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**Feminist Perspectives on
Times and Spaces in Distance
Learning**

by

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the requirements for the degree of Doctor
of Philosophy in Continuing Education

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Declaration

I confirm that this thesis is the author's own work and it has not been submitted for a degree at another university.

ABSTRACT

This study draws on a feminist perspective on time and space, or a feminist time and space literacy, in order to better understand the times and spaces in distance learning. I seek to respond to some of the key gaps in the literature by considering the multiplicity of times and spaces in distance learning, and the underpinning power relations, within respondents' stories of being a distance learner. This research makes a substantial contribution to the research on time, space and distance learning. This is not only in terms of bringing a feminist time and space literacy to the area of distance learning but, by doing so in conjunction with data collected over time and space, it also adds many new layers to the stories about the multiplicity of times and spaces in distance learners' lives, and the ways in which gendered and other power relations shape these. Moreover, this study has contributed to the wider body of feminist knowledge in seeking to explore a multiplicity of times and spaces in women and men's lives – as opposed to a binary of women's time and space and men's time and space – and in seeking to focus on time and space simultaneously.

Introduction

This research draws on a feminist perspective in order to focus on time and space in distance learning. The concepts of time and space are fundamental to all aspects of social life (Adam 1990, 1995; Massey, 1994). It could be argued that, since time and space are so central to our lives, they are already widely evident and we do not need research to tell us about them. Indeed, space and time have been theorised in a number of ways in different disciplines (Nowotny, 1994). Nevertheless, as will be explored in this research, the multiple and complex nature of time and space remain overlooked both in much social science research and in our everyday lives (Adam, 1990, 1995; Massey, 1994).

This study aims to draw on a feminist perspective on time and space, or a feminist time and space literacy, in order to better understand the times and spaces in distance learning. I seek to respond to some of the key gaps in the literature by considering the multiplicity of times and spaces in distance learning, and the power relations underpinning them, within respondents' stories of being a distance learner. Before providing an overview of the chapters that follow, I first provide some context for this study by considering what distance learning is, followed by a brief outline of the specific group of learners on which this study focuses and why it is interesting and important to research distance learning.

Distance learning

Distance learning is a growing phenomenon worldwide (Harry *et al*, 1993; Perraton, 2000). It can be organised in a number of ways, but generally involves a learner receiving a package of learning materials, be they printed, online or broadcast on television, which they study outside of the institution (e.g. at home, at work, in local learning centres). They may study alone, or as part of a group of distance learners. The learning materials may be supplemented with a range of methods of teaching, support and communication. This can include seminars, online lectures, group discussions, residential teaching sessions, and a range of learner support via telephone, email, post, the internet or in person. Distance

learning is generally categorised in the literature into generations, following Nipper's (1989) three generations of distance education. Each generation is characterised in terms of the type and level of communication and the interaction involved. Although developed some time ago, they continue to be popular characterisations of distance education. These can be summarised as follows. The first generation of distance education is characterised by the correspondence course, which primarily involves the use of written materials sent out in the post, and one-way communication from teacher to student. The second generation of distance education has been characterised by the wide-scale development of new forms of communication since the 1960s. These have enabled the use of multimedia delivery. The telephone, radio and television broadcasting, and in some cases computers, have enabled the development of two-way communication within distance education. And the third generation of distance education has been characterised by the development and increasing use of personal computers and internet technologies. These are seen as having the potential to enable two-way communication and interaction.

This characterisation of distance education is, perhaps inevitably, rather simplified. Indeed, there is a continuation and simultaneity of what have been characterised as older "generations" of delivery. Moreover, while debates about new technologies are prolific in the distance education literature, they have been since the 1930s when civil aviation and radio technology first sparked these debates in relation to correspondence education (Bolton, 1989). Equally, regardless of developments and changes in course delivery, paper-based and printed course materials remain the primary means of delivering distance learning courses (Burt, 1997; Macdonald-Ross, 1995; Perraton, 2000). While this generation-based characterisation of distance education overlooks this continuity, it is nevertheless useful in terms of understanding the possibilities of technological and communication-based changes within the development of distance education over time.

While the latest "generation" of distance education is primarily characterised by networked learning via the internet and the replacement of postal or paper-based

courses with internet-based modules, information and interaction, much distance learning remains "second generation". Indeed, the learners on which this research focuses are studying on one such programme. My research focuses on the experiences of a small group of women and men in the UK and Ireland who are studying for an MSc qualification with a UK university located in the Midlands. The programme involved studying paper-based materials, with additional support from non-obligatory attendance at teaching days and contact via telephone, email, internet and in person. Further information about the context of this research is provided in Chapter 1.

My focus on time and space in distance learning arose from respondents' narratives about how they combined their home lives, work and studies. However, such stories of combining study with other social and professional roles is not specific to distance learning. Blaxter and Tight (1994) and Blaxter *et al* (1997), for example, researched such issues among part-time learners. Indeed, when most learners 'either cannot afford, or do not wish, to study full-time' (Blaxter and Tight, 1994 citing Tight, 1991), the synchronous combining of home, work and study is likely to be the reality for many learners. However, learners, learning providers, governments and international bodies are increasingly regarding distance learning as an effective form of lifelong learning. In particular, distance learning is seen as enabling adult learners to combine home, work and study whilst upgrading their skills and knowledge. My own searches in papers, magazines and the internet have certainly highlighted that the ability to "earn while you learn", alongside seemingly minimal impact on work and, to a lesser extent, caring roles, is commonly cited in advertisements and websites as a key advantage of distance learning over part- or full-time education. While many of these experiences of combining multiple responsibilities may be shared between distance learners and full- and part-time learner in higher education, views about distance learning facilitating access to education and combination of roles, make this an interesting and important area for research.

Overview of the research

I now provide an overview of research, summarising the chapters that follow and the issues that will be addressed in each of these.

As will be outlined in Chapter 1, the data that is drawn upon in this study was gathered through mixed-methods and over time and space, including a survey, non-participant observation, interviews with learners over the course of their studies and, finally, learning journals. Chapter 1 provides a reflexive account of the process and methodology of the research, considering what makes research feminist, outlining my own feminist position, and how this impacted on the mixed-methods approach over time that was taken. Within this discussion, as indicated, further contextual information is provided about the context for this research and how I chose this specific area of research. In addition, I outline how the data was analysed through thematic, narrative and discursive analysis, drawing on a feminist poststructuralist framework. I then introduce the four key aspects of time and space that were highlighted in respondents' narratives and which will be explored in the rest of this research, before returning briefly to start to consider the feminist aims of this research.

This brings me to Chapter 2, where literature around time and space in relation to distance learning is reviewed. It is argued that the dominant way in which time and space are treated in the distance learning literature is to present them as straightforward, natural facts of social life. However, this treatment of time and space masks the power relations underpinning time and space. Indeed, I move on to explore some of the more critical literature that deals specifically with issues of space and, to a lesser degree, time in distance learning. Nevertheless, while more critical literature around space is useful in highlighting the socially constituted nature of space, I argue that there is a clear gap in the research knowledge in terms of: critical readings of time; feminist perspectives on time, space and distance learning; and the linking of theory with empirical data. In order to respond to these gaps in the literature, I then draw on (primarily) feminist perspectives of time and space from the wider literature in order to highlight the multiplicity of times and

spaces in social life, and the power-laden nature of these times and spaces. Feminist perspectives on the times and spaces of the home are then explored in order to further demonstrate some of these multiple times and spaces in social life, and the gendered and other power relations underpinning them. Noting both some of the problematic aspects of these perspectives and the strengths, these perspectives are drawn upon in order to develop a feminist time and space literacy through which the four key aspects of time and space highlighted through the learners' narratives will be read.

Chapter 3 thus takes this feminist time and space literacy to explore learners' narratives of the historical time and space, or the "timescape" (Adam, 1998) in which they are located. Exploring why these respondents were studying on their distance learning programme highlighted the backdrop against which they undertook their studies both in terms of the historical time in which they felt they were located, and the social background against which they negotiated their multiple roles as workers, carers and learners. The first section explores learners' presentations of the current historical time and space as one in which there is a need for greater flexibility in order to survive in the labour market, and a high level of insecurity of work. Section two then considers the related narratives of the necessity to learn. I highlight that learners saw undertaking their studies as a means of enhancing their flexibility and reducing insecurity by remaining employable. I conclude by noting both the individualising nature of ideas of flexibility and the role of studying in learners' responsibility for their future in the labour market, but also the sense of power that some learners felt in taking this responsibility.

Chapter 4 then focuses on locations of learning. I seek to respond to the idea, noted in Chapter 2, that, because distance learning goes beyond barriers of time and space, it is "anywhere, anytime" learning. However, exploring when and where learners study, and how this combines with learners' narratives of fitting their studies into their busy lives, I highlight that, rather than anywhere, anytime, time and space for studying are socially negotiated and subject to gendered and other power relations. I seek to emphasise the complexity of women's and men's times

and spaces, as opposed to the duality that can be suggested by ideas such as women's more cyclical time and men's more linear time. I explore the greedy nature, in terms of time and space, of both the workplace and the home, and how it can be difficult to find time and space for the additional greedy institution of higher education between these. Indeed, it is noted that this can be particularly, although not exclusively, difficult for women with young children. The ideas of managing and claiming time are then considered, highlighting that the popular idea of time management overlooks, again the multiple, social and power-laden nature of time and space, by focusing on time as individual and linear. In order to further highlight this multiplicity and negotiation, I move on to consider stories around claiming time and space for studying. Finally, the narratives of the "right time" in which to study are explored, highlighting the time and space in which respondents felt they had room in their lives in which to study, noting that this was rarely "spare" time or space.

Building on this discussion, Chapter 5 considers the idea of absence, which is seen as characterising distance learners' experiences of their studies. While, as outlined in this and the second chapter, absence is primarily seen as a negative aspect of distance learners' experience, I focus here on the dominant narrative in these learners' stories of absence as an opportunity, giving them access to education while combining their multiple roles and responsibilities at work and home. While the sense of opportunity is dominant for these distance learners, section two also considers one of the downsides of distance learning; namely, the lower levels of contact with other learners. This was one area in which learners did occasionally feel they were missing out but also, highlighting the complexity and contradiction of learners' feelings about absence and presence, I note that learners often did not seek out contact with other learners. In section three, I return again to the idea of opportunity, focusing on women's narratives of claiming space and time for themselves through distance learning. For some this was about being able to study, developing their confidence as learners, away from the institution and away from their negative experiences of education in the past. For others, this was about claiming a space and time in the home away from caring and domestic roles. It is

argued that this ability to claim time and space for themselves is politically important for women, whose time and space in the home is often heavily subject to the demands and expectations of caring and domestic work.

While Chapter 5 focuses on absence from the physical space of the university, Chapter 6 moves on to ask what the university stands for in these distance learners' narratives, focusing on the more metaphorical spaces of the university and the kinds of power relations involved in entry into this space. A particular focus is the account of the learner-practitioner, highlighting the ways in which the metaphorical knowledge space of the university is often seen as dichotomous, and ascendant, to the knowledge space of the practitioner. After outlining some of the diverse literatures that overlap with these issues, I focus on narratives of what it means to get a university education, and some of the power relations that are evident in this. This leads to a consideration of how learners came to re-value their practitioner knowledge spaces through the course of their studies. Gaining access to the university was seen as a way of validating their practice, nevertheless, they also drew their practitioner knowledge space into their studies in order to support, but also to challenge the ascendancy of the university knowledge space. Finally, I explore some of the difficulties learners experienced when learning in this new space, focusing in particular on writing and the idea of becoming academic. These stories highlight the powerful hold of ideas of the "real world" of the practitioner versus the "ivory towers" of the academic, with these signalling not only different spaces, but a different way of communicating and thinking being necessary in order to succeed in the different spaces.

Finally, Chapter 7 reviews what has been achieved in this research, considering both to what degree I met my aims, and some of the overarching conclusions that can be drawn from this research. I revisit the literature that relates to the issue of time and space in distance learning, considering how I aimed to respond to this in my own research. I then briefly revisit some of the multiple times and spaces, and underpinning power relations, highlighted in this research, in order to reflect on how far I achieved the aims of my research, and what this perspective tells us about

this research area that another might not. As well as the usefulness of this approach, I consider some of the more problematic aspects. Two wider conclusions are then drawn from the ways in which gendered power relations featured within these women and men's stories of being distance learners. I consider the implications of commonality and difference, and the implications for this feminist research, of focusing on a broad set of areas as opposed to focusing specifically on areas in which gendered power relations were most evident, or on the specific needs and experiences of women. I argue that, overall, this feminist time and space literacy, combined with a range of data gathered in different ways and over time and space, has contributed substantially to the research knowledge in the area of time, space and distance learning. This is both in terms of a theoretical contribution, bringing feminist perspectives to this area, but also in terms of adding many new layers to the stories about the multiplicity of times and spaces in distance learners' lives and the ways in which gendered and other power relations shape these. Furthermore, I argue that this study has contributed to the wider body of feminist knowledge in seeking to explore a multiplicity of times and spaces in women and men's lives – as opposed to a binary of women's time and space and men's time and space – and in seeking to focus on time and space simultaneously.

Chapter 1

The Research Journey

This chapter explores how this research was carried out and the data analysed, focusing on the process and methodology. In order to do this, I take up the position of the 'reflective/reflexive' researcher (Alvesson and Skölberg, 2000: 5). The importance of reflection and reflexivity within the research process has been widely highlighted in feminist research, as in qualitative research more widely. Importantly, as will be explored here, feminist research has questioned the objectivity and detachment claimed of scientific research, emphasising instead the ways in which research is subjective and necessarily located. Maintaining a reflexive position about how we conduct and analyse research is part of recognising and, moreover, making use of this subjectivity. Indeed, a more reflexive approach to methodology can have an ethical dimension by avoiding concealment and accepting responsibility for the research and for what we do as researchers (Letherby, 2003).

As highlighted more widely, methodological issues are often dealt with in terms of sample, selection and procedures for data collection. This omits the 'traps, delays, and frustrations that inevitably accompany the field work' (Lareau, 1996: 197). An interesting aspect of time and space within the research journey is that research is often presented as a linear, 'clean, crisp, neatly finished product' (Skeggs, 1995: 2). As a postgraduate researcher, I often felt othered and alienated by research and "how to" texts that presented research in this way. This clean, linear, rational story reflects neither the spiralling nature of research (Blaxter *et al*, 2001), nor the re-reading that continually takes place over time. Thus, in writing up this journey, I aim to try to make clear my feminist epistemological location and my connections with, and journey through, the field of research. Rather than presenting it as a linear journey to enlightenment, I reflect both on the successes and problems (Lareau, 1996) and explore the ways in which I have revisited and revised the research. This openness and reflexivity may facilitate the assessment and evaluation

of research (Taylor, 2001: 41), by making processes, improvisations and decisions clearer to the reader (Chenail, 1995). Nevertheless, while it is useful to place the researcher in the text, it is also vital to avoid silencing the other participants in the research, or '...flooding the text with ruminations on the researcher's subjectivities' (Fine *et al*, 2000: 109). As such, I hope to create a sense of critical dialogue without the loss of the multiple voices involved in the research process.

This chapter is now divided into four sections of discussion. In section one, I consider what makes a piece of research feminist and some of the interlinked debates about research methods and the role of the researcher. Having argued that feminist research is not about the methods, I consider what does make research feminist and start to outline my own epistemological position.

In section two, I consider where my respondents and I were geographically located, and how my feminist location changed through the research, reflecting on what this meant for the research process. Issues around access, gatekeepers and participation are considered, moving on to highlight how I chose this specific area of research.

The third section then moves on to outline the mixed-methods approach over time that was taken, noting further some of the feminist debates around different methods of research. I explore the use of a questionnaire, interviews, non-participant observation and learning journals, and highlight some of the different times and spaces in which the research was conducted.

Finally, the fourth section outlines how the data was analysed, exploring my initial use of thematic analysis and then a narrative and discursive analysis, and noting further the feminist poststructuralist framework that informed this approach. I then introduce the four key aspects of times and spaces that were highlighted in respondents' narratives and which will be explored in the rest of this research. Coming full circle, I return to briefly consider the feminist aims of this research.

What Makes Research Feminist?

What makes a piece of research feminist remains a contentious debate. Here I discuss just two aspects of this debate. Firstly, I explore how what is seen as feminist research has often been tied to the qualitative research methods used. Secondly, I explore the aims of feminist research and how this is most often seen as research by, for and about women. Both of these positions have been questioned, to some degree, with recognition that feminist research can make use of a range of research methods, and with a shift towards a focus on gender relations as opposed to women's specific issues or experiences. These issues are particularly relevant to my own research since, as explored in this chapter, it makes use of mixed methods, involves both women and men, and considers gendered and other power relations, as opposed to seeking to find out about women's specific experiences of distance learning.

A question of method?

Feminist research has been particularly linked to qualitative research methods, seen as typified by methods such as in-depth interviews and auto/biographical writing (Letherby, 2003; Maynard, 1994). Indeed, much early feminist work did focus on more qualitative methods (and often still does). This was often a political and epistemological choice: a question of ways of knowing (Oakley, 2000). Qualitative methods were seen as particularly important in voicing women's particular experience, as opposed to the dominant quantitative methods of research which were not only seen as masculinist but as restricting the voicing of different experiences (Maynard, 1994).

The development in social science research of quantitative, "scientific" methods such as surveys and experimental methods followed a model adopted from the natural sciences. Such methods were (and often still are) widely regarded as giving access to the "truth"; providing an objective means of collecting data by ensuring that the researcher, and any bias they may have, were detached from the research process and context (Maynard, 1994). However, feminist research and thought has

questioned the concepts of objectivity and detachment, highlighting the masculinist basis on which much of this "objective" social science research and, moreover, enlightenment thought, has been based (Letherby, 2003; Maynard, 1994). For example, in psychological research, feminist researchers such as Carol Gilligan (1982/1993) sought to demonstrate how influential psychological theories, such as theories of human and moral development, were underpinned by the norm of the male-as-standard and the female-as-other. As such, women were either excluded from research on the moral development of children and adults, since men's responses could be taken to represent the norm and therefore be generalised to women, or were considered as under-developed because their responses did not match the male norm. Feminist research such as this has been vital in highlighting the gendered and other power relations underpinning the construction of widely accepted knowledge about the social world, and the ways in which research can be used to maintain such gendered knowledge.

Indeed, another important aspect of feminist research that is related to the construction rather than reflection of knowledge about the social world and tied to issues of time and space, is the demonstration of the ways in which research is subject to the location of the researcher and the researched. In other words, rather than being objective and detached, research is situated and located, not only in terms of geographical or historical location, but epistemological location: we cannot detach our values and ourselves from our research (Deem, 1986; Haraway, 1991). The researcher plays a central role in collecting and analysing data and in representing the "reality" of the social world. Moreover, as Skeggs (1997) notes, rather than trying to remove our values from the research, these can be productive: not only leading us to research particular topics, but to do so through feminist or other critical perspectives.

While the focus on qualitative methods was a politically important challenge to the dominance of quantitative research and research which overlooked women's experience, it has been increasingly recognised that such methods are not specifically feminist. Indeed, they dominate in several areas of social science

research (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). Moreover, feminist researchers employ a range of research methods and produce a range of data, although feminists using more quantitative methods have faced heavy criticism (Kelly *et al*, 1995; Oakley, 2000). Nevertheless, it is increasingly recognised that qualitative and quantitative methods can be complementary rather than binary. These issues will be noted further in section three in relation to the specific methods I have used.

