Signed:_____*   ***Carol Yelverton-Halpin***

Appendix 5: Proposed Research Questions

The proposed research questions I have constructed are based on Bourdieu's theories of habitus, field and culture, and they categorised under the headings as follows:

- Grand tour questions

- Specific grand tour questions (or behavioural questions)

- Guided grand tour questions

- Task-related grand tour questions

- Mini-tour questions

- Concluding questions (Spradley, 1980).

2.0 Grand tour questions: otherwise known as a typical opening question which sets the opening scene for in-depth description, giving a broad overview of the particular topic in question (Brenner, 2006, p.358).

1. Tell me about yourself?
2. What influenced your choices to return to education?
3. What are your experiences of returning to education like?
4. How do your class mates describe this new journey?
5. How did it feel becoming a student again?
6. Did you know all of your classmates before you returned to education? Or was it through your previous place of employment or through social contact?

2.1 Specific grand tour questions:

1. Do you see the role of adult education as an opportunity to secure non-financial social assets? (For example your style of speech? Vocabulary? Word awareness? How you communicate with others? Your dress code?)
2. Do you agree that your habits have changed since you returned to education? Or do you believe there is some other reason that better explains what influences/motivates you?
3. Do you think success is measured on performance in and out of college?
4. Do you believe that there is a hierarchical system in college and in society in general?

5. Do you think the more you feel fulfilled on your new educational journey, the more it tends to suspend or reverse the thing that sent you here in the first place?

6. What shared set of practices and habits do you and your class mates contribute in on a day-to-day basis?

7. When you think about and observe these practices, can see the similarities between you and other members of your class?

8. Do you see the role of adult education as having symbolic value? (Does it have more cultural and environmental meaning, such as more prestige in the work place and in general?)

9. Do you think society places value on knowledge and education?

2.2 Guided grand tour questions:

1. How do you as a participant in class identify with the tutor as well as other students?

2. How do other students perceive the value of returning to education in relation to social mobility? (For example, getting a higher-paid, higher-status job)

3. As a survivor of job loss and redundancy who returned to education and training, describe the strategies you used to survive.

2.3 Task-related grand tour questions:

1. Can you draw a life map on your educational journey from childhood to present and include your work experience and family circumstances?

2.4 Mini-tour questions:

1. Could you walk me through your experience of becoming redundant?
2. Who else was involved and who else did it affect?
3. How did that make you feel?
4. How was the news broken to you?
5. What kind of work skills do you have?
6. What value do you think society places on those skills?
7. At what age did you leave school or college?

8. Do you have any learning difficulties? (What are they and did they affect your school days?)

9. Can you tell me about your first job?

10. Can you tell me how you felt when you first came back to college?

2.5 Concluding questions:

1. Did losing your job and returning to education affect your identity as a person?
2. What led to that?
3. How did that start?
4. When you hear the phrase 'prior learning', what does it mean to you?
5. What would you associate with prior learning?
6. Did I miss anything?
7. Is there anything you feel is necessary to conclude the interview?

Appendix 6: Ethnographic Interview Record

Project: *A Critical Search for the 'Self' in Adult Education: Bourdieuian insights into transformative possibilities*

Interviewer: *Carol Yelverton-Halpin*

Date of Interview:

Informant (name of person being interviewed): *Confidential*

Informant's occupation or student status: Student /participant

Informant's gender: *Female*   Age:

Informant's ethnic identification: *Irish*

Exact Quotations

Summary of Interview

Comments

Adapted from: Spradley. J., (1979) *The Ethnographic Interview*. NY: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston:

Appendix 7: Interview Schedule Year One and Two

The Interview Schedule

A critical search for the self in Adult education: Bourdieuian insights into transformative possibilities

Name : _____   **Location** _____

Interviews	Date:	Time started	Time completed
Year One 2012/2013			
Interview One	Ist October 2012	10.30 am	11.45 am
Interview Two	17th February 2013	10.30 am	11.45 am
Interview Three	15th May 2013	10.30 am	11.45 am
Year Two 2013/14			
Interview one	25th September 2013	2.00 pm	3.30 pm
Interview Two	22nd January 2014	9.30 am	11.00 am
Interview Three	30th April 2014	11.00 am	12.30 pm

Appendix 7: Reflective Journal Excerpts

When I returned to learning, I felt inferior and cautious and found it difficult to engage with lecturers. The feelings of discomfort prevented me from expressing my opinion in class and from getting involved in group discussions when the lecturer was present. From my perspective, the lecturers were people of superiority, and I felt like a lesser person. Their choice and use of linguistics made the experience, even more, unsettling, and it widened the gap between them and me. It was unclear as to why they did not use simple terms to explain complicated concepts, and establish an inclusive practice. Instead, it was debilitating for me, and it took me some time before I felt comfortable in participating [September 2012]

Tutors may often say that 'there are no stupid questions', but I have observed some tutors becoming impatient when these supposedly non stupid questions are asked [November, 2012].

I presumed that all my colleagues in adult and higher education were from middle class and privileged backgrounds and I have always supported the 'underdog' and paid little attention to those that I perceived as well off. I had been following one rule book of social norms values and beliefs, and never looked too deeply at other hierarchical class statuses. My perceptions viewed those with educational qualifications as having money and power, and 'mixing with the right people in the right social circles' on a continual progressive route to success. I never thought to question that they may have had financial difficulties or domestic struggles. As an adult learner, I engaged with my intuition and emotions as part of the learning process even though it was something I did automatically as a facilitator and mediator with my own students. Furthermore, as an adult learner, I had to become more considerate to my peers and foster the skills of critical consciousness, as well as developing the ability to analyse multiple perspectives. I began to question and take action on the social, political, cultural, and economic contexts that influenced and shaped my life and the lives of others [Jan, 2013]

I have to be considerate to my peers and foster the skills of critical consciousness, as well as developing the ability to analyse multiple perspectives [February, 2013].

I try as often as I can to ask my students: 'What does that mean to you?'; 'What do you think of this theory?'; 'Can you apply this to your everyday life?' Getting students to present their thoughts and ideas to a class is a wonderful way of enhancing their sense of freedom. By giving them some co-ownership of the class, I can see their sense of 'self' soar [March, 2013].

From my own personal experience, the field of education is comparable to a magnet, with no beginning and no ending. As each time, I decided I had enough of the educational merry go round I went back for another ride and continued on my quest for more knowledge [September, 2013].

When I see the students, I have tutored progressed to third level, and beyond, I am immeasurably gratified. They have grown within themselves to believe that advancement in education now has no ceilings; that the future is limitless. At times like these, I realise the joy of teaching [April, 2014].

The women in this study demonstrated how uncomfortable they felt returning to education and they were slow to open up in group discussions. They had their tea and smoke breaks in small groups and tended to stay together. It was a question of safety in numbers. When I reflected on my own habitus I could identify with the women. When I returned to education myself, I was very unsure of how well I was going to fit in, and I thought that the lecturers were way above my standard of education. Deep down I knew that these feelings were not the real me, but I felt influenced by how many of my own family who had returned to education reacted, and I felt that I was blazing a trail on my own. Some of the feedback I got from my family and friends about my return to education was not always positive. "Aren't you great to be going back to college at your age?", "What are you bringing all that on yourself for?" and "What will be in it for you when you're finished?" (Were some of the comments I got that I felt weren't very encouraging). I realised that those questions were reflections of their own habitus and how they felt about themselves. I could relate to the women in my study who themselves had been scrutinised by their families in a similar way. Seeing other people go against the perceived status quo and challenge themselves can be very challenging to people who prefer not to challenge themselves [January, 2013].