So if it is not a question of method, what does make research feminist? I would agree with feminist writers such as Kelly *et al* (1995), Letherby (2003), Oakley (2000) and Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002), that it is not the methods that identify feminist research, but how and why those methods are used. I would argue that drawing on a feminist perspective, being committed to respecting respondents, having a sensitivity to, raising awareness of, and seeking to challenge gendered and other power relations can inform the development of any tool for research. The most important element in the choice of methods is that they suit the research topic and aims (Oakley, 2000). While my research has a number of aims, which will be further explored in the following chapter when I review the literature related to time and space in distance learning, I now consider further the general aims of feminist research. I note the range of feminist perspectives and some of the key questions these raise around the focus of feminist research.

The aims of feminist research

As discussed, it is not the methods that identify research as feminist, but the feminist epistemology that underpins research: 'remaking what is seen as 'knowledge' in feminist terms' (Stanley and Wise, 1983/1993). However, feminist thought is not characterised by one way of knowing the social world, but by a wide range of feminisms (Beasley, 1999; Zalewski, 2000). Appendix 1 maps some of these different feminist positions, drawing partly on Beasley (1999) and Tong (1989/1997). It is worth noting that this is rather simplified map and many feminists would be located in different positions across it. Importantly, however, these different feminist positions would seem to entail remaking knowledge in different feminist ways. In the case of more radical feminist research, for example, a

key aim has been to demonstrate and value women's difference from men, with women's experience or needs being prioritised and valued above those of men. In liberal feminist research, on the other hand, the key aim has been to gain recognition of equality between women and men, seeking to demonstrate that, when access is equally open to the public spheres such as paid work, education and politics, women are just as able as men. Standpoint theories have "centred" women's experiences, starting from the perspective that women have a privileged standpoint from which to understand sexist and gendered power relations. More recently, feminist poststructuralist perspectives – closer to where I would locate myself – have aimed to explore how gender relations operate within women and men's everyday lives, seeing these as a more fluid and changing set of power relations which are subject to time and space. While there is recognition of fluidity and multiplicity within this position, this does not mean, however, that these perspectives do not focus on inequalities and differential gendered relations. Indeed, this can be seen as a "both/and" position (Hughes, 2002a) since, gender relations are both seen as socially and linguistically constituted through a range of discourses or social expectations about what it is to be a woman or a man, rather than being fixed and natural, but are equally recognised as having everyday material and social impacts and continuing to create inequalities between and among women and men. Thus, social discourses or expectations about women's caring nature, for example, mean that many – but not all – women face different demands and expectations than men. This can have real, everyday impacts on women and men's roles as parents, in elder care or, indeed, within the workplace. Equally, however, power is seen as both repressive and productive (Foucault, 1977). In other words, power is not automatically oppressive or negative, but can create feelings of pleasure and empowerment. As such, women may also see caring roles as giving them a sense of empowerment (Skeggs, 1997). This feminist poststructuralist perspective will be considered further in the following sections when exploring both how this research developed and how the data was analysed.

As well as raising questions as to what kind of aims feminist research has, these different perspectives raise issues about who feminist research focuses on and

whose lives we aim to be able to talk about. One of the key aims of feminist research has been to explore, make known, and prioritise women's experiences and knowledge. Thus, feminist research has been seen primarily as by, for and about women. Indeed, Kelly *et al* (1995: 235) suggest that work which looks at women and men, or is conducted by or with men, also faces marginalisation and exclusion from feminist research. However, this focus on women's lives has, to a degree, come into question with the development of perspectives, such as feminist poststructuralism, that focus on gender relations. Indeed, Flax (1990: 40) argues that what is central to the many feminist perspectives, is the goal of analysing '...how gender relations are constituted and experienced and how we think or, equally important, do not think about them'. Flax (1990) notes that it is important that we focus on gender relations as about both women and men, since expectations of women's and men's roles in society are interlinked and dynamic. Moreover, one of the ways in which these relations continue to be overlooked is in seeing gender as about women only. Thus, if we agree that feminist research has something to say about social life, it would seem important that feminist research aims to explore – and is able to say something about – the experiences of both women and men; bringing a sensitivity to gendered power relations, but also to a range of other power relations evident within the different spheres of everyday life. As Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002: 147) note, while focusing on women's 'voices and experience' has been vital to the development of feminist perspectives, and to feminist action, such approaches:

...are not incompatible with looking more generally at gendered lives, power relations, hierarchies and institutionalized dominance. (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002: 147)

I would agree with Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002: 147) that the key aim of feminist research is to 'give insights into gendered social existence that would otherwise not exist'. As such, I feel that in order to explore gendered relations within the context of this study of times and spaces in distance learning, it is vital to consider these relations as about both women and men's everyday experiences and positions in society. A poststructuralist feminist perspective, in stressing the

changing and dynamic nature of gender relations – as well as their continued salience – leads us to consider the ways in which gendered expectations, perceptions and roles change over time and space. Moreover, feminist poststructuralist perspectives stress multiplicity. As such, I aim to explore both difference and commonality in women and men learners' narratives.

The following section now explores further the geographical and epistemological location of this research and myself as researcher, exploring how I came to research this area and some of the issues that arise around that.

Locating the Research and Researcher

This study explores the experiences of a group of postgraduate distance learners studying with one department within a UK university. The university provides on-campus and distance learning programmes (these are not interchangeable) and is one of the largest distance learning programme providers in the UK after the Open University. I came to study this area following my own experience of studying for a Masters with the Open University whilst working full-time for the department whose students I am researching. Evidently this relationship will have some ethical and practical implications, which are now explored.

Access, gatekeepers and participation

Notably, I am not seeking to research the learning provider or the courses provided, but to focus on the learners and their experiences. This choice of focus partly reflects my feeling that it would be difficult to conduct such a study as a now outsider-once insider. I had worked for over two years in the department, on the course material production as well as being an administrator in my first year, dealing with students located in different countries. My choice was most related, however, to my subjective interest in the stories of the learners themselves. I felt that learners' voices, particularly those of postgraduate distance learners, were relatively quiet within the distance learning literature. I was interested in researching the learners on this particular programme due to having both heard and shared some

of their experiences through informal and formal contacts, and through the research I conducted for my Masters. On a more pragmatic level, I also hoped that my links with the learning provider would help me to gain access to a group of distance learners within the 'closed' or 'private' setting of the educational institution, 'where access is controlled by gatekeepers' (Silverman, 2000: 198).

On a practical level, while not a homogenous group, distance learners are often geographically dispersed, perhaps never setting foot in the university with which they study for a degree. In addition, since many distance learners work full- or part-time whilst studying, they are generally considered "time-poor" individuals with many responsibilities. This is particularly when compared with the "traditional" image of the young, full-time student in higher education. It is perhaps for this reason that many studies of distance learners appear to be undertaken by distance learning tutors and course providers, using postal surveys or questionnaires administered at tutorials. Since I did not have the access to a group of distance learners that a tutor or course provider might have, I hoped that my connection with my former employer might facilitate this access. This was generally the case, although a change of gatekeepers early on did mean re-negotiating access.

I worked closely with the new gatekeeper, ensuring that they were informed of my plans and progress and 'convinced of...[my] integrity and of the value of the research' (Bell, 1997: 52). This included discussing openly my research aims and asking for feedback on my questionnaire design. They were excited about the potential of the research in terms of findings and implications for practice, and offered to post the initial questionnaire out with other postings going out to the learners. I was fortunate that my gatekeeper had an interest in gender issues and that I was able to be open about my feminist perspectives, which is not always the case for feminist researchers (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002). My gatekeeper asked to attach a covering letter of her own so that she could encourage the learners to participate, and to emphasise that the findings might impact upon practice as part of their focus on quality and learner support. I did not see this as problematic since they did not wish to censor or guide my questions or the

learners' responses. Indeed, I hoped that their participation might increase the response. Nevertheless, I often found it difficult to attract research participants, despite trying different methods of contact, as will be highlighted in the following sections.

Choosing and developing the area of research

As indicated, prior to conducting my PhD research, I worked for 2 years for this learning provider, whilst being a distance learner myself. Therefore, I had experienced, and conducted research about, various aspects of the learner and tutor experience, developing an understanding of the issues around distance learning and the context of these particular programmes, and having a wide experience of interacting with distance learners worldwide. Reflecting the situated and located nature of research, my location within this field formed the basis for my chosen area of research and inevitably informs my research focus and analysis. Strauss (1987/1990) refers to this contextual background as 'experiential data', drawing on the researcher's own experiences, reading and observations in the field of study. Strauss argues that this data can help to identify different avenues of investigation, including identifying areas for comparison and contrast.

As part of my own distance learning studies with the OU, I conducted three research projects in the areas of: women's experiences of distance learning; tutor's experiences of teaching at a distance; and the use of Net Conferencing as a means of supporting learning at a distance. My PhD research built on this foundation, initially focusing on contextualising learners' approaches to their studies, with an emphasis on exploring gender issues, roles and responsibilities. Having designed and conducted a questionnaire to explore these areas, outlined below, the responses to the open questions in my survey led me beyond considering approaches (how much time they study for, how they use their materials, what their preferences for learning were), to consider learners' experiences of combining their home lives, work lives and studies. I found this a much richer and more diverse area of research. Over time, the research focused in on time and space as a means of understanding learners' stories about combining these multiple roles and aspects

of their lives. This reflects the changes that can take place as researchers develop their understanding and perspectives over the duration of the research. One potential downside of this could have been that the data collected in earlier stages of the research was less relevant to the final focus, or that much of the data related to different areas. However, since the survey and interviews focused primarily on how learners balanced their different roles and fitted in their learning, much of the data remained relevant and formed the basis of my shift towards concepts of time and space. Indeed, had I focused on time and space from the very beginning of the research, the outcome might have been quite different. For example, I might not have taken into account the diverse areas of learners' lives, instead focusing entirely on issues of when and where learners studied in order to capture what, at first sight, seem to be the key times and spaces of distance learning. In coming to these concepts towards the end of my data collection period, in order to make sense of learners' stories, I have been able to draw out a range of different times and spaces and dimensions of learners' experience.

Moreover, over time I also altered my epistemological position in relation to the research. Although I drew on feminist perspectives from the outset, I started out with a focus on making known distance learner's experiences. This now suggests to me a more enlightenment position, that the "truth out there" was not being seen in the literature or captured in research. My understanding of my aims in conducting this research shifted after I conducted and analysed a tentative and informal pilot study involving one face-to-face interview and five e-mail based interviews. I informally "tried out" questions raised by the literature I was reading around women's ways of knowing (Gilligan, 1982/1993; Belenky *et al*, 1986; Baxter-Magolda, 1992), partly in preparation for designing the open questions in my questionnaire. The pilot study sought to explore the connection that women and men made between their home and work lives. Having sent out my questionnaire, I began to analyse in more depth the data from the face-to-face interview that I conducted with a woman academic. Through this I developed my understanding of feminist poststructuralist perspectives, although this was far from being the perspective used by the above-mentioned writers that I had drawn on. Starting with

a thematic analysis, I highlighted the idea of multiple positionings, using the metaphor of different positions being like different pairs of shoes that individuals choose to wear, are made to wear and are seen by others as wearing. This developed into an analysis of the key discourses and underpinning narratives involved in the data, drawing partly on the work of Francis (1998). The understanding I developed through the analysis (see Raddon, 2002b) also meant re-reading my aims and my perceptions of the research journey. I started out on what seemed a fairly linear research process: reading the literature around approaches to and styles of learning; designing the research tools; conducting the research; analysing the data. I focused on learners' experiences with what on reflection seems to be a wish to capture the "truth" about the gendered experiences of distance learners. However, I now explore the narratives of these learners' "lived realities". I am no longer seeking to capture the truth, but to add to the multiple stories about being a distance learner and to explore some of the gendered and other power relations within these stories. Over time I have come to recognise the spiralling nature of the research process (Blaxter *et al*, 2001), where waves of research and analysis over time were constantly feeding back into the previous and next wave of the research, as well as into my overall theoretical framework and, therefore, analysis. This brings me to explore the methods used in this research.

The Research Tools and Process

This third section now outlines the research methods and process. I consider the practical reasons for, and implications of, carrying out mixed-methods research over time and in different spaces. I then outline the four methods used to gather data about these distance learners' experiences; noting further some of the feminist debates around specific research methods. These were: a questionnaire survey; non-participant observation; interviews over time and through different methods; and learning journals.

A mixed methods approach over time and space

My choice of a mixed-methods approach was influenced by a number of factors, some of which are underpinned by issues of time and space. For example, since the research involved distance learners that are often geographically-dispersed and seen as "time-poor", I hoped that using a mixed methods approach would enable a larger number of people to take part in the research. Equally, I felt that using different methods to gather data would create a flexibility that meant I could respond to the preferences and availability of individual respondents in terms of both time and space. Moreover, I hoped to gain a richness of data by using both a questionnaire to gather a general picture of these distance learners and their motivations and approaches, and interviews over time in order to explore individual perceptions and experiences. Thus, as well as being a pragmatic approach to engaging participants, I hoped to avoid some of the problems related to using either quantitative or qualitative methods.

One of the key arguments in favour of a mixed- or multi-method approach is the triangulation and validation that it can provide (Halford *et al*, 1997: 56).

Triangulation aims to confirm the validity of the data by comparing and contrasting data gathered by different means, while theories can be tested and developed through data collected in different ways about the same phenomena. Underpinning this conception of validity is the belief that the "truth" of the "world out there" can be better captured through certain methods rather than others, or through the cross-referencing of multiple methods. However, as indicated, I am seeking neither to claim the "validity" or truer status of my research by using multi-methods, nor to test the "truth" of my respondents' claims and experiences. As Halford *et al* argue, while triangulation cannot:

...reveal...undisputed or complete versions of social events or processes...at least it provides different approaches to these. (Halford *et al*, 1997: 56)

Indeed, I see the use of different methods as a form of dialogue, building up a richer picture around these learners' experiences. This is not only through these methods of data collection, but also through interactions with the respondents,

and my analysis, interpretation, write-up and presentations of the data (thesis, newsletter and journal articles, conference papers, informal discussions) and through the reader's interpretation of this research. Rather than trying to identify a definitive truth, I would argue that individuals' understandings can highlight the multiple perspectives on and experiences of different social situations, practices and discourses. Equally, they can raise experiences and issues that others will relate to and recognise within their own experience, as well as leading us to reflect on our own.

As well as using mixed methods, to be outlined below, this research was carried out over time and in different spaces. Many studies that focus on learner experience appear to involve one-off surveys or interviews. As an important part of building an understanding of the context in which learners combine their home, work and study lives, as well as approaches that are developed and learning experienced, it seemed important to consider how things change over time. I felt that a one-off interview or questionnaire survey would not capture the negotiations that take place between multiple roles, or the highs and lows learners go through. Indeed, rather than using one research tool and repeating it over time, different tools were used, developed and improved as I went along. This again reflects the spiralling and developmental nature of research as opposed to linearity and fixity.

My approach over time was thus intended to track changes that might occur due to aspects such as growing confidence, changes in personal circumstances, -or respondents' positive and negative experiences; not only in their learning, but also in other areas of their lives. My appreciation of the importance of conducting research over time and in different locations has also grown with my analysis and increasing focus on issues of time and space. Indeed, Davies (1990: 48), focusing particularly on women's lives, argues that to home in on one specific chunk of time as exemplary of an individual's experience tends to overlook the complexity and lack of linearity in people's lives and removes research participants from their 'context and history'. As well as being conducted over time, my research was also conducted within different spaces and locations. These reflected both the

geographically dispersed nature of the sample, and my desire to be flexible in order to respond to the needs of the respondents. I highlight and discuss some of these locations below when outlining the specific methods used.

The research was carried out in waves, starting with a questionnaire survey, moving on to non-participant observation, interviews and, finally, learning journals. The interview data forms the major part of the data for this thesis, however, due to the sheer amount of data collected. For this reason, while I outline all of the methods used, I focus in more detail on the interviews.

The diagrams in Appendices 2a and 2b give a general overview of the timing of the different waves of research and with the two different cohorts. This is an approximate timing for each activity since, for example, although interviews were initiated at the same time for all respondents within either group 1 or group 2, the actual timing of these was individually negotiated according to the availability of the participant. More detailed information will now be given on each method.

The questionnaire survey

The first wave of research aimed to gather general data about the learners on the distance learning programme. Areas researched included the learners' motivations and their experiences of, and approaches to, studying at a distance, reflecting the original focus of my study. A postal survey seemed the most suitable method in terms of accessing the geographically dispersed UK-based learners, and in terms of gathering general data from as large a number of people as possible (see Appendix 3). As discussed, quantitative methods such as surveys have been viewed quite negatively in feminist research. Quantitative research has been seen, for example, as seeking to explain rather than understand social phenomena, collecting data about a pre-defined and pre-coded set of experiences, rather than allowing for a range of experiences and stories (Maynard, 1994). Nevertheless, a number of feminist researchers have argued against the outright rejection of quantitative methods. Kelly et al (1992), for example, found that in their highly sensitive research around sexual abuse, the use of a questionnaire gave respondents a certain sense of

protection and anonymity when dealing with painful memories and sensitive issues. Furthermore, in terms of the dissemination of social research and the audience for research, it remains the case that quantitative data continues to exercise more influence over policy makers and government decisions, and to be more widely disseminated (Oakley, 2000). Thus while qualitative data can create an in-depth understanding of social phenomena, in terms of dissemination and having a wider impact it can be very helpful to complement this with quantitative data. For this reason, it would seem politically important for feminist researchers to be able to use and understand quantitative methods of research. Thus, I happily admit, as Letherby (2003) does, that I most enjoy conducting in-depth and interview-based research, whilst recognising the great importance that more quantitative methods such as appropriately designed, gender-sensitive questionnaires have in the research of power relations. Indeed, the qualitative and quantitative methods are not dichotomous, since more qualitative research methods can provide quantitative data or be quantified, and vice versa (Kelly et al, 1995). Indeed, my questionnaire was developed drawing on three different areas of research which include qualitative and quantitative research: firstly, distance learning research, including my own prior research into women's experiences of distance learning; secondly, feminist research around women's ways of knowing (e.g. Gilligan, 1982/1993; Belenky *et al*, 1986; Baxter Magolda, 1992); and, thirdly, learning approaches and styles research (e.g. Biggs 1987; Entwistle, 1984; Honey and Mumford, 1982). A balance of open and closed questions was used in the survey, leaving plenty of opportunity for participants to respond in their own words. The women's ways of knowing research was particularly helpful in designing the more open questions, while the learning approaches and styles research influenced the more closed questions.

After piloting with 5 distance learners, some small changes were made to the questionnaire and it was posted out to 200 UK-based learners on this distance learning programme. In order to deal with any ethical issues raised by my connections with the learning provider, I made it clear in a covering letter that I had

worked for them, but was now an independent researcher, briefly describing the aims of my research (Appendix 4).

As an incentive to complete the survey, I offered to put everyone's name into a draw for a £20 book token. The course provider arranged for the questionnaires to be posted out whenever anything was sent out to their students. Therefore, it took just over a month for all 200 questionnaires to be posted out. The response rate was not as high as I had hoped (n=63), despite the offer of a book token, a cover letter from the learning provider and reminders sent out by e-mail via the course administrator. Nevertheless feedback on the questionnaire was generally positive, for example:

User-friendly questionnaire! - Tick boxes and clear, unambiguous questions. (SR 2)

The questionnaire was well structured with appropriate space for comments. (SR 19)

Good questionnaire. Interesting and thought provoking. Good luck with your research!
(SR 61)

Indeed, a small number of women respondents wrote that they were pleased to see this research being undertaken, and to have the opportunity to think about gender issues in relation to their studies. Criticisms of the questionnaire focused on aspects such as questions that particular respondents found inappropriate for the area of research: income and sex being two examples. There were also a few suggestions for additional questions or alternative foci. For example, one woman respondent wrote that I should have focused on who had paid for their studies, since women might have difficulty accessing funds. Indeed, this was an area that I had removed from the questionnaire due to lack of space (I had used this question in my MA study of women distance learners), but which on reflection I should have kept in. Notably, a number of women and men respondents understood my interest in gender as a focus on women only, which, as already discussed, was certainly not my intention. One respondent, for example, noted:

You haven't asked - whether female members think gender is an issue. (SR 9)

Since I felt that it was important to emphasise that gender is about both women and men (Flax, 1990), I responded to this reading of gender as one which was about women, and some of the other questions raised by respondents, within a series of articles that I was invited to write for the learning provider's newsletter.

The survey data was inputted into a database, using *Filemaker Pro* database software, in order to manage and analyse the survey data. A thematic analysis of the data was conducted from the open questions. Boyatis (1998: 4) writes that the first step of thematic analysis involves 'seeing' patterns in the data, and the second step involves 'seeing as', or linking the emerging patterns to key themes, ideas and concepts. Thus, we might see a general pattern in how learners describe their studies, which then leads us to ask what underpins that description, what kinds of issues does it raise, how does it link with ideas in the literature? In this way, themes such as "learning for work" might arise. I developed such themes from the data, and then identified sub-themes within these. These were later used to develop the interview schedule for the next step of the data collection. I also performed cross analysis with the data from the closed questions. This included looking at responses to certain questions by age, gender or level of income (see Appendix 5 for an example). The data from the closed questions was then transferred into *Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS)* for further statistical analysis, including basic descriptive statistics and cross-tabulations. The questionnaire enabled me to build a picture, although not necessarily representative, of the learners on this programme. The following table gives a profile of some of the basic information about the respondents.

Survey Profile

		% *
Sex	Female	66
	Male	34
Age	20-29	6
	30-39	30
	40-49	50
	50-59	14
Marital status	Single	16
	Married	56
	Divorced	14
	Other	14
Children	Yes	48
	No	50
Work	Full-time	91
	Part-time	8
		N=64

* Where percentages do not add up to 100, this is due to spoilt or missing cases.

Where the survey data is drawn upon and quoted in the following chapters, I refer to the respondents as SR1, SR2 and so on, SR standing for survey respondent. While the data from the questionnaire is not the primary focus of this thesis, particularly since the focus of the research shifted, it underpins the development of the research focus and tools, and is drawn upon to add further contextual data where appropriate.

Non-participant observation

On three occasions I spent a day at one of the teaching weekends or days that were put on as part of the distance learning programme. This was with the permission of the learning provider. While I interacted with the learners, tutors and administrators to a certain degree, I was not a participant in the key activities of these groups. Some of my interview respondents were present at these teaching weekends. However, the main aim in conducting this non-participant observation was to gain a general sense of the activities and environment of the teaching

weekend, and to gather 'live' data' (Cohen *et al*, 2000: 305). On the first occasion, which was an unstructured observation, I spent 4 hours (10am-2pm, 10th March 2001) in the spaces in which the learners registered for the teaching day and in which they socialised. This observation was carried out while I was still receiving replies to my questionnaire so, as well as talking with different learners, I took the opportunity to hand out some additional questionnaires. However, I did not go in to the teaching or tutorial rooms.

The second occasion was a semi-structured observation over the course of two days (9am-4pm 7th July 2001, 9am-1pm 8th July 2001). This involved observation of two seminar groups, a formal lecture and spending time observing interactions between and among learners, tutors and administrators. I made general notes about the atmosphere and group interactions over the days observed, and made detailed notes and sketches about the interactions and topics within the seminar groups. I also conducted the first wave of interviews with five of my respondents who themselves suggested that would be a good time and place to meet.

On the third occasion, I aimed to get a more general feel for the structure and organisation of the day since the teaching had been compressed in to one day by this point (9am-4pm 2nd November 2002). I met individually with those respondents that were present. In one case this was to conduct an interview on the respondent's request, while in other cases this was just for an informal interim chat.

While these observations did not form a major element of my data collection, they did provide a better appreciation of the structure of the teaching days, the levels of interaction, the activities, and the spaces and times around which the teaching was organised. When respondents later commented on lectures they had attended, or things that had happened, I was better able to relate to their comments and perspectives. Indeed, over time it has become evident that the second occasion on which I conducted this observation was to prove the most important in terms of sharing a sense of the environment with the interview respondents. Respondents

who had attended the second teaching weekend talked about it on several occasions over the two years of our interviews. Therefore, having been present at the weekend enabled me to relate to, and reflect on, their responses to it.

Interviews over time, in different locations and through mixed-methods

Interviews were conducted with a small group of self-selecting distance learners in the UK and Ireland, with the intention of following them through from the beginning to the completion of their 2 years of studies. A brief description of each respondent is given in the following table, with details of the area they work in, who they live with, and the number of interviews conducted. Details of who interviewees live with are given not because I see people as classified by their marital or parental status, but because whether someone is single and living alone, or lives with their partner and children gives an initial, albeit superficial, signal of some of the kinds of roles (e.g. partner, parent etc.) and responsibilities these interviewees had in the "private sphere", alongside their employment in the "public sphere".

Interviewee Profile

Interviewees	Interviews conducted
Beth, late 20s, working full-time in public sector, living with partner	4
Ian, 40s, working full-time in private sector at time of first interview in fairly senior role, living with partner	4
Jane, 40s, working part-time in public sector in fairly senior role, living with children and partner	5
Janet, 40s, working full-time in public sector in senior role, living alone	4
Jim, 40s, working full-time in public sector in fairly senior role, living with partner	4
Liz, 30s, working full-time in public sector, living alone	1
Marie, 40s, working full-time in private sector, living alone	4
Mark, 30s, working full-time in public sector at time of first interview, living half the week with his child and half the week alone	7
Rachel, 40s, working full-time in public sector, living with her child	1
Rose, 40s, working full-time in public sector, living alone	5
Sue, 40s, working full-time in private sector, living with partner and children	4

As discussed, interviews have been central to feminist researchers' work, seen as particularly useful in sharing individual experience and voicing women's lives and needs. The use of interviews, however, cannot be seen as unproblematic. If we

recognise the role of the research and location within the research process, for example, we must question the idea that interviews give us more direct or better access to the "truth" of individual's lives than any other method (Halford *et al*, 1997). Moreover, qualitative methods do not remove power relations from the research process or from feminist research (Oakley, 2000), although they may involve considering these more openly. Indeed, in order to protect the identity of my respondents, I have used pseudonyms chosen by the respondents and myself. The names were chosen either by the respondents (e.g. Jane and Janet), or by myself if they did not have a preference (e.g. Jim). I have also omitted some more identifying details. This has been both necessary and difficult, since aspects such as their profession have been omitted, although a general idea is given of the sector in which they work. More importantly, I omit aspects such as interviewees' ethnicity, since these may also be immediately identifiable with respondents due to the small sample. Except for one interviewee who is black and British African-Caribbean, all those involved in the UK and Ireland interviews, including myself, are white and either Welsh, Irish or English. Withholding this information is, in itself, a telling aspect of the power relations involved in research and, indeed, in education. While I am seeking to protect the identities of my respondents, I am withholding information that potentially maintains relations of assumed white, British domination, silencing aspects of the voices of those positioned as other to the norm in one way or another. This dualistic idea of the "norm" and the "other" is central to Western thinking, and has been influential in feminist thinking. In being open about this omission, however, I hope to make clear my position and my recognition of this contradiction. At the same time, I have tried to be attendant to any potential issues arising from these various positionings.

In this research, interviews were conducted in order to gather learners' narratives on, and perspectives about, their experiences of combining home, work and study and some of the roles and responsibilities around which they did this. While questionnaires can be useful in gaining a wider picture of a phenomenon, interviews are seen as enabling individuals:

...be they interviewers or interviewees – to discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live, and to express how they regard situations from their own point of view. (Cohen *et al*, 2000)

Indeed, Kvale (1996) sees "inter-views" as an exchange and interaction between the interviewee and the interviewer, involving the co-creation of knowledge about the social world, rather than a one-way narrative.

The interview stage of the research constituted the major part of the research process. This involved several waves of interviews (see Appendix 2a/b), carried out over time and in different real and virtual locations. Initially, my sample focused on UK-based learners. However, a low response rate necessitated extending the sample to include learners based in Ireland. For the first wave of interviews with the UK learners, a letter was sent requesting the participation of learners who were just starting their studies. The aim was to follow a group of students through the 2 years of their studies. Due to data protection issues, I put the letters in blank envelopes with First Class stamps on and the course administrators put address labels on them and posted them to the 26 people who had recently signed up for the programme (see Appendix 5). Ideally, I would have followed these letters up with telephone calls in order to ensure a good response rate. However, data protection meant that this was not possible and I received only 3 replies initially. Hoping to engage more participants, I sent a follow-up letter asking course members to help with my research (Appendix 6). In the end, 4 women and 3 men agreed to take part. Six months later, when a new cohort of students registered on the programme, I repeated this exercise, hoping again to increase the number of respondents. This time, at the suggestion of the learning provider, a letter was sent out to UK and Ireland-based course members. I received responses from 4 women, 2 based in Ireland, and 2 in the UK. Although the numbers were again low, this assuaged some of my panic as I had not been able to contact Liz or Rachel when I organised the second wave of interviews. Thus, in total interviews were conducted with 11 learners, 7 from the first cohort and 4 from the second cohort.

Originally, I intended to conduct the interviews over the duration of learners' two-year programme, marked by completion of 4 assignments and a dissertation. My second cohort, however, would not complete their studies until after my own completion date; although it would be possible to follow them through the major part of their studies. Nevertheless, by the final interview, none of the first cohort had completed their studies due to extensions and deferrals (which involves deferring their studies for up to six months) and the second cohort were just starting to research their dissertations. Thus, while I had intended to go through the whole process with at least one group of learners, this was not possible in practice. While this was a little disappointing initially, I realised that this is an important element of the research data and the learners' experiences of combining their multiple roles and responsibilities. Equally, these aspects would not have been captured within the research had I conducted one-off interviews or relied on the one-off questionnaire. Again, this highlights the importance of researching over time.

The waves of interviews were intended to concur with key moments in the learners' studies, intersecting with assignments, holidays, starting new modules and starting, researching and completing the dissertation. This was, of course, with the proviso that the interviewees were available at those times. Originally, I aimed to conduct 4-5 waves of interviews. As seen in the above table, it was not possible to keep to this plan (although the number of interviews does not entirely reflect the amount of contact, since I was in contact with interviewees before and in between interviews). Interviewees would perhaps be out of touch for some months, would be unavailable at those times, or would initiate additional interviews in order to discuss an aspect they felt might be of interest. For this reason, it was vital to be flexible and pragmatic when organising the interviews. Aspects such as lack of availability were a strong reflection of the impact of multiple roles and responsibilities, and can be seen as a part of the context of their experience. In order to see Marie, for example, at her suggestion I met her in a city where she was attending meetings (not her home town), and accompanied her as she travelled to different locations around the city. I waited in the reception of a company where

Marie had her first meeting and we conducted our interview in the taxi on the way to the first meeting, on the way back into the city centre, and in a noisy snack bar over lunch before her next meeting. While this does not fit the ideal of conducting interviews in a comfortable and quiet location, this both reflected the reality of research and provided an insight into Marie's typical working day.

As indicated, I did not use one research tool and repeat this over time. Each wave of interviews involved a new interview schedule and was differently structured. The first wave of interviews was semi-structured. This included exploring some of the issues raised by the questionnaire survey, as well as areas that had only been touched on or were not covered in the survey (Appendix 7). Subsequent waves of interviews were more in-depth and less structured, although as will be noted, this was less possible for the e-mail interviews. This more in-depth approach was taken in order to allow the respondents to raise issues that were of importance to them, rather than being guided by my questions or by the issues raised by my analysis of the data up to that point. Thus, I prepared general themes for exploration, but was not confined to these areas. Kvale (1996) refers to this as a focused approach, which involves focusing on a number of themes and having a level of direction but not being tied to a set of predetermined questions. These themes were related to the learner's stage in their studies (Appendices 8 – 11), which primarily related to the module they were studying, and formed a general basis for wider discussion.

In between the waves of interviews, I kept in touch with respondents by occasionally sending e-mail messages to see how they were, forwarding information that might be of interest, sending greetings at festive times, and an occasional card or letter to those who had provided their postal address. This was particularly the case after the second wave of interviews. I was initially reluctant to bother my respondents in between interviews, since they were so busy. However, I found that when I contacted them to arrange the second interview, apart from two respondents that did not respond at all, they commented that it had been a while since we had talked and they were pleased to hear from me. After this, I was encouraged to stay in touch between interviews. This contact was important in helping to build our

relationship, maintaining respondents' interest and participation in the research over time, but also in providing a picture of their life between our interviews. For example, while I interviewed Janet face-to-face and by telephone, our brief e-mail communications in between kept me up to date with issues such as changes in her job role.

Mixed-methods interviewing

Interviews were carried out in a number of ways, depending on the needs and preferences of the interviewees. Since it had been hard to engage these already busy distance learners in my research, all participants were offered the opportunity to be interviewed either in person, by telephone or by e-mail. Each interviewee had different preferences, often dependent on their workload, family pressures and so on at the time. For example, while Jane liked to talk in person, we would talk on the telephone when she was very busy. This flexibility was, I believe, important in engaging these learners in the research process over time but also, as will be noted, responded to how they felt more comfortable communicating with me.

Email interviews

The same interview schedules and themes were used regardless of method, although the e-mail interview usually took the form initially of a survey. This involved emailing the questions through and leaving time for the respondent to contact me with answers, queries or alternative points. This approach was taken on the request of respondents, who felt that it would be better to receive all of the questions rather than one question at a time followed by discussion. Having sent the questions, and received responses, I followed up responses with further questions to explore specific areas. At this point the process would become more interactive. As Mann and Stewart (2000) note, there are various benefits to using computer-mediated communication (CMC) in qualitative research. These include widening access and participation, enabling respondents to discuss issues they might not feel able to discuss in a face-to-face interview, cost effectiveness and having the respondents' own words rather than the researcher's transcription. Letherby (2003) notes, of diaries and written responses, that respondents may feel

a greater sense of control over what they tell the researcher and in taking time over this decision. I found that Jim, in particular, enjoyed writing his responses and appreciated having the time to think these through. He responded to my questions and subsequent interactions in detail and noted that e-mail interviews were most convenient for him, since he would not need to travel; although I insisted that I would travel to see him. Indeed, when we conducted our final interview over the telephone, while Jim seemed fairly happy with this, he did say at one point when he was stuck for words "This is why I like to write my responses! ".

Inevitably, there are also downsides to this approach. Mann and Stewart (2000) note that the challenges can include access, computer literacy, lack of training and interaction. I found that interaction was the key challenge. Rose initially requested an e-mail interview as she thought it would be better time-wise; although she was happy to be interviewed by any of the methods. However, I found that Rose's responses were very short and follow-up emails were similar. Rose noted that as she was responding while at work, she had little time to respond in detail. We had spoken on the telephone previously about the research and how Rose would like to be interviewed. At that time, we had quite a long and chatty telephone call, and I decided that it might be better to follow up Rose's responses in this way. Rose was happy to do this and, after a successful 'phone interview, in future we either spoke on the telephone or I would visit her at home. Time to respond was an important issue in these email interviews, and I felt most respondents were more likely to give time for an interview face-to-face or on the telephone.

When quoting email interviews and discussions in the following chapters, I quote these directly from the respondents' emails, without any changes to spelling etc. In order to signal data that is from emails, I follow the quotation with the source e.g. (Jim, email).

Telephone interviews

Telephone interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed with the permission of respondents. The telephone interviews were, I would argue, as effective as the face-

to-face interviews. Telephone interviews share some of the same benefits as CMCs, including cost effectiveness, access, participation, convenience for busy participants and a sense of safety as opposed to face-to-face interviews (Cohen *et al*, 2000). Similarly, there are challenges, including access (while everyone had a telephone, bad weather and interference impacted on two people's access), lack of verbal cues, difficulty of making notes or recording telephone interviews, and individual comfort with talking on the telephone (Cohen *et al*, 2000). While most telephone-recording machinery is very expensive, I was able to purchase a cheap and effective telephone-recording device, which linked the telephone to a personal stereo so that interviews could be recorded. In terms of interaction, there was only one occasion on which I felt that the interaction was difficult. This was in an my third interview with Janet (previous interviews were face-to-face), who I found tended to give short answers to my questions or prompts regardless of whether we talked face-to-face or on the telephone, and even after several interviews. In all of the other telephone interviews, however, there was a high level of interaction and the data was as rich as that from face-to-face interviews, even when we had not met in person prior to the interview. I was initially worried that it would be harder to conduct in-depth interviews in this way, since these were usually longer than semi-structured interviews and more guided by the focus of the interviewee, this was generally not a problem. I let respondents talk for as long as they felt comfortable, and telephone interviews ranged from 20 minutes to over 80 minutes, depending upon how much the respondents had to say, and how much time they had. Telephone interviews were conducted whilst respondents were at home or at work, depending on their preferences. Most respondents preferred to talk when they were at home, while Mark and Marie preferred to talk when they were at work. For Marie this was generally during her lunchtime. The times when I was asked to call Mark were always different, and he mentioned that he could be flexible about how he organised his time at work. Nevertheless, there are some potential ethical issues in conducting these interviews in work time which, on reflection, I did not consider when agreeing to call respondents at the times they requested. Telephone interviews could enable a greater degree of flexibility than face-to-face interviews, since they could be rescheduled at short notice, allowing for changes in people's availability.

For example, when there were unexpected interruptions or problems, I was able to call back later. Sue, for example, had to unexpectedly rush one of her children to hospital on a night when we had arranged to talk, and Jane was delayed in getting home on one occasion when we had arranged for me to call her. One shortcoming of telephone interviews is the lack of visual cues and responses, nevertheless, intonation and pauses could still be very telling and are transcribed for both telephone and face-to-face interviews.

Face-to-face interviews

With the face-to-face interviews, I again allowed respondents to talk for as long as they felt comfortable. This ranged from 30 minutes to over 3 hours. As well as transcriptions of the tape-recorded interviews, general notes were made about some of the off-tape discussion or interaction that took place before and after the taped interview. For example, when I went to visit Jane, we talked on our way to a café and after our interview we went for a walk and for a drink. Indeed, the face-to-face interviews were conducted in a range of locations, including people's homes, at the teaching weekends and days, whilst travelling around for work, in a cafe and a hotel lobby. The different spaces of the interviews both reflected the learners' study locations and the access they had to different spaces (e.g. in the study at home, at their desk at work, in the kitchen at home, whilst travelling) and added to the richness of the data. When I visited people at home, for example, they would show me where they studied. Thus while my flexibility as to the times and locations of interviews was due to my wish to work with the availability of my respondents, it also added to the research in unforeseen ways.

When transcribing the interviews, I use *italics* to show words that were emphasised by the interviewee, a hyphen to show a broken word (becau-) or short pause (I- I-*wanted* to go), and I include some of my personal notes about physical cues or things that came to mind in this way: <we laugh>. As Kvale (1996) notes, transcriptions must be recognised as already having been interpreted, rather than straightforward presentations of reality. Equally, as Cohen *et al* (2000: 282) highlight, transcriptions are 'frozen', they 'are decontextualized, abstracted from

time and space, from the dynamics of the situation, from the life form'. As such, whilst trying to convey the way in which respondents speak through my transcription, I also add contextual information where appropriate, such as how we were communicating, tone of voice, location and so on.

Through participation in the research, and particularly the interviews, I hoped that the respondents and myself would have the opportunity to reflect on experiences of distance learning and some of the issues around gender and other power relations involved in these. Feedback on the interviews was positive. For example, I always asked if there were issues that were not covered or aspects they would like to see covered. Respondents would add any aspects they felt appropriate, although these were always small additions, rather than any problems with the research. Also pleasingly, a number of the respondents said that they had found it a positive experience. Jane, for example, who was very interested in power relations and inequalities, stated that talking to me was a means of re-claiming her study time and space. Mark also said that he had appreciated our contact and that it had added to his experience of his studies, at times spurring him on to do something he had been thinking over and then had told me about in our interviews.

Learning journals

Towards the end of the separate waves of interviews, and as I was developing a focus on space and time, I asked interviewees if they would keep a brief learning journal. I explained that I was thinking about the times that they studied and in which places. We had discussed these issues in the interviews, however, this was often a general idea, as opposed to identifying specific times and the different rooms that they studied in. Diaries or journals have been both analysed in feminist research as cultural artefacts (Letherby, 2003) and seen as a useful way in which respondents can reflect on their lives in their own words (e.g. Quinn, 2003). Diaries as a source of more organisational or behavioural information (Bell, 1997) can also be useful in providing additional information about how learners schedule their studies, as was the case in Morrison's (1992) research on women studying part-time. Since my respondents had little time, and since we had already explored many

areas within the interviews, my main aim in asking respondents to keep brief journals was to gather additional information about when and where they studied and some reflections on what they had achieved.

All of the respondents agreed that they would be happy to keep a brief journal for between a few days up to a week, and some made suggestions as to when they thought it would be most illuminating. For example, Ian suggested that a few weeks before his assignment was due, and the week that he wrote the assignment, would probably be good times to keep the journal. Having discussed with my interviewees how this might be recorded, I provided a loosely structured set of questions and areas that they might consider and space for them to make additions as necessary (see Appendix 12). This was sent by email or post depending on the preference of the respondent. While all of the respondents agreed to keep the journal, I eventually received responses from just two learners, and messages from others that they would send it along shortly but were very busy and, in most cases, had been distracted from their studies. Again, this was a reflection of the poverty of time that these learners experienced. While this was not a highly successful approach, the journals that I received were useful nevertheless in adding a small amount of more specific detail to aspects such as the times when learners studied, where they studied, and what they got out of that time.

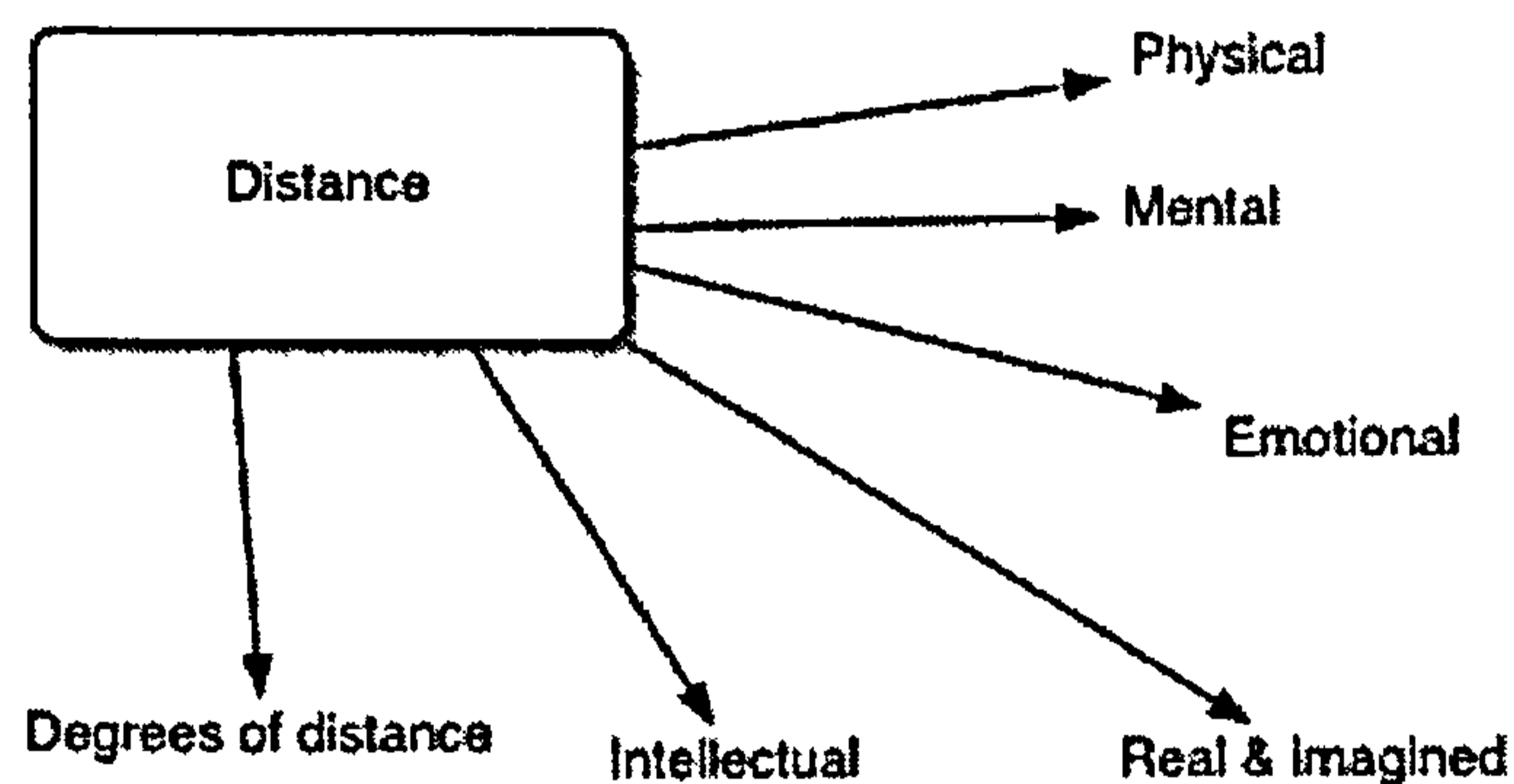
Analysing the Interview Data: thematic and narrative/discursive analysis

This final section now outlines how the data was analysed. In exploring the different dimensions of this analysis, I also outline further the feminist poststructuralist perspective that has informed this analysis.

As with the more open data from the questionnaire, each wave of interview data was first analysed using a thematic analysis. This involved close reading of each interview in order to find patterns and themes in the data, or as Boyatzis (1998: 4) terms it, 'capturing the codable moment' within the data. Rather than seeking to develop a code that would be systematically applied and tested across the data

(Boyatzis, 1998), however, the data was coded into themes and sub-themes in order to bring the various 'fragments' together within 'a particular idea or concept' (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996: 27). Thus, the sub-themes related to the different views or responses to particular themes. The following diagram illustrates how, for example, the theme of distance was broken down into sub-themes.

Sub-themes of Distance



The data was then organised around these themes and was compared between respondents and across the interviews over time. Other key themes that arose from the data included: choice; managing; benefits; change; flexibility; learning for work; and communication. These themes and their related sub-themes were used to identify areas for further research in the following wave of interviews and guided my continued reading of the research literature. Indeed, I explored a number of different bodies of literature throughout the research process, according to the themes raised by the learners' experiences. While this is not a grounded theory approach, the focus the research took after the initial stages was largely grounded in the stories of the participants, rather than being predominantly guided by theory or previous research. However, no research can be entirely grounded in the data and untouched by theory: we continuously theorise our lives and, moreover, research that claims a feminist perspective necessarily starts from a theorised position (Letherby, 2003; Maynard, 1994).

Having conducted the final wave of interviews, I drew together a narrative and a discursive approach to analysis in order to explore the data around these key

themes in more depth. Narrative analysis treats interviews and other data as biographical data about each participant, or 'stories of the 'self' ' (Raddon, 2002b: 389). As Coffey and Atkinson (1996: 76) note, stories are told in all areas of our lives, and provide a means of sharing '...cultural values, meanings and personal experiences'. Sociological research has often studied society from '...social structure 'downwards' [rather than] individual 'upwards' (Rustin, 2000: 45), however, the narrative and biographical approach starts from the perspective of the individual. Although large-scale generalisations can rarely be made based on an individual's experiences, there will be a resonance with other people's experiences, as well as themes and issues for general consideration.

A narrative approach fits well with a feminist poststructuralist framework, since it highlights the subjective nature of research, the storied nature of "reality", and the multiplicity of individual experiences, meanings and "lived realities" (Chamberlayne *et al*, 2000). Moreover this approach is useful in exploring individual and group representations of reality. For example, in Chapter 5, I explore how these distance learners talk about the apparent absence involved in distance learning, considering what it means to them and how they engage with it in their "lived realities" of combining home, work and study. Moreover, by focusing on narratives as storied, and speech as text, we subject the interview data to a particular set of assumptions. Indeed, within feminist poststructuralist perspectives, language is seen as fundamental to the definition and constitution of social organisation, relations and individual subjectivities (Weedon, 1997, 1999). This is not just in terms of those we research, but also in terms of ourselves as researchers and the very process of research and interaction. Therefore, this research would see the stories individuals tell about themselves as subject to the research process (whether it be survey, interviewing, journal-writing or observation), to the context of the research, and to the researched-researcher interaction. In this way, the respondents' narratives are seen neither as a direct and absolute reflection of the truth of that person or an event, nor as fiction. Instead, these are seen as products of the research process. Equally importantly, narrative approaches can be seen as highlighting the 'discursive reconstruction' that takes place within the interview, through which the

individual '...attempt[s] to impose an orderliness, a shape, on a life which is essentially irrecoverable' (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000: 167). Again reflecting the role of time and space in the research process, an interviewee may talk in a linear and chronological way about events that did not occur in that way. It is inevitable that they will draw on current experience and knowledge to assess the past, leading them to re-tell past events. In this way, it is impossible to "tell it like it was", since in the telling of the story, there is a level of interpretation and selection.

I brought this focus on storied lives together with a discursive analysis. Discursive forms of analysis are common in feminist poststructuralist work (e.g. Francis, 1998). However, perhaps reflecting the resistance in more poststructuralist approaches to grand narratives or prescriptive approaches, there are few specific models for this approach to analysis. My own approach involved focusing on the key discourses upon which the respondents drew in their narratives. Thus, I treated these narratives not simply as stories, but as underpinned by a range of discourses about the "reality" of the social world, such as discourses about what it means to be a woman or man, a distance learner or a worker. Making this approach still more complex is the fact that discourse is a '...wide-ranging and slippery' term (Taylor, 2001: 8) and has been used, understood and practiced as a form of analysis in a number of ways in different disciplines and by different researchers (Kendall and Wickham, 1999; Wetherell *et al*, 2001). Foucault (1972/2000: 49), whose work has been particularly influential, sees discourses as both 'signs' and 'practices' through which subjects are both represented and formed. Or, as Francis (1998: 139) puts it, discourses are 'the themes which position and describe us'. I would argue, as others have, that we are not only positioned and described by discourses, but take them up as practices and make use of them to understand the social world (Raddon, 2002b). Through these themes or statements about the social world, we both make sense of and constitute the world around us, understanding our own subjectivities and those of others, and being identified as subjects (the carer, the learner, the worker). Nevertheless, the range of discourses on which respondents draw, and which they have available to them, will differ for

each individual (Weedon, 1997) and we are not necessarily free to pick and choose between them.

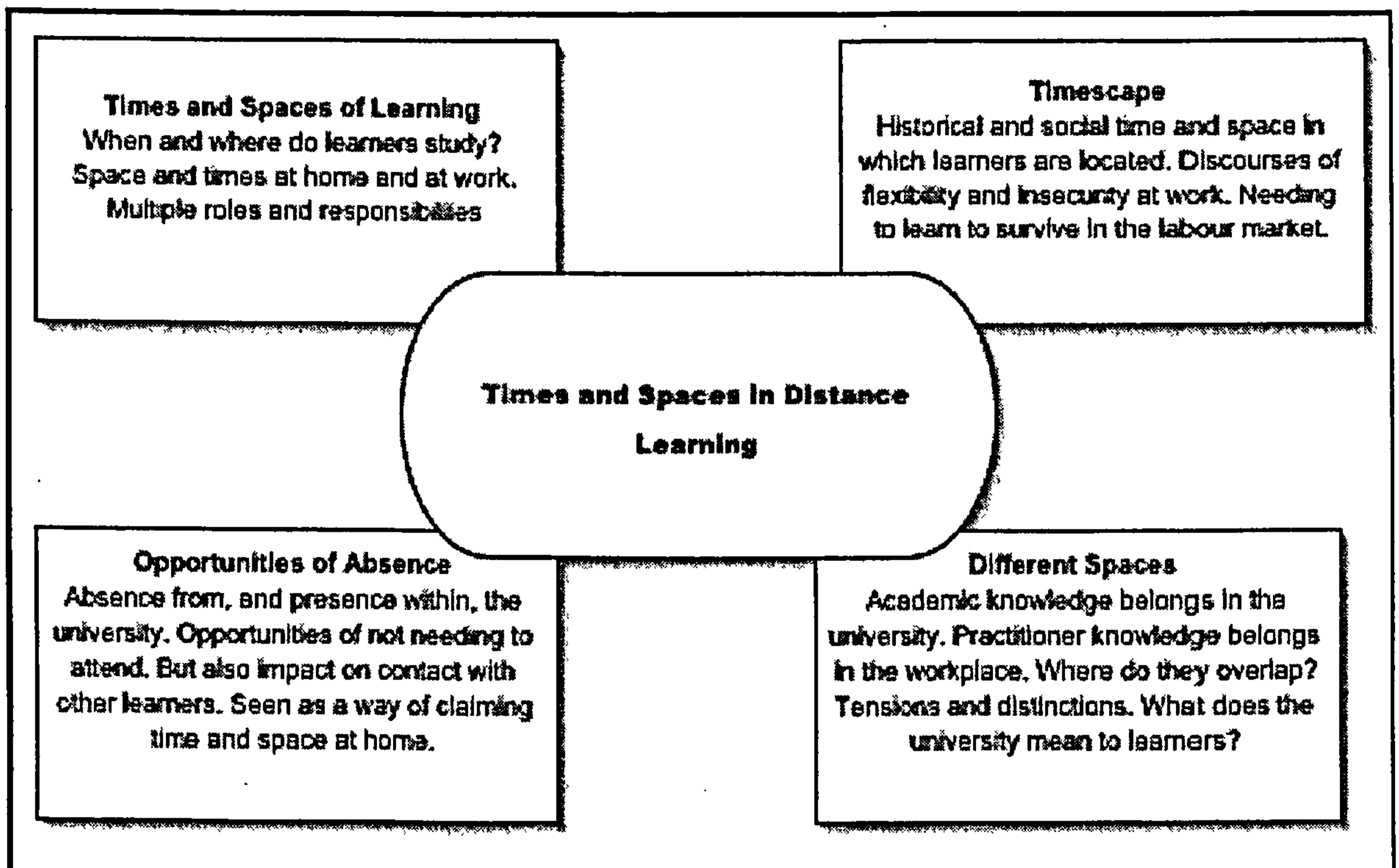
Indeed, as Weedon (1997: 76) notes, the range of discourses available at any one time '...ensures that interest groups put a great deal of energy, time and money into promoting certain views of the world'. For example, by stating what is and is not acceptable in society, whether in terms of expression, beliefs or actions, discourses act to identify individuals as part of a particular group, or as having a particular role in society (Gee, 1990). In this way, certain individuals and ways of knowing, being and doing are seen as the "norm", while those not fitting this discourse are seen as "other". As such, discourses are necessarily power-laden, representing certain values, beliefs and political interests over others (Weedon, 1997).

Moreover, part of the power and pervasiveness of this knowledge about the social world is that it is seen as "common sense" knowledge (Weedon, 1997), concealing the power relations involved in its production. Indeed, part of this pervasiveness is that when we take up certain discourses we are not automatically oppressed by them but might gain a sense of achievement and pleasure, meaning that discourses can become seductive. For example, ideas of flexibility at work will be explored in Chapter 3. These may be designed to fulfil the organisation's needs, but we might also enjoy being seen as a good worker who is willing to change with the times. Moreover, we might gain a sense of pleasure and achievement because we feel better able to manage our home and work roles.

Thus, I drew this narrative and discursive approach together in order to explore the key concepts and discourses evident within learners' narratives, highlighting some of the power relations, values and social practices underpinning these. I aimed to explore the ways in which the respondents both take up and resist these themes, such as the above mentioned ideas of flexibility.

In the early stages of the discursive analysis, the key discourses highlighted included: distance; utilitarianism; knowledge and employability; commodification of learning; communication; flexibility; desire and fulfilment; insecurity and risk;

identity enactment; individualism. These discourses were further explored and developed, and eventually grouped underneath the concepts of time and space. In one way or another, time and space provide a link between these different themes or discourses. While a range of discourses were identified, the four diverse aspects of times and spaces shown in the following diagram will be explored in this research.



It is important to note, before moving on to the next chapter in which I explore the literature around times and spaces in distance learning, that these four areas are fairly broad and are not specifically focused on gender, or on asking how women differ from men as distance learners. This brings me back to where this chapter started: to the aims of feminist research. A feminist perspective has informed the questions I asked, how I carried out the research, what I aimed to do through the research, and the issues I aimed to highlight when disseminating my research findings. Since I would recognise gender as central to the organisation of social life, I do not ask if gender is important in the distance learning context (although on reflection I probably started out in this position) or deal only with those specific narratives in which gendered differences were most evident. As Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002) state, it is difficult to separate out gendered relations from other

power relations, and they are not lived in a distinct and separate way from the rest of life. As such, it would seem important to explore the wider context of times and spaces in distance learners' lives and the ways in which gender and other power relations weave through these. Indeed, rather than being a theoretical approach that is exclusive to understanding gendered power relations, in making us sensitive to the gendered power relations that underpin social life, I would argue that feminist perspectives provide us with a useful tool for analysing and, moreover, challenging power relations and inequalities more widely.

Conclusions

This chapter has outlined the research journey involved in this research and sought to locate both the research and myself as the researcher. A number of different aspects of the research process have been explored, including what it is that makes research feminist and what my own aims are in conducting this research, which has been informed by feminist poststructuralist perspectives on gender. I have also tried to highlight the role of time and space within the research process. Thus, as well as the epistemological location of myself as researcher, this chapter has noted some of the geographical locations and virtual spaces over which the research was carried out. It has also explored the usefulness of research carried out over time and in different spaces, highlighting both how a more flexible approach can be important in engaging "time poor" individuals in research, but also the spiralling rather than linear nature of the process. While I did not originally set out to engage with time and space in this research, it has certainly added to the richness of my data and to my reflexive understanding of the research process.

The following chapter now considers how time and space in distance learning are considered in the literature, and how a feminist perspective on time and space might add to our understanding of this area.

Chapter 2

Presentations and Conceptualisations of Time and Space in Distance Learning: a feminist contribution

This chapter reviews the literature around time and space in relation to distance learning. I consider what we already know about this area of research, where some of the gaps are, and how I intend to address these through a feminist perspective. This discussion will be divided into three sections. Section one considers the dominant presentations of time and space in distance learning. I focus on arguments regarding what distance learning is and is not, and the ways in which time and space are presented as barriers, while distance learning, information communication technologies (ICTs) and flexibility are presented as enablers. Importantly, while time and space are presented as decreasingly relevant to experiences and understandings of distance learning, I argue that this treatment of time and space illustrates what is, in fact, their very centrality rather than negligibility in distance learning.

The second section then goes on to outline and engage with some of the more critical readings of space and, to a lesser degree, time in distance learning. I consider some of the research that has highlighted the socially constructed nature of space in distance learning, focusing in particular on the work of Evans (1989, 1994) and highlighting concepts of presence-absence and choreography, and the ways in which other writers have drawn on these. The idea of time-space compression is then considered, focusing in particular on the work of Edwards and Usher (2000). These perspectives can be useful in demonstrating that space remains a key concern in distance learning – as in social life more widely – by highlighting some of the ways in which space and, to a lesser degree, time, are complex and socially constituted rather than straightforward and transparent concepts. Nevertheless, I also note some of the more problematic aspects of these perspectives, and a number of questions that remain. This brings me in section three to outline some of the gaps in the research and how I aim to address these in

my own research. In particular, I note the paucity of readings of time, the paucity of feminist perspectives, and a need to bring together theory and empirical data. Having noted these gaps, I outline the primarily feminist perspectives on time and space that inform this research. In particular, the work of Adam (1990, 1995), Davies (1990) and Massey (1994) is drawn upon to explore why the majority of social research treats time and space as unproblematic concepts. I consider how these writers have argued for recognition of the multiple and power-laden nature of time and space. In order to better illustrate this, I then move on to outline feminist perspectives on the home. These are particularly useful in demonstrating both the multiple nature of time and space, and the gendered power relations underpinning them. While such perspectives focus primarily on gender, I argue that, in seeking to make these power relations visible, they can equally sensitise us to the many times and spaces of social life and the range of power relations underpinning them.

Time and Space Presented as Straightforward Concepts

This section considers two themes in the distance learning literature. Firstly, how the nature of distance learning is defined through ideas of time and space and, secondly, some of the ways in which time and space are presented as barriers to learning while distance learning, particularly that making use of new technologies, and flexibility are presented as enablers. These two areas are particularly useful in highlighting the hierarchies and assumptions that underpin the dominant presentations of time and space. As Adam (2002) declares, the presentation of time and space as common sense facts of life acts to mask power relations, and I hope to begin to illustrate this here.

Distance learning: what it is (not)

There is a significant tension in the literature regarding what distance learning is and is not; namely, between distance education and face-to-face education (Burt, 1997). Here, the idea of physical and spatial separation across time and space is often used to differentiate distance learning from so-called "traditional" forms of education. For example, Perraton (2000: 13 citing Perraton, 1982: 4) defines

distance learning as 'an educational process in which a significant proportion of the teaching is conducted by someone removed in space and/or time from the learner'. Perraton (2000) notes that this definition was adopted by the World Bank and is still widely used to describe distance learning. Other writers have defined distance education in similar terms, focusing on the idea of geographical and physical separation of learners and tutors over space and time when compared with more "traditional" forms of education (e.g. Belanger and Jordon, 2000), and on the use of various technologies to mediate between learner and tutor, providing guidance (Rowntree, 1992) and being able to 'bridge the time and distance factors' (King *et al*, 2000). In a more negative vein, writers such as Simmons compare the 'advantage of distance learning' (Simmons, 2000) to the advantage which comes from cramming more and more students into the limited space of educational institutions, and allowing those lower in the academic hierarchy to teach, while the institution gains a greater income and pays lower salaries. The concepts of time and space underlying these narratives of separation, mediation, presence and access are treated as straightforward and remain unquestioned. Nevertheless, they signal historical and hierarchical times and spaces of education, particularly through the narratives of traditional forms of education as opposed to non-traditional distance learning. By failing to problematise time and space, these concepts remain opaque (Adam, 2002), masking the fact that hierarchies underpin such statements. This positions distance learning and learners as other to the "traditional", on-campus education. These issues will be explored throughout the following chapters and the hierarchical spaces and times of higher education will be explored further in Chapter 6.

Time and space as barriers: distance learning, ICTs and flexibility as enablers

Concepts of space and time are also evident in the ways in which distance learning is marketed by distance learning providers and learning brokers. Again, these remain unquestioned and opaque ideas. In particular, time and space are presented as barriers to education, self-development, enjoyment and access. Indeed, a lack of time is one of the major barriers to learning cited in wider studies

remain unquestioned and opaque ideas. In particular, time and space are presented as barriers to education, self-development, enjoyment and access. Indeed, a lack of time is one of the major barriers to learning cited in wider studies of adult learning (e.g. OECD, 2003). Distance learning, and particularly that which involves information communication technologies (ICTs), is presented as a means of overcoming these barriers. Thus, constraints of time and space, such as a lack of time due to working or parenting or being geographically too far from an institution, are popular motivations for choosing distance learning as opposed to on-campus programmes (Sherry, 1996; McGreal, 1999). As such, time and space are seen as irrelevant to, or at least overcome by, distance learning. For example, the LearnDirect scheme, part of the UK government's flagship University for Industry, includes many internet-based, distance learning options. These are designed to enable learners to study:

Wherever, whenever you like...at home, at work or anywhere you can access the internet. (LearnDirect, 2002)

Indeed, the UK government (1998) places an emphasis on people being able to engage in lifelong learning 'wherever they choose', with distance learning being one means of providing this access. Educational institutions similarly market their distance learning programmes by highlighting the convenience and access that distance education can provide for those with a busy lifestyle who want to increase their knowledge and skills for work. Du Page College (2002) in the USA, for example, writes that distance learning is particularly suitable for those 'limited by time and place', such as carers and parents, and that this independent form of learning 'frees you from the traditional classroom constraints of time and space'.

These narratives of time and space being overcome through distance learning are prominent in the research literature as well. Chung (1990: 66), for example, argues that distance learning 'can break the boundaries of time and space', allowing 'people in different circumstances to enjoy the advantages of education'. Roche (1988: 60) argues that distance learning allows individuals to be 'in charge' of their

described as constraints and barriers to learning, while distance learning enables people to engage in learning by overcoming time and space.

In order to gain access to opportunities for learning and interaction, it is argued that 'knowledge mobility' replaces 'student mobility' (Taylor, 1996: 60). Indeed, "third generation" distance learning that makes use of new technologies and the internet, has been particularly heralded as a means of overcoming such barriers (Nipper, 1989). By providing a greater level of interaction and dialogue, this generation of distance learning is seen as further increasing opportunities for 'distance educators to overcome time and distance to reach students' (Sherry, 1996). Again, time and space are presented in an uncritical way, and are seen as becoming almost irrelevant to experiences of, or access to, education. Thus, Belanger and Jordon (2000: 10) write of the ability to 'teach and learn irrespective of time and place' due to the use of the internet. Naylor (1998: xxiii) asks why learners would attend an institution when their computer gives them instant access from anywhere in the world to 'the information and expertise once held at a school, college or university'. ICT-enabled distance learning is thus seen, more than ever, as being about anyone, anytime, anywhere learning. Indeed, new technologies are argued by some to be the only way forward in higher education, with those who do not follow not only being consigned to the same fate as the 'dinosaurs', but losing 'competitive advantage' (Cookson, 2000: 79). Evident within such statements are the temporal and spatial concepts of (pre)history, progress and reduction of time and space. These assumptions about the use of new technologies in learning have been questioned (e.g. Edwards and Usher, 2000; Selwyn and Gorard, 1999). While web-based learning is not a focus of this study, some of these issues are touched on below when exploring more critical conceptualisations of space and time.

The flexibility of distance learning is a further area of debate in which time and space are vital but mostly unquestioned concepts. This flexibility is portrayed as enabling learners to choose when and where they study. For example, Mills and Tait (1999:3) predict that a convergence between distance and campus-based education will bring positive effects for learners. They argue that an increased

provision of flexible forms of learning will enable learners to 'ride the changes which family and work bring throughout life by switching between full-time and part-time, class-based and home-based study'. Thus, they argue that learners will be better able to cope with changes by switching between different times (full and part) and spaces (classroom and home) of learning. This perspective seems to assume that moving between different times and spaces of learning will not only be facilitated within and by the institution, but will be unhindered by issues such as access or power relations around gender, class, ethnicity, disability and so on. This convergence is already a reality for writers such as Rumpus (1996), who writes that the current growth of multi-mode courses enables learners to study when and where they choose, combining a 'mixture of attendance and off-campus activities'. Indeed, Hodgson *et al* (1987: vii) see enabling "anywhere, anytime" learning as the very purpose of distance learning, stating:

We must provide an educational enterprise that makes learning resources accessible to people at their convenience in terms of time, place and pace through their life span. (Hodgson *et al*, 1987: vii)

As Edwards and Clarke (2002: 154), who focus critically on flexibility more widely, note, the suggestion that '...teaching and learning can be liberated from the constraints of time and place', can be seductive for those keen to support adult learners. Indeed, overcoming barriers to education can only be seen as a positive move. However, while time and space are presented as decreasingly relevant to experiences and understandings of distance learning, this treatment of time and space illustrates what is, in fact, their very centrality. Hierarchies, contradictions and assumptions about time and space are masked, meaning that, on the one hand, distance learning is positioned as inferior to "traditional" on-campus education due to the learners' separation in time and space from the tutor. On the other hand, distance learning is positioned as enabling, and even as superior to on-campus education, since it is seen as overcoming the barriers of time and space: providing flexible, accessible learning available anywhere, anytime and, by inference, to anyone. However, as will be highlighted in the following sections, and particularly section three, time and space are socially constituted: they are subject

to social and power relations, rather than straightforward, natural and fixed facts of life. As such, time and space are not, in and of themselves, barriers; although the power relations underpinning them may create barriers around what time and space we have access to and can claim. Moreover, time and space cannot be overcome, negated or irrelevant: they are central to social life, although they may be differently experienced in different situations and contexts – such as distance learning. I return to this idea of "anytime, anywhere" learning in Chapter 4.

Space as Socially Constituted

As the first section of this chapter illustrated, much research and writing in distance learning treats time and space as straightforward facts, which do not require problematising or theorising. It is perhaps not surprising that time and space have often been read in this way in the distance learning literature, since much social research overlooks the complex nature of space (Edwards and Usher, 2000; Massey, 1994) and of time (Adam, 1995; Davies, 1990).

A small number of authors have highlighted that space and, to a lesser degree, time in relation to distance learning, as more widely, are socially constituted and subject to power relations. I will focus on two key areas of debate. These are dominated by a focus on space and place; therefore, time features relatively little in this section. Firstly, debates around place, space and distance are explored. Secondly, I explore how the concept of time-space compression has been used to make sense of distance learning.

Place, space and distance

Evans' social constructionist work has been particularly influential in terms of highlighting the role and social construction of space in distance learning. Evans argues that place, space, and distance are 'fundamental to human existence and have powerful cultural and historical qualities', and that they are vital to the reproduction and transformation of society (Evans, 1989: 176). Evans (1989) argues that since all interaction is situated in time and space, the meaning of

distance education will be different for different people. Indeed, he maintains that by understanding the 'historical, social and cultural' aspects of space, place and distance, we can come to understand them not just as:

...physical time-space, but also as social constructions which are deeply embedded in contemporary culture and in each individual psyche. (Evans, 1989: 177)

In order to make sense of place, space and distance, he particularly highlights issues around "presence-absence" and "choreography". I will now outline these concepts and examine some of the other work on space and distance learning that has drawn upon Evans' work.

Evans highlights the concept of "presence-absence", drawing on Giddens' argument that theorists must be aware of the '...mutuality of presence and absence in time and space' (Evans, 1989: 178). Evans declares that in Australia distance learners may travel vast distances to their educational institution with 'less concern' than students who live close to the institution. He then applies the idea of presence-absence to the 'distance relations of 'local' and 'remote' distance students' (Evans, 1989: 178). For example, students who register on a distance learning programme, but who live near their institution, will be treated as remote, like other distance learners, despite being in the same "place" as on-campus students:

...we might hypothesise that local (present) students studying at a distance are rendered absent in relation to their institution through the structures, symbols and processes of distance education. For example, they are treated by their institutions, through the posting of materials and assignments etc, as if they were unable to attend the campus. They are clearly 'off-campus' (absent) in relation to 'on-campus' (present) students, even though both types of student are present in the same place. The remote students are, of course, absent, but distance education provides the connections for them to manage their absence in a way that enables them to fulfil their educational aspirations. (Evans, 1989: 178)

In other words, absence and presence are seen not only as about physical attendance, but are linked to the ways in which learners and institutions construct distance and on-campus education. As such, through their spatial relations with the institution, all distance learners are constructed as absent and remote. Here the example is that learning materials are posted to learners who live nearby, in just the same way that a more remote learner's materials would be.

Evans also asserts that absence and presence are vital to relations between learners and institutions in terms of "choreography". Maintaining that the times and spaces in which individuals can move depend on power relations, Evans (1989), focuses on the choreography and social construction by educational institutions of distance learners' time, space and, moreover, their very existences. Evans declares that the distance education institution does this by setting routines and certain procedures through which the learner's absence from the institution is symbolised, but also through which the learner's movements in space and time are organised and regulated.

A particular area in which Evans sees this choreography and absence to be symbolised is in:

...the use of non-dialogic forms of communication, for example, application forms, text course materials and written assignments all of which are distributed by post. The regulation of the 'daily-path' and 'private' time emerges through the study schedules, submission and examination dates and procedures, tutorial etc attendance requirements, durations of readings, tapes, exercises etc. (Evans, 1989: 180).

This is an interesting way to look at aspects such as the organisation over distance of learners' time and space in terms of routines, procedures and relationships.

Edwards and Usher, for example, find this notion useful in:

...reflecting the looser organisation of space-time within ODL [open and distance learning] rather than the more conventional notion of the institutional timetable and implying the lesser degree of control over where and when people undertake their learning. (Edwards and Usher, 2000: 52-53)

However, they also note that certain assumptions are made that need to be taken into account. In particular, they suggest that generalising this conceptualisation might overlook the different ways in which open and distance learning is organised and experienced, since it assumes a particular 'space-time relationship' (Edwards and Usher, 2000: 53) for all, e.g. choreography. Indeed, one of the issues with choreography is that it seems to present a fairly one-way and top-down relationship, with little room for resistance or dynamic relationship between learner and institution (or learner-learner) around the organisation and experience of time and space in distance learning. Choreography seems to mirror Foucault's (1977) reference to a beating drum dictating the physical movements of troops, or a ringing bell organising the daily movement of monastic life. This sense of top-down power relations perhaps reflects Evans' constructionist perspective and his view that each of the '...cultural borders of class, gender, race, language, ethnicity and religion...provides its own structuring properties of place and distance' (Evans, 1989: 176). Nevertheless, Edwards (who draws heavily on Foucault and postmodern perspectives) takes this idea of choreography a step further, again mirroring Foucault's (1977) notion of the "docile body", in which the control of the institution works by encouraging learners to discipline themselves:

...choreographing still suggests a locus of control, one which is largely located in the timetable of outputs – assessments – more than the inputs in the traditional form of class attendance. This places greater responsibility on the adult-as-learner to learn to 'dance' – to be self-disciplined – rather than simply be schooled into the 'steps' – disciplined. (Edwards (1997: 127-128)

The question remains, is there room in this notion for a more dynamic power relation between institution/tutor and learner? There is perhaps more sense of this dynamic relationship when Evans argues that the distance, or space and time, between 'educators and their students' is not simply static or measurable in terms of 'kilometres or miles', but is made up of 'complex and fluid 'distances' in the teacher-learner relationship' (Evans, 1994: 18). In this later work, Evans uses biographical studies of distance learners to make these social distances evident to educators, exploring social and educational background, gender, age, money and

work issues as key social constructions, and as "distances" which impact on learners' engagements with education. Thus, distance becomes not only 'the space between places' (1989: 176) but has a complexity of meanings in social life:

These are not just matters of geography or even time; the social, economic, spiritual, political, experiential and personal dimensions add many interwoven layers to the 'distancing' of the teacher from the student. (Evans, 1994: 18)

Again, rather than time and space being straightforward concepts, how learners understand distance learning and the ways in which the learner-tutor relationship is organised, is subject to space and time: meaning different things to different people in different places, and being subject to social constructions. Indeed, Grace (1994), who takes a feminist perspective on distance learning, draws on these ideas of presence and absence to argue that distance learning courses are framed within the masculinist world of higher education. She argues that higher education is a world in which women are excluded and isolated. Moreover, Grace (1994: 13) asserts that, through their absence, distance learning creates an added 'invisibility' for women and may only serve to compound this problem. In other words, she suggests that women distance learners are even more likely to be excluded and isolated, in terms of visibility, access, location and experience, than on-campus women learners. However, as Quinn (2003) notes, women can no longer be seen as excluded from, and invisible within, higher education. As such it is perhaps less helpful now to focus on women as the minority within higher education, although it remains important to consider what their absence and presence might mean. Indeed, although not the central focus of the research, von Prümmer (2000) touches upon issues of time and space in distance learning when exploring the learning environment of women distance learners. She notes that they are often assumed to be housebound carers of young children, who therefore have plenty of spare time to study. Not only does this assume that the majority of women distance learners are full-time carers and housewives which, von Prümmer notes, is less and less the case, but this misrepresents the time and energy that care work takes. von Prümmer (2000: 70) goes on to assert that women have particular difficulty in claiming time and space in the home, while men are more likely to have the power

and resources needed to '...establish their own and undisputed space'. These important issues will be considered further in the next section. Grace and von Prümmer's work is useful in beginning to raise issues of time, space and gendered power relations. Nevertheless, since time and space were not a central focus of these studies, inevitably there is still a need for further research, and much remains to be said about these issues.

Further developing Edwards' (1997) work, touched upon above, Edwards and Usher (2000) draw on Evan's notion of presence-absence to examine issues of discipline in open and distance learning (ODL). They note that university students are traditionally disciplined and regulated through the practices of 'observation, normalisation and examination' (Edwards and Usher, 2000: 60). However, these practices assume physical presence in an institution, 'at particular times in specific places' (2000: 57). Since this presence can be seen as removed in open and distance learning, they note that it might be understandable to suggest that a learner is '...therefore 'freer', has more autonomy and is less subject to discipline' (2000: 57). They argue that techniques of discipline are not removed simply because distance learners are absent from the institution, however, but are reconfigured and take on new forms. Edwards and Usher (2000: 60) declare that these techniques have shifted towards confessional practices of 'reflection and self-surveillance'. Thus, while distance learning may in some senses be seen as more open, this does not mean the institution does not have control over the system and the learners. Indeed, they assert that while there is a possibility for knowledge to 'become multiple with different subjects and subjectivities', the power relations underlying such practices and processes may become 'ever more subtle as well as extensive' (2000: 63). Seeming to mirror the idea of choreography in many ways, Edwards and Usher (2000: 60) state that, instead of being 'objectified...through the direct gaze of teachers', it is through the 'absence-presence of course materials and technologically mediated tutoring' that these disciplinary practices and control are objectified. As such, it is argued that we need to question the nature of ODL practices and ICTs which:

...extend disciplinary practices beyond the walls of the university and the physical presence of the lecturer. Our argument is that one does not have to be enclosed within an educational institution to be disciplined. Thus extending access and opportunity through new forms of teaching and learning may also signify a more extensive achievement of an active, productive and governable positioning of subjects where learners may literally and metaphorically be 'kept in their place' (Edwards and Usher, 2000: 56).

Nevertheless, I would argue (and am sure these authors would agree) that this practice of power by the university was already extensive and successful in marginalising women and those positioned as other to the traditional young, white, middle-class, male higher education student, long before the growth of distance learning. This will be explored further in Chapter 6.

While Evans' concept of presence-absence is interesting, it is worth noting Massey's critique, from the wider feminist literature, of Giddens' theory of presence-absence. Fundamental to Giddens' notion is the argument that "modernity" has brought about a '...separation of space from place' (Massey, 1994: 6). Giddens (1990: 18) contends that space and place coincided in "premodern" societies, since life was characterised by presence and 'localised activity'. In "modernity", however, he argues that space and place are torn apart, thus '...fostering relations between 'absent' others': people who are not engaged in a 'face-to-face interaction' (1990: 18). Thus, Giddens (1990: 18) declares that 'distant' social relations and 'social influences' now impact heavily upon the nature of 'locales'. As Massey (1994: 14) asserts, however, this distinction between presence and absence seems too fixed, potentially suggesting a 'place identity' and 'metaphysics of presence', and thereby placing boundaries around particular spaces and identities. This would suggest that the uniqueness of a place is bounded within one space, rather than contingent and subject to interrelations of space-time, and social and power relations. Namely, for there to be such a link, there would have to be specific histories that were internal to certain places (e.g. untouched by what happened outside), and there would have to be identities that were timeless: meaning that spaces, times and identities were static and fixed (Massey, 1994). Instead, Massey (1994: 6) maintains that any idea of place-identity is not "natural", but is constituted and underpinned by

struggle and power relations. As such, presence does not guarantee any greater understanding or truer experience:

...'presence-availability' does not somehow do away with issues of representation and interpretation. (Massey, 1994: 164).

Thus, it would seem important to consider the assumptions underpinning ideas of absence and presence, and the different meanings and values that absence and presence might have. As indicated, I return to these issues in Chapter 5.

Time-space compression

Along with ideas of choreography and absence-presence, Edwards and Usher (2000) use the idea of space-time compression as a way of looking at distance learning. Indeed, the term time-space compression is regularly cited in descriptions of the nature and growth of distance learning, although it is primarily mentioned in passing with little, if any, critique. After outlining this concept, which particularly draws on the work of Harvey (1989), I consider how Edwards and Usher have made use of this idea in their understanding of open and distance learning.

Time-space compression, Harvey (1989) argues, is a process that has taken place several times in (European) history. This began with a '...new sense of space and time' in the Renaissance (Harvey, 1989: 247), moving through the Enlightenment project, to Modernity and Fordism, and now to Postmodernity and the 'flexible accumulation' that is seen as characteristic of the current form of capitalism (1989: 284). He argues that the idea of compression describes the radical changes in '...the objective qualities of space and time' and the resulting need to change 'how we represent the world to ourselves' (1989: 240). Examples given include the speeding up of life, the 'collapse...[of] spatial barriers' due to increasingly rapid communications and travel, and the '...shorten[ing of] time horizons...to the point where the present is all there is' (Harvey, 1989: 240). Harvey declares that this radical change in time and space is turning the world into a kind of 'global village' (1989: 240). Therefore, Harvey (1989: 240 original emphasis) maintains, we 'have to learn to cope with an over-whelming sense of *compression* of our spatial and

temporal worlds'. If time and space are being compressed into each other, and the now is paramount, what does this mean for distance learning?

Edwards and Usher (2000) use what they call space-time compression as a means of describing and understanding the current spatial (and temporal) relations in which they argue distance learning has both come about, but to which it has also contributed. They maintain that space-time compression and new technologies (often seen as interlinked) have been vital to the development of open and distance learning and to this '...ideal of an education available 'anytime' and 'anywhere'' (2000: 52). By no longer requiring the physical, synchronous presence of learner and teacher within a specified space or time, they assert that distance learning has been both a factor in, and a response to, globalisation and geographical dispersal. Thus, for example, within distance learning the learner and teacher are 'potentially...available on a global scale to each other' (Edwards and Usher, 2000: 52). Likewise, Jarvis (1997) argues that the idea of time-space compression is particularly pertinent to distance education since 'it has always involved a separation between teachers and learners'. Jarvis (1997: 112) declares that, before distance education, 'teaching and learning always took place in the same space and at the same time'. However, this view of the history of education raises ideas of fixed times and spaces and questions of presence and absence similar to those discussed above. For example, there are early recorded examples of education, such as the letters between Plato and Dionysius and between the Elder and Younger Pliny, that have been likened to distance or correspondence education (UNESCO, 1967: 2). Indeed, as Edwards and Usher (2000) note, this global tutor-learner availability is rarely the case in reality (also see Mason, 2000). Furthermore, Edwards and Usher note an inherent contradiction in the way that open and distance learning act as 'key dispersal agents' (Evans and Nation, 1992: 10) within the shift towards 'a post-industrial period' (Edwards and Usher, 2000: 52). The dispersal of education, learners and tutors might be seen as going beyond a specific location, enabling communication 'across great physical distances' (2000: 52): compressing space and time but also being enabled by this compression. However, it can also be about staying still or being fixed in one place.

Thus, the learner remains in their place physically and geographically while engaging in global education. While Edwards and Usher seem to leave this implicit, rather than stating it, being kept in one's place is also about power relations. Indeed, it is important to highlight the different social, cultural, historical and power relations implicit in concepts such as time-space compression. As noted, this concept is often mentioned in passing in the distance learning literature, cited as a statement about nature of the postmodern world in which we live. This seems, again, to view time and space as straightforward, natural and neutral facts of life, which do not need to be critiqued. It is important, however, to ask what kind of time is being compressed here? And whose space? For example, the "'global village' of telecommunications" (Harvey, 1989: 240), within which distance learning is often seen as located, is certainly not open to all (Nowotny, 1994).

Importantly, as Massey (1994) highlights in her feminist reading of this concept, while Harvey's conception of time-space compression is based upon an historical materialist perspective that focuses on relations of class, other power relations such as gender and ethnicity equally impact on our experiences and understandings of these changes in society. This is the 'power geometry of time-space compression' (Massey, 1994: 149): not only are different groups and individuals positioned in different ways in relation 'to these flows and interconnections...[but] some people are more in charge of it than others'. Indeed, not only are feminist perspectives on time and space ignored in Harvey's development of this concept but women and those positioned as "other" feature less than fleetingly in his argument:

Nor is it that there should be a few paragraphs here and there on 'women, ethnic minorities, etc'. It is that the dominant view is assumed to be the universal, and that view is white, male, heterosexual, western. (Massey, 1994: 225)

As such, while this might be a useful way of theorising the social world, it is important to be attendant to the power relations underpinning such universal conceptions of time and space, and the ways in which they might limit the questions we ask. For example, while the fragmented and shifting nature of life in

the postmodern has been seen by some as disorienting and troubling, such experiences have been explored and even celebrated by those 'on the margins' of that old, settled (and anyway mythologized?) coherence' (Massey, 1994: 123). Indeed, the idea of working at both the centre and the margins, and of challenging fixed and hegemonic ideas, has been central to much feminist work. Rose (1993) notes the "paradoxical space" inherent in much feminist work which seeks to avoid fixity, certainty and confinement at either the centre or the margins. While this is a paradoxical space in some ways, Rose notes that the tensions involved create a productive space for feminists.

The research explored in this section has begun to highlight some of the ways in which space in distance learning is socially constituted. Nevertheless, as well as aiming to add to these debates around space and time in distance learning, my own research seeks to address a number of important gaps in the literature. I have noted both the usefulness and some of the problematic aspects of these previous more critical readings of space. As indicated, I will return to the ideas of presence-absence and the power relations linked to the times and spaces of the university in subsequent chapters. I will now outline some of the other key gaps that remain in this literature, before moving on to further outline the feminist conceptualisations of time and space on which this study will draw, with the aim of expanding and furthering our understandings of time and space in distance learning.

Reading Time and Space

There are a number of important gaps within the current more critical research in this area. The research examined in section two focuses primarily on space, with very little consideration of time. This is clearly an important gap in the literature. Edwards and Usher (2000) assert that there has been a bias towards time and critical explorations of time in the educational literature. However, I found that time appears, both in the general educational literature (see Adam, 1990, 1995) and the distance learning literature, in a primarily straightforward and unproblematic way. Therefore, it seems that there still remains a need to consider time in distance learning as a complex and socially constituted concept. However,

rather than focusing purely on time as a means of filling the gap in terms of temporal analyses of distance learning, this study aims to bring these two important concepts together, as will be explored further below.

Massey (1994) argues that the focus on space in social research has often been a male-dominated and masculinist domain, while Adam (2002) argues that the emphasis on space over time has often been a masculinist focus. Indeed, another key gap in the literature is the paucity of feminist perspectives. This is not surprising since I have found this to be the case more widely in the distance learning literature. As indicated, Grace's (1994) feminist work draws upon Evans' concept of presence-absence to consider how women distance learners, by their absence, are even more isolated than on-campus women learners, and von Prümmer (2000) draws briefly on ideas of time and space when exploring women distance learners' learning environment. Nevertheless, time and space were not a central focus of these studies and, as noted above, there is plenty of scope for further work in this area. For example, we need to question the idea of women's absence from higher education, and the idea that presence somehow guarantees a more positive or authentic experience or identity. These two studies were carried out in the 1980s/early 1990s, however, over the last two decades the shape and student body of higher education has changed considerably (Quinn, 2003). Indeed, women have tended to make up the majority of distance learning students (von Prümmer, 2000). Another gap in the research which I aim to fill is that feminist perspectives on distance learning have tended to focus on women's specific experiences, arguing, for example, that distance learning does not suit women's 'specific learning styles' (e.g. Kirkup and von Prümmer, 1990). As noted in Chapter 1, in order to consider the complexity and fluidity of gender relations, I feel that it is important to consider the multiple ways in which experiences of distance learning – and social life more widely – are gendered. To do so, I explore the narratives of both women and men distance learners and seek to highlight both areas of difference and areas of commonality.

A further key gap in the current literature seems to be bringing together not only time and space, but also the empirical and theoretical. While Evans' biographical study of distance learners (1994) seeks to demonstrate the heterogeneous nature of distance learners and the multiple nature of "distances" in their biographies, on his own admission theory was 'mostly confined to the endnotes' (1994: 18) and to papers such as his (1989) article, which did not make use of empirical data. For this reason, we do not see how the theories of presence-absence and choreography explain, or are challenged by, the learners' experiences. Drawing on a feminist poststructuralist position, as outlined in Chapter 1, I not only treat the narratives as stories of the self rather than "truths" about distance learners, but I see my journey from initial analysis, through further theorisation, to writing up as intricately linked, rather than as separable when presenting the "stories" of my interviewees. Thus, in this study I seek to theorise my exploration of time and space in distance learners' narratives, aiming to both use theory to make sense of learners' stories, but also to challenge the theory. For example, do ideas of presence-absence fit with learners' stories and the ways in which they understand time and space? Can we develop this concept, or look at it differently? In what ways are feminist theories of time and space useful, but also can they be developed further through this research?

Von Prümmer's (2000) study brought together both empirical data and feminist theory. As indicated, however, time and space were not a central focus of her study and the data was drawn from a large-scale questionnaire. While useful, this data will have limitations, since it is necessarily a snapshot of one point in time, and does not allow for time and change in learners' perspectives and for a more in-depth consideration of learners' stories about their experiences. Thus, I feel that as well as attending to issues of change over time and space, my own research, which has gathered a range of data and in-depth narratives, can add many new perspectives to what we already know in this area.

This brings me to outline some of the multiple conceptions of time and space on which my own study draws. I use these conceptions in order to develop a feminist framework for reading time and space. Not all of the work that I draw on is

specifically feminist. For example, Adam (2002) writes about the usefulness of feminist perspectives, but does not claim a feminist position. Nevertheless, her work is particularly useful in highlighting the multiple nature of time, and some of the social and power relations underpinning these. I will first discuss the dominance in social research of time as industrial "clock" time, and space as a static background to social life, and the reasons for the general lack of critique of time and space. This leads to a consideration of feminist readings of time and space in relation to one important area of social life: the home. This is an area which is particularly useful in demonstrating some of these multiple and power-laden times and spaces.

A feminist framework for reading time and space: becoming time and space literate

I will now consider the dominant ways in which time and space have featured in social research – and daily life – and why these often remain unquestioned. Due to the unavoidable focus on critical readings of space in the previous sections, where I drew on the feminist work of Massey (1994) to draw out some of the issues, more emphasis is given in this section to a critical reading of time. Adam (2002) writes about developing a time-literate feminist approach through which to re-vision time-blind concepts such as globalization. Here I also draw on conceptualisations of space in order to develop a time and space literacy. Nevertheless, this literacy (like the time literacy of Adam) is not one of 'absolute knowing...what it 'really' means' (Hughes, 2002b: 3-4). Rather, as Hughes (2002b: 3) notes, this 'conceptual literacy is no more, and no less, than an act of sensitization to the political implications of contestation over the diversity of conceptual meanings'.

Adam (1990, 1995, 1998) and Davies (1990) illustrate that the primary conceptualisation of time in social research is as "clock time" or industrial time. Organized around the precise and linear measurements of the clock, this time is divided up into identical sequences or blocks: divisible by seconds, minutes, hours, days, months and years. It is perceived as an objective, quantifiable, commonly understood, universal resource, in which contextual aspects such as gender are irrelevant (Davies, 1990). This form of time is argued to have dominated Western

social consciousness since the 18th century, being connected not only with the development of modernity, but also with the shift towards the capitalist organisation of work and production (Davies, 1990). Nevertheless, the development of the mechanical clock and a growing consciousness of the contrast between clock time and natural time (e.g. diurnal or seasonal patterns) can be dated back to the 14th century (Thompson, 1991). However, functionalist Western perspectives in which time is constituted as 'a smooth flowing continuum in which everything proceeds at an equal rate, out of a future, through a present, into a past' (Whorf 1956: 7), overlook the power relations involved in the control and definition of time. As such, the majority of analyses continue to frame time as a "parameter" for social life and as 'a spatial quantity by which time is measured as distance [focusing on]...comparisons of before-and-after states' (Adam, 1995: 75). Indeed, it is notable that while ideas of change and development are central to much educational and social science research (e.g. experiential learning, learning cycles), "life time" (Merriam *et al*, 2001), or the time of clocks, calendars and chronological age, remains dominant (Adam, 1995). However, Davies (1990) questions the relevance of this "clock time" to women's lives, if not to many men's lives, particularly in relation to the more fragmented nature of time involved in caring and reproduction. Indeed, Adam calls for recognition of the complexity of times, including both social and natural times, and what she refers to as "invisible time" (1995: 42). That is, time as 'lived, experienced, generated, known, reckoned, allocated, controlled and used as an abstract exchange value' (1995: 8). Adam thus encourages us to look at the multiple, non-hierarchical layers of time and temporality within social relations.

The treatment of time as unproblematic within much social research and daily life is largely due to its very embeddedness in social life and, moreover, to the certainties provided by the boundaries of the lifecycle. Time is intricately interwoven into our daily communication. As the 'most widely used noun in the English language' (Adam, 1995: 19), we constantly draw on notions of time and temporality in our everyday language and self-expression (Adam, 1990, 1995; Hughes, 2002b). While we draw constantly on notions of time and space in our everyday language without

appreciating their complex and multiple nature, the ways in which we can express our actions, locations and states of being do suggest their complexity. In the majority of languages, actions or states of being can be expressed in a range of tenses. In English, Spanish, French and Italian, for example, our actions and being can be expressed as past, present, future, conditional and subjunctive (among others). Thus, if we think about time and space/location: I was there, I am here, I will be there, I would/might be there, that/if I were there. This suggests that time and space are historical and of the now, but that they can also be planned, hypothetical and imaginary.

Nevertheless, our ties to industrial, clock time are so strong that we often overlook, and even at times cannot enjoy or mentally cope with, time that is not structured in this way. For example, studies of unemployment highlight the difficulties that people, and men in particular, seem to face when the timetables and processes of paid employment no longer structure their life (Davies, 1990). Rather than accepting time as a progressive and measurable flow, however, our lives are not only contextualised within "historical time" and the cultural expectations that exist in certain periods (Merriam *et al*, 2001), but the past continues to exist in the present (Adam, 1995; Hughes, 2002b). Drawing on a phenomenological perspective, Adam (1995: 78-79) highlights the simultaneous 'importance of the past and future at any one present moment'. Moreover, she notes the ability for the past to be 'continuously re-created and reformulated...from the standpoint of the emergent present' (1995: 79). This is in opposition to the view that time is linear, fixed and "out there" to be captured by researchers. Thus, as Adam asserts, when we research time, our tendency to focus on time as something singular, as involving a clear before and after state, and being organised into timetables and deadlines, means that we overlook the multiplicity of times in everyday life and the interplay between them.

Similarly, while space is everywhere and in everything we do, in social research it is often treated as unproblematic, presented primarily as a static and depoliticised background to social life (Massey, 1994). As with time, space is seen as universal,

objective and, therefore, not subject to contextual aspects such as class, gender, race and sexuality (Massey, 1994; Rose, 1993). However, Rose (1993) and Blunt and Rose (1994) note the white, male, middle class perspective upon which this universal view of space rests. Moreover, Massey (1994) asserts that not only is space dynamic; multiple and in process, but that it is integral to social relations through spatial organisation, rather than being merely a result of such relations. In other words, space is both constitutive of and constituted by social relations; it is not merely a product of social life or a blank canvas on which history is played out. However, Massey (1994: 3) argues that the point of focusing on space is not to try to separate out space, or to consider it as 'some absolute independent dimension', but to recognize that 'the spatial is social relations 'stretched out''. Massey thus seeks to highlight the power geometry of spatial relations and the differing ways in which they operate at different levels and across different groups. For example, Massey (1994: 158) notes the 'spatial reach' of multinational corporations, and 'the stretching out of different kinds of social relationships [and power relations] over space': such relations are not simply exported or transferred, but take 'on a new spatial form' within different contexts. Likewise, she explores issues such as the impact of regional differences on social perceptions of women's place in society and their role in the workforce, with quite different views being evident in different locations.

Perhaps reflecting the immensity of the concepts of time and space, and the difficulties of working with them, there are no "step-by-step" models for how to capture or read the multiple times and spaces expressed in social life. Indeed, I have looked at time and space separately here, reflecting the way in which they appear in the majority of the research. Although Davies (1990), for example, notes the links that some have made between time and space, and Massey (1994) notes that space and time are intricately linked, there is a tendency to focus on one, while mentioning the importance of the other. As two complex and multiple concepts, it does appear to be quite difficult to work with the multiple readings of one of these concepts, let alone the two together. Indeed, there are some tensions between these two concepts. Massey suggests that space and time have been radically polarised,

with space defined 'by the absence of temporality' (Massey, 1994: 6). She argues that while time is seen as something dynamic, moving and changing, space has been seen as 'simply the absence of these things', privileging time over space:

...time is the nodal point, the privileged signifier...space is defined by absence, by lack...With time are aligned History, Progress, Civilization, Science, Politics and Reason, portentous things with gravitas and capital letters. With space on the other hand are aligned the other poles of these concepts: stasis, ('simple') reproduction, nostalgia, emotion, aesthetics, the body. (Massey, 1994: 256-257)

Indeed, she illustrates the ways in which this dualism can be mapped on to the dualisms of female and male, with space, stasis, emotion and disorder being 'coded female' (1994: 258), while reason, order and time have been coded male. Nevertheless, Massey rejects this reading of space and time, as she rejects the female-male dichotomy, asserting that space-time are inextricably linked, multiple and simultaneously vital to social and power relations.

One useful idea that starts to bring together concepts of time and space is Adam's "timescape", although her primary focus remains on time. Researching environmental issues and time, Adam (1998) conceptualises the complexity and multiplicity in social life as a "timescape". She explains that the landscape is an historical record of activity, including both visible patterns of 'life and dwelling' (1998: 54), but also aspects which we cannot see and traces of that which has occurred before. In this way, the concept of landscape recognises both the visible and invisible, and is subject to the interpretation of each individual. Adam (1998) maintains that this openness to simultaneity, multiplicity and unseen forces can be extended to the different times in social life, acknowledging the links between time, space and matter and the need for an attention to context and to the role of the researcher. This idea of timescape is useful, and will be particularly drawn upon in Chapter 3. However, Adam does not go into much detail about this concept and, like the other research that informs my own framework, it does not provide a theoretical model that can be applied directly to research. Rather than having a specific model to follow, however, it is the understanding of multiple times and spaces and the underpinning power relations that are particularly important to this

study. In order to further demonstrate this multiplicity and the power relations underpinning time and space, I now focus on feminist readings of time and space in the home. While I note that there are some problems with the ways in which space and time are conceptualised in what often seem to be dichotomous (seemingly male-female) positions, as indicated, it is this recognition of multiplicity and power relations that I aim to draw on in my own work, whilst aiming to try to go beyond female-male dualisms and dichotomous positions of women's and men's time and space.

Feminist readings of time, space and the home

Power relations in the so-called private and public spheres have been a key focus of feminist theory and politics (Rose, 1993; Blunt and Rose, 1994), with a particular focus on the personal, and on everyday life in the home (Smith, 1988). As well as the institutions of the university and the workplace, the idea of the home is a key focus of my own study. Different distance learning programmes are organised in different ways. In the case on which my research focuses, however, studying is undertaken primarily at a distance from the university and, for many, this means studying at home.

I will now outline the ways in which firstly time and then space have been conceptualised in relation to the home. I do this by asking some of the questions raised by a multiple conception of time and space and an attention to the power relations underpinning them, asking: what, whose, where and how? This division between time and space reflects the way in which these are generally treated in the literature.

In terms of time and the home, distinctions are made in the feminist literature between two major forms of time, often seeming to map on to dichotomous male-public and female-private positionings. The primary form of time associated with the home is "natural", female, private time devoted to reproduction and caring. This stands in contrast to the male, public time, which is devoted to production. These have been summarised in the following table and will be discussed below.

Forms of time in relation to the home	Group 1: female, embodied, reproductive time	Group 2: male, external, productive time
What is it?	Biological, natural time	Social, clock time
Who does it belong to?	Female, natural time; a necessity for society but also for industry and the capitalist system. However, this time does not belong to women. Within the private sphere, women's time is experienced as "relational", as related to the needs of others rather than the self (Knights and Odih, 1995), being constantly given over to the care of others (Davies, 1990), with men claiming "their women's" time as their own (Deem, 1986), leaving them "time poor" (Edwards, 1993), with little time for themselves or for leisure (Deem, 1986).	Male, industrial time (Davies, 1990); a commodity to be traded on the market.
Where does it belong?	Seen as 'domestic time' and as belonging within the private, female sphere (Sullivan and Lewis, 2001: 140).	Belonging within the male, public sphere (Adam, 1990, 1995; Hughes, 2002b).
How is it (perceived to be) organised?	'[C]yclical, reproductive' time (Hughes, 2002b: 133), and natural, biological time which is marked by internal and external rhythms such as seasons, night and day, weather, physical ageing and so on (Adam, 1990, 1995). Time given over to caring cannot be organised in the same way as industrial time, since it involves being responsive to changing needs and demands and unexpected events (Davies, 1990).	Linear, clock time, defined by tasks, deadlines and schedules (Adam, 1990, 1995; Davies, 1990; Edwards, 1993); 'progressive, standardised and instrumental time' (McNay 2000 cited in Hughes, 2002b: 133).
How is it experienced?	Tasks performed within this form of time are experienced in simultaneity, or 'polychronic time' (Sullivan and Lewis, 2001 citing Hall, 1983: 139): multi-tasking. It is marked by social narratives such as women's "biological clock" and experienced as the natural ageing process, or as health, illness and the rhythms of our bodies. Domestic and caring roles within the home are seen and experienced as outside of the task or schedule-based organisation of time (Davies, 1990). Subjective and qualitative	In a sequential way, with one task following the other, or 'monochronic time' (Sullivan and Lewis, 2001 citing Hall, 1983: 139). Objective and quantitative

The second form of time is clearly related to what is seen as the "norm"; in other words, the male social world, in which work and productivity are central to the organisation of social life. This is very much a quantifiable understanding of time, which can be objectively measured and organised into uniform sequences and blocks of time dedicated to certain tasks (Davies, 1990: 43). The first form of time clearly relates to perceptions of the private, female world, with caring and reproduction being central, as well as the natural processes of the lifecycle. This is recognised as a more biological and natural form of time preceding the advent of clocks and mechanisation. Adam (1995) notes that industrial processes such as

shift working or office hours mean that we lose touch with this form of time, often having an impact on our health and sense of wellbeing. This is a much more subjective, qualitative understanding of time, with personal, embodied and material experiences of the home, caring and the lifecycle being central. However, these conceptions of female and male time create a dualism rather than a complexity of experiences and conceptions of time (Hughes, 2002b). Hughes (2002b) notes that there are relatively few feminist studies that explore this complexity. She argues that this dualistic approach overlooks 'the variable effects of detraditionalization and globalization upon women's lives' (McNay, 2000: 111 cited in Hughes, 2002b: 133). This division of male and female time does seem to work along the lines of the traditional male breadwinner and female caregiver model. Indeed, if we consider historical time in relation to the home, feminist work shows how the social ideologies, discourses and narratives about what constitutes a home, and social roles within it, have changed over time. This has led to different expectations and positionings of women (Sharpe, 1994) and, although to a lesser degree, men. Thus, in the historical time that provides the context for this study, it is common for women to have paid employment and a greater role in the so-called public sphere, while there is a growing acceptance (if not practice) of men's role in the caring and domestic sphere. So what kinds of time are experienced when multiple public and private sphere roles are combined?

Edwards' (1993) research with mature women returning to higher education highlights a number of forms of time involved in the combination of multiple roles of learner, carer and, to a lesser extent, worker. Edwards (1993) sought to explore the connection or separation that women made between their public and private lives in relation to their studies and their family life. Work life was not a major focus of the study, although some of the women worked part-time. Edwards found that the women talked about two kinds of time: physical and mental time. She relates physical time to the "doing" or performing of different tasks, and mental time to the time that different roles took up in the women's minds, or that they felt the roles should take up. For example, when studying or attending lectures, the women's caring and domestic roles dominated their thoughts, and vice versa.

Edwards argues that this mental time was strongly related to the women's personal beliefs about what it means to be a mother, partner or student, and to the emotional connection that they made between the giving of time and the demonstration of care for others.

Turning to the multiple conceptions of space in relation to the home, these have been identified in two key ways. As outlined in the following table, rather than a male-female dichotomy, there is a tension between the idea of the home as, on the one hand, a natural and, on the other hand, a problematic space for women. Notably in both cases, the home is seen as a space for providing for the needs of men and children.

Forms of space	Group 1	Group 2
What is it?	A natural space for women	A problematic space for women and a safe space for men
Who does it belong to?	It is seen as a woman's place (Sharpe, 1994), for carers, mothers, reproducers (Davidoff and Hall, 1987). Seen as a 'natural extension of being a woman' (Sharpe, 1994: 45), particularly for white, middle- and upper-class women (Sharpe, 1994; Laurie <i>et al</i> , 1999). It serves the needs of society and industry.	Men, children and servicing society and industry
Where does it belong?	Private, female sphere	Private, female sphere
How is it (perceived to be) organised?	The home as space is both a representation of women's 'feminine integrity' and success (Laurie <i>et al</i> , 1999) in what is seen as a 'wife's job' (Kieman, 1992). The home is implicitly seen as the "proper" location for "proper" childcare, as opposed to the idea of the maternal deprivation than can occur when women "go out" to work and put their children in childcare (Sharpe, 1994). The home is seen in masculinist, humanistic geography, to exemplify the emotional attachments that we make with specific places – women, seen as mothers, come to symbolise the maternal, nurturing and biological place of home (Rose, 1993). Rose (1993) notes that the home has been exemplified in masculinist humanistic geography as the ultimate place to which we connect strong emotions and a sense of belonging, being particularly tied to ideas of nurturance, care and biology and treated as an unproblematic social space. The home is thus presented as an ideal (male) space. Socialist	It is the realm of 'invisible labour' (Sharpe, 1994: 46; also Rose, 1993). Some Marxist and socialist feminists have seen the home as central to the oppression of women, being part of the capitalist organisation of social life (e.g. Barrett, 1980; Firestone, 1970) Women and men are 'positioned and controlled at work through discourses about the woman-man, home-work relationship', regardless of whether these 'have a relationship with the reality of their lives' (Halford and Leonard, 2001:79). While the space of the home is often portrayed as a space of leisure, relaxation and comfort for men and children, it is often a workplace for women (Deem, 1986). While men who work outside of the home seem able to make a clear division between the workplace as work and the home as leisure, women often experience the home as both leisure and work simultaneously (e.g. ironing in front of the television) ; although women who worked outside the home did seem more able to make this distinction (Deem, 1986).

	<p>feminist analyses have argued heavily against this perception of the home as haven, seeing the home, the family and even the community as central to women's oppression and exploitation within patriarchal capitalist society (Rose, 1993). Indeed, Rose (1993: 57) goes on to explore the 'fantasized maternal Woman' underpinning masculinist notions of place as feminine, emotional, relational and domestic. In effect, the multiple meanings and experiences of being a woman are superseded by an image of woman as mother, with women coming to represent a sense of belonging, home and place for others (Rose, 1993).</p>	
<p>How is it experienced?</p>	<p>Along with caring for children, the home is presented as a more fulfilling space for women than the workplace.</p>	<p>Constituting one of a number of "greedy institutions" for women (Edwards, 1993), but a sanctuary or haven for men coming home from the alienating and greedy workplace (Rose, 1993). Location of the "second shift", or "double burden" for women that work both inside and outside of the home. Hard for women to have a sense of leisure time in the space of the home, since it is a workplace. Unlike many men, many women cannot go out to the workplace to escape from the household chores (Deem, 1986). The space of the home is not idyllic, as it has been portrayed in some cases (Deem, 1986).</p>

As with time, there is a dichotomy and dualism in this distinction between the home as natural and as problematic, potentially overlooking not only transformations in gender relations, but different women's experiences of the home and of the family. The 'spatial politics of difference' (Blunt and Rose, 1994: 1) have been important to feminist theory and action. However, Rose (1993) and Blunt and Rose (1994) note that feminist debates around public and private space, the latter being typified by the home, draw on a white, middle-class, Western view of the social world. Indeed, feminist work in this area has highlighted the historical importance of the distinction between the private and public realms to the establishment of the middle-classes and to white, middle-class femininities and respectability, as well as to the oppression of women within patriarchal and capitalist society. Drawing on various feminist writers, Rose (1993) and Blunt and Rose (1994) argue that the distinction between the public/male and private/female

spheres has been underpinned by a tendency to universalise white, middle-class feminism; overlooking differences around other social relations such as race, class and sexuality. For example, for many black women the "private" sphere has been more heavily regulated than for white middle-class women. Equally, however, it may be experienced as a community space that acts as a haven from the racism within wider society, as opposed to an isolating or individualising space (Rose, 1993 and Blunt and Rose, 1994). The significance and validity of the public-private distinction has been questioned for women more generally, with research highlighting the ways in which caring roles in the private sphere are not simply left behind when women "go out" to work (Edwards, 1993). Indeed, some research has illustrated the ways in which women and men actively seek to maintain a divide between their public and private lives, and the sense of identity outside of caring or mothering that women feel they gain by doing so (Edwards, 1993; Hochschild, 1997). Moreover, Tamboukou (2003) questions the idea that women have a claim over the private sphere in the way that men have a claim over the public sphere, as inferred in the linking of the private with woman and the feminine. As Laurie *et al* (1999: 12) assert, through cultural discourses about place and space, the home has become '...encoded as a 'feminine' space'. Tamboukou (2003) argues that individuals need a sense of private space in order to develop a political engagement with the public sphere. However, she notes that the private sphere for women has always been given over to the care of others and, therefore, is not by any means private for women, as it has been for men. This, she argues, leaves women without a private space in which to formulate a political position from which to engage with the public sphere.

Regardless of the truth of the public-private divide, the ideology underpinning this distinction has real, everyday impacts on women's and men's lives and thus remains an important area for consideration (Edwards, 1993). Moreover, while polarisations between public male space and private female space, with men as breadwinners and women as mothers, have always been highly contested and 'have only briefly defined the labour market', they have nevertheless 'been a potent

influence on our imagined social space, on wages, social security and the gendering of rights and responsibilities' (Campbell, 1999: 185).

While there are issues of dichotomisation and dualism within these readings of time and space in relation to the home, they serve, nevertheless, to illuminate the multiple, complex and power-laden nature of time and space. I would argue that these feminist perspectives not only sensitize us to gendered power relations, but, by helping us to make visible the hierarchies and relations of power underpinning times and spaces, and the intersections between the personal and political, and the individual and institutional, they can be used to consider power relations and the multiple nature of times and spaces more widely. In other words, feminist perspectives help us to remove some of the opacity around the straightforward and common sense ways in which we ordinarily treat times and spaces (Adam, 2002). This section sought to demonstrate some of the ways in which time(s) and space(s) are vital elements of our everyday lives. They are both material, "lived realities" and imaginary: '...it is within the power of the human mind to visit past events, to re-invent them, create alternative versions and plan a multitude of futures' (Adam, 1995: 18). Moreover, we have seen that these "real" and/or imaginary spaces and times can also be ideological and subject to power relations: some of us can more easily lay claim to space and time, as we have seen in the case of the home and the public-private dichotomy. Importantly, if we look critically at time, space and distance, we can see they are not, *sui generis*, constraints or barriers to learning. It is the social, historical, cultural and linguistic constitution of time and space, and the related power relations, which create constraints on what "clock time" and mental time and space we have and what we can do in it. Furthermore, our emotional connection to time can impact on how 'we may experience...[time] as opportunity and/or constraint, as a pressure and/or a luxury' (Hughes, 1999).

The primarily feminist perspectives on time and space outlined here have highlighted not only the multiple and fluid, rather than singular and fixed, nature of time and space, but also the power relations underpinning conceptions, definitions and experiences of time and space. Rather than taking time and space for granted,

as universal and transparent concepts, my research draws on these perspectives in order to highlight the ways in which time and space are integral to an understanding of distance learners' experiences of combining home life, paid work and studying. This feminist framework is used in order to consider the area of distance learning, however, I would argue that it can provide a powerful tool through which to explore time, space and power more widely.

Conclusions

In this review of the literature, I first sought to demonstrate the dominant way in which time and space are presented as straightforward, natural and unquestioned facts of life. By failing to question the concepts of time and space, however, hierarchies and power relations underpinning our understandings of definitions of distance learning and the times and spaces in learners' experiences of being a distance learner are masked. Indeed, distance learning is seen as overcoming and potentially negating time and space. However, some of the more critical readings of space (and time) within the distance learning literature were then explored. As noted, these more critical perspectives are useful in highlighting the socially constituted nature of time and space. Both the useful aspects of this research and some of the more problematic aspects were highlighted. This brought me in section three to consider some of the additional key gaps in the literature and how I hope to address these in my own research. As well as some of the questions that were raised throughout the chapter around ideas of "anywhere, anytime" learning, presence-absence and the power relations related to the space and time of the university, I noted the lack of temporal analyses and of feminist perspectives in this area of research, and the need to link the theoretical and the empirical.

I then outlined the feminist framework on time and space that will inform this research. Primarily feminist readings of time and space from the wider literature were explored in order to further highlight both the multiple nature of time and space, and the power relations underpinning them. I then sought to demonstrate these further by focusing on feminist perspectives on time and space in the home.

This study now seeks to make use of these conceptions of time and space in order to engage with both the multiplicity of times and spaces apparent in experiences of distance learning, and the gendered and other power relations underpinning these. As noted, a dichotomous conception of women's and men's time and space overlooks many issues and historical changes. However, I aim to try to go beyond an exploration of what is women's and men's time and space, to consider the multiplicity of times and spaces evident in these distance learners' experiences of combining their home life, work life and studies.

While time and space have often been overlooked or considered in a factual and universal way, I would argue that they are fundamental to an understanding of distance learning, just as they are to analysis of social life and power relations more widely. As well as addressing the various gaps in the research, to date there appears to be no study in this area and even, it seems, beyond a focus on distance learning, that simultaneously takes into account the multiple nature of both time and space, and the gendered and other power relations implicit in these concepts. While I use this feminist framework to consider the area of distance learning, such a framework can provide a powerful tool through which to explore time, space and power more widely.

Chapter 3

Painting the Timescape: Narratives of flexibility, insecurity and the necessity to learn

This chapter explores the distance learners' narratives of the historical time and space in which they are located. These narratives can be seen as reflecting the "timescape" (Adam, 1998) within which they are located, highlighting some of the multiple and interlinked layers of time and space in social life. In particular, I focus on narratives that arose around reasons for studying on this distance learning programme and as respondents mapped the backdrop against which they undertook their studies. The timescape also highlights the background against which they negotiate their multiple roles as workers, carers and learners, further illustrating some of the power relations involved in access to and control over time and space.

In the first section I explore the learners' presentations of the current historical time and space as one in which there is a need for greater flexibility in order to survive in the labour market, but also in which they experience a high level of insecurity in relation to work. Flexibility is a dominant discourse in today's society (e.g. Edwards, 1997) and a growing 'time trend' in relation to work (Adam, 1995: 103). It is important to highlight how these stories of flexibility are intertwined with stories of insecurity since, as Edwards (1997) reminds us, it is a sense of insecurity that makes flexibility and the 'discourse of competitiveness' possible (Edwards, 1997: 30-31 drawing on various). Moreover, as will be illustrated, insecurity is often the material result of increased flexibility in working practices (Bauman 2000; Felstead *et al*, 1998).

The second section then moves on to explore related narratives of the necessity to learn. I focus on how the learners see undertaking their studies as a way of both enhancing their flexibility and combating a sense of insecurity, by remaining employable. I conclude by noting the individualising nature of the discourse of

flexibility and the role of studying in taking responsibility for their future success in the labour market, but also the sense of power that some feel in doing that.

I have chosen to deal with these narratives as the timescape of these learners for a number of reasons. While some of these narratives would perhaps appear to highlight issues of historical time rather than issues of space, they also deal with changes in where and how individuals work, and the social environment in which they work, care and learn. As Adam (1998) notes, the timescape includes traces not only of the current and visible context or surroundings (e.g. current discourses of flexibility), but also of the past, invisible and immanent (e.g. historically embedded but also changing gender relations at work and home). Furthermore, the flexibility in these learners' narratives is not only about time, but also about the spaces in which they work and the ways in which they work; including what they do as part of their job. As Beck (1999: 114 original emphasis) notes, the organisation of time and space are central to flexibilisation, which operates on three levels: '*work time, place of work and work contract*'. Some of the multiple layers of time highlighted when exploring these issues include: the past in terms of where these individuals have come from; the present in terms of where they are now and why; the future in terms of the expected outcomes of undertaking their studies; and the imaginary in terms of dreams and hopes. Some of the spaces or landscapes include: the workplace and environment; the home; and the imagined locations of the future. Moreover, in exploring narratives around the world of work and the necessity for learning, power relations around time, space and the negotiation of multiple roles of carer, worker and learner are also highlighted. As will be illustrated, while flexibility in relation to times and spaces of work is a very dominant narrative, it is not always clear where caring work or time and space for themselves fits in.

Reasons For Studying: reflections on the Timescape

When asked why and how they took up this programme of learning, my respondents' narratives began to paint a picture of the historical time and space in which they felt they were located. This can be seen as the timescape against which these learners undertook a Masters programme alongside their multiple roles and

responsibilities. Discourses of flexibility and insecurity were prevalent from the very first interviews, particularly in relation to changes at work and how this impacted on the decision to study. Narratives of flexibility and insecurity were interwoven with each other, with much of the perceived insecurity involved in the labour market being linked to organisational and sectoral restructuring and flexibilisation. This had brought about casualisation and insecurity of employment. All but one of my interviewees talked about the re-organisation of time and space: facing restructuring and changes in their area of work, including times, spaces and contracts, and decisions about their future career direction. Rose, for example, who worked in the care sector, talked not only about the flexibilisation and casualisation of her field, but the instability of the professional culture in the public care sector. Flexibility and insecurity can be seen as intricately interwoven in Rose's narratives of the contract culture and changing working practices. She explained that her short-term work contract was a result of the national skills shortage in her area of the care sector. Paradoxically, this came about following a further round of restructuring in response to government policy:

...unfortunately there's a huge skills shortage at the moment nationwide [in her area of work]. And I think a few years ago we had, you know, like lots of local authorities, lots of organisations, were in the position where- that- this was like a 2 year contract. It was like a contract culture and that gave momentum in lots of different places. And you find that they're constantly restructuring the organisation and it goes through many changes. You know one of my colleagues said that you just blink your eyelid and there's another restructuring on the way. And a lot of it is to do with, you know, a lot of government thinking and proposals...So you find a lot of organisations just offering people, you know, just like short term contracts...they might have made huge staff redundancy, so then they find they didn't have enough people, and you know to plan ahead, then they'll bring in people on a short term basis...a lot of people that I do know, at this moment, don't take up permanent employment, you know, they work on a short term basis. And because of the stress factor that's involved in it as well. (Rose)

This contract culture creates insecure employment, and Rose saw her job as providing cover before someone more permanent was found:

I mean, again, I'm on a short-term basis here. I've been where I am from since last year, in September. And they're just recruiting new people to move into the post, and I will leave as soon as those new people are in. (Rose)

However, Rose did not appear to find the uncertainty of where she might be in the future a particular problem. Indeed, she seemed to accept this insecurity as part of the current professional culture. Moreover, as illustrated in the first quote from Rose, this contract culture is also seen to suit many people who want short-term contracts in order to deal with the stress involved in the profession. Thus, flexible employment is seen not only as a reflection of the requirements of the labour market at this time, but also as a means for individuals to avoid work-related stress. This mirrors popular discourses of flexibility as enabling employers to remain competitive while employees maintain a work-life balance (Adam, 1995). Similarly, Rachel saw flexibility as a current trend in work practices that was both necessary and desirable. For Rachel, who works in the education sector, flexibility is both a way of working that gets results and creates success, and a way of balancing work and family life. She regularly identifies herself as being very flexible in her capacity as manager and mother. Moreover, noting her tendency towards demanding better opportunities for women, she aims to facilitate this for other women and carers:

The programme I manage, it's a very big programme...I have 3 full-time members of staff working for me, all women. Two of them telework. Um- and I'm *very, very* flexible about working practices, and they- as a result I get amazing results. I mean the fact is that four full-time people doing what we do, people constantly say to me "I can't believe you're doing all of this". Because we're not just doing training, we're doing a number of others things as well. But I put that down solely to the fact that- what I say to people that work with me is "These are the results I want, this is when I want them. How you do it, I'm really not interested". So if that means- as it happens one member of staff has got- her baby's about one now, if that means she wants to work from 11 o'clock at night till 2 o'clock in the morning, that's her business. And as a result, people produce the results, because they're able to fit it in with their concerns, and they're not worrying all the time about *things*. I have a small child and I operate a similar thing myself. Um- sure I have to be *a lot* more available than the people that work for me, but I- I am much more flexible in the way I work. I work a lot in the evenings, whatever I have to do. So one of the things that *does* concern me, and I'm sure

it's the same for a lot of women, is that there aren't many corporate cultures that are *yet* comfortable, *whatever* they may say, with that kind of working." (Rachel)

Thus, for Rachel, being flexible is both a necessary and desirable way of working. More specifically, this means being flexible about time and space: eschewing the 9-5 mentality and learning to work and live everyday life in flexible and fluid ways that transcend the traditional boundaries between public and private space and time. This narrative is one in which work can be done anywhere and at anytime, as long as it gets done. In one sense, these flexible practices are described as being contrary to the traditional practices of set timetables and requirements for presence in specific times and places of work which, as Foucault (1977) highlights, are used to control and discipline bodies. Paradoxically, however, they appear to involve a greater level of commitment of private times and spaces to paid work and education, whilst requiring the impact of reproductive, domestic and caring roles to be minimised. As Adam (1995) notes, flexibilisation of working time can impact significantly on individuals:

...decoupling...work time from the time of the organization and from the collective rhythms of public and familial activities erod[ing] communal activities in both the public and the private realm. (Adam, 1995: 103)

Indeed there are a number of power relations evident in this discourse of flexibility around times and spaces. While Rachel uses these working practices to facilitate work-life balance for women/carers, there is an underlying suggestion in the discourse of flexibility, that caring/women's work and reproduction hampers their productive work for employers. While Rachel would by no means agree that this is the case, her talk reflects the gendered nature of this discourse. Thus, care work is talked of in terms of creating worries, claiming space and claiming clock and emotional time, while being flexible about bringing work into the space of the home is seen as a way of minimising this demand on the time and space of paid employment. Within this kind of narrative, as long as women remain the primary caregivers, they are perceived and positioned as problematic and as other to the ideal worker. As Clarke (2003) comments when writing about the links between women's caring role and engagement in education, family responsibilities are often

treated as 'an obstacle to learning, rather than as a source of knowledge' or of equal value to paid work. In the same way, caring and reproductive roles, traditionally seen as belonging within the "private" sphere, are viewed as obstacles to a form of production that crosses the boundaries between public and private space and time. In this way, there is a hierarchy of time and space in terms of giving time and space to these roles and responsibilities, with time for productive, paid work being expected to come first.

Equally, there are other power relations around the demands that flexible working makes on employees. Adam (1995) declares that some of the hidden costs of flexibility are stress and health problems due to working long hours whilst trying to simultaneously juggle multiple roles. Jane, for example, had worked for 20 years in a very emotionally difficult and stressful role in the care sector.

The area that I work in is just absolutely dire at the moment. It is not- it's not- good to have worked in it 20 years, as I have, and not have a development to go forward with because- um- you...it is such a tough area. It is very undervalued now. It doesn't have the value that it had when I entered it. The sort of professional respect really. Um- and- I just need to- I need to have another way of thinking about my future I think. (Jane)

She had finally changed roles a few years previously after suffering serious anxiety attacks and stress. With taking on her studies, she worried that this would happen again, as she stated:

I almost felt like I was a bit um- like I was consciously sort of testing the waters really. "If I'm going to have a mental break down, let's have it *now!*" <she shouts the last word> (Jane)

Likewise, Rose had been very ill in the past and her illness flared up again several times during the course of her studies. She put this down to years of emotionally and physically stressful work, with long hours and regular travelling for work. After a few months off work due to her health, Rose took up a new job and found herself once more working long hours and under very stressful conditions. As Rose stated,

contract work was not necessarily full-time or permanent, but effectively entailed working all the time; highlighting both the insecure and greedy nature of work:

If you are not in full-time employment, for example, you know, for me and lots of my colleagues, if you're doing contract work, you're working, aren't you, all the time. (Rose)

This was evidently impacting on Rose's health. Indeed, in our final interview, Rose told me that she had spent the previous night in the hospital. When I commented that she seemed to have little time for herself, she reflected that:

I don't have any time for me. And I said I would *never* get back into this situation again. And here I am. There must be something very needy in me <laughing>. I've put myself right back into it again! And um- it's- not a good feeling, you know, because as I said, I am tired. I am- I am- really, really, very tired. And I'm looking forward as I said, in July I'm going away. (Rose)

Thus, while the dominant narrative is that the times and spaces for work are effectively all times and spaces, both in the supposed public and private spheres, and while we tend to accept this, there is little personal time outside of this. Nevertheless, as this quotation illustrates, Rose places responsibility for the situation on herself. She refers to herself as needy, rather than seeing this as an outcome of the greedy nature of current working practices. Jane and Rose were both in caring-related work, however Jim, who worked in a more policy and management-related side of the public sector, also felt that his health problems were related to working long hours and stress at work. Like Rose he partly saw himself as responsible, seeing his focus on his career when he was younger and his tendency to take work home as part of the problem. However, after finding out that he had epilepsy and following various experiences of redundancy, he began to change his priorities and to be more protective of time outside of work. Contrary to many of these narratives, not allowing work to permeate beyond the workplace is seen as good time management:

Prior to developing this I spent a lot of time bringing work home - no more! (Well, I do sometimes bring documents in to skim, or

physically work away from the office for a day if there's a panic on, but otherwise nothing 'original'). It is important to hit the brakes in the evening and people are reminding me that good time management means leaving work at the desk. (Jim, email)

My priorities really are the *family*, and surviving my health and all the rest of it. And I can get- *not* aggressive, but I can sort of dig my heels in and say, "No! I work X hours a week. It doesn't follow me home". 'Cos if it does, it stresses me out. And I won't have that anymore...when I was- when the epilepsy first hit me...even then I did still try and do long hours and I did still try and do this that and the other. And it takes a couple of knock backs before I finally got to grips and said "No!". I can understand there are people that like *thrive* on stress. I've met a few. And I'm not one of them. (Jim)

To return to the narratives of flexibility and insecurity, Beck (2000: 1) calls this shift towards 'discontinuity...diversity, unclarity and insecurity in people's work and life', the "Brazilianisation" of the Western world. Beck refers to Brazil here because, alongside a booming capitalist economy, Brazilian workers have experienced the decline of full-time and permanent employment, and the growth of casual and informal working conditions. According to Beck, this is a world in which 'all paid work is subject to the threat of replacement' (2000: 2), and where we '...know, feel and grasp that we are all potentially unemployed or underemployed, part-time or makeshift workers without any real job security' (2000: 5). We might question whether this is an accurate reflection of the current timescape and whether this is a new situation. Nevertheless, both Jim and Ian reflected this feeling of insecurity as they considered why they were studying. Jim told me that he came to the course to prepare for the future and to minimise the uncertainty he foresaw. He regularly told me that his job, in a precarious sector, was coming to an end. Therefore, the time it took to complete the course was essential in his decision about which programme of learning to sign up to:

I work for [public sector organisation]...(always precarious) and it looked as though we had 2-3 years left...It also won out over a BSc at [another university] via distance learning as it had a more tightly scheduled process – [it] would have taken up to 8 years. (Jim, email)

In our final interview, Jim reflected that while he had been "very career-driven" when he left university, his priorities and his idea of a career had changed radically after redundancy:

...made redundant twice, and that sort of kicks your career path right out the window. And you really start to think, "No, I'm not investing in a career", that "I'm doing a job, and my job pays for my leisure time". Um- I've got a wife, I've got pets, I've got a house, I've got guitars. Basically that's it. And that really is all that concerns me.
(Jim)

Insecurity and fear of unemployment or underemployment also became a material reality for Ian, who worked in the finance sector, when he was made redundant just three days before our first interview. Therefore, one of the main things he expected to gain from his studies was to:

Make myself more marketable in the longer term...because from next Saturday, I will be out of work...Which I only found out about this week. So from that point of view, even though I haven't got it, it is something that will go on the CV. (Ian)

When we talked again nine months later, Ian was "doing temporary work" to "pay the bills" and get "out and about". He admitted that he was quite shocked that after nine months he had not found a full-time job. Although Ian remained focused on his career and often told me he enjoyed working, he had now come to recognise his experience of redundancy and insecurity as the reality of the private sector. He also saw this as a reality he would experience again in the future. He expanded on the story of his redundancy, telling me how he had heard about the fate of his company "on the news" when he got back from his holidays; news confirmed when he went into work the next day. Nevertheless, he remained hopeful of finding a new job:

So- um- I'm- got er- interviews tomorrow, I've had some this week and next week. So touch wood, I'm sort of- *hopeful* that before the end of May, I'll have a job...because it's the first time I've really been out of work in over 17 years of, you know, full work. But- um- that's um- that's the reality of the commercial world. And it's gonna' happen a few more times probably in my next 20 years of work. So-

whilst I suspected it would take a few months to get a job, um- I didn't expect it to- to still be looking after nine. But various things contributed towards that. Um- September [September the 11th 2001]. Um- December's always quiet, and the market was very, very flat from mid-December, through to really about the 3rd week of February. Very little to apply for. Things are picking up now, so I have to be optimistic that the right job will come along. (Ian)

This insecurity of employment and anxiety was to mark Ian's experience for over half of the duration of his studies. While continuing education is seen as one means of creating greater security and employability, a return to education is, of course, not necessarily a guarantee of greater certainty. Davey (2003) notes that relatively little has been written about redundancy, discontinuity of employment, and adults' return to education. Davey's (2003) research found that redundancy was a motivator to return to education for 18% of older men and 12% of older women students aged 40+ surveyed at Victoria University, New Zealand. Subsequent interviews highlighted that the majority felt that gaining a qualification was very important, both in terms of 'status' and validation in the face of ageism in the labour market (Davey, 2003: 97). Nevertheless, re-entry into full-time and more permanent jobs in the labour market can be difficult, even after a return to education and gaining credentials (Davey, 2003). In Ian's case, he had returned to education with the support of his employer, prior to being made redundant. Nevertheless, with his change in circumstances, his studies became both a selling point in his CV and a way of mentally coping with this period of unemployment and short-term contract work.

Janet, too, was experiencing a period of insecurity when she decided to enrol on the Masters programme. When Janet started her studies, she was approaching statutory retirement from her current profession in the justice sector, and thinking about potential opportunities in this or other sectors. She, like Jim, hoped to be able to flexibly transfer her skills and experience to a different area if necessary:

And so that's why I've gone into the Masters, because I've only got just over three years before I retire, so I would like to get that to be able to use that when I do retire...I'd like to do something a bit

different, it's been a smashing time in [the justice sector] but to do something a bit different and knowing what you can do once you've got the degree. (Janet)

It is worth noting how heavily these narratives are marked by time as the respondents reflect on: their career paths; their years of service; the ups and downs of the labour market during restructuring and unemployment; the pace of change; planning for the future; and the impact of world events such as September 11th on markets and individuals. These are both cyclical times – career cycles from starting out to retirement, and intertwined industrial and natural times – but the times of the year are seen in terms of the ups and downs of the labour market as opposed to the changing seasons. As well as locating our narratives within time and the chronology of our lives, this reflects the importance of time within language and how we express ourselves to others (Adam, 1990, 1994). Thus each learner's story of how they came to be studying on this programme is located within a timescape. It was against the backdrop of these changes and insecurities in working lives, and a dominant discourse of a need for flexibility, that these learners either made the decision or were asked by employers to study on the MSc distance learning programme. Thus, while it does not tell us about their programme of studies *per se*, this timescape is vital to an understanding of why these learners are participating in learning. In illustrating the demands on the time and space of these learners, this also partly suggests why they felt a need to squeeze studying into their already busy lives, and why they opted for a distance learning programme.

The second section now focuses on the necessity to learn, exploring the perception that studying would enhance the learners' flexibility in relation to work, whilst combating a sense of insecurity by increasing their employability. These narratives highlight the timescape within which these learners are located and within which there is a drive to engage in learning and to take individual responsibility for employability.

The Necessity to Learn: being flexible and remaining employable

Studying on this distance learning programme was in many ways seen as a response to this need for flexibility and the accompanying sense of insecurity. On the one hand, continuing their education by means of distance learning was seen as an important means of building their flexibility as workers. This meant being more flexible generally about the things that they could do by enhancing their skills. On the other hand, it was seen as dealing with a sense of insecurity about the future, by seeming to ensure their employability. Jane, for example, linked studying on this course both with planning for the future and becoming flexible in a number of ways. Firstly, this was seen as a chance to develop her career outside of the caring sector in which she had been working for many years, and which was highly stressful and damaging to her health. Notably, she felt she had made the first step towards this by taking up her studies. Secondly, it was seen as a chance to be more flexible in order to explore possibilities of self-employment. Thirdly, it was seen as potentially increasing her earnings and adapting in order to support her family in the future when her partner's career cycle changed:

AR: ...what do you expect to gain from doing this course?

The opportunity to- to move out of- the career that I have been in, I suppose, and to- well I've made the move in a sense, but to develop my career, and the world that I'm in. And to be able to perhaps be much more flexible, so that I can do some work for myself, I can think about different types of organisations to work for...And also at the same time incidentally, I *do* have to go on earning money, 'cos I've got kids and etc. etc. and especially as my partner is older than me not earning that much longer. (Jane)

For Jim, studying on this distance learning programme was a way of ensuring he could get another job, and a means of flexibly transferring his current skills to another job:

...where the first- no, the second time I was made redundant, I was out of work for a month or so. Um- and I found it incredibly difficult to convey what I'd done and what I understood and what my level of skills were to outsiders. And so when it became clear that this job

may- go bad, it *will* go bad, it was suddenly a case of "What can I use, what can I slap on the table to help show?" (Jim)

Again, Jim stated in a later communication that it was vital to get some kind of validation of his experience in order to ensure his future employability:

I was driven by work issues and the fact that this job is insecure into looking for something that validated my learning and experience, as when I was unemployed briefly in 1996 it was clear how localised and difficult to communicate my previous working situation and contribution had been. (Jim, e-mail)

Indeed, Rose felt that in her profession there was a heavy pressure from government to undertake continuing education and professional development:

...you find that there are a lot of people in [the profession] do continue to study. I think it's one of the areas of um- of a working environment where you have a lot of very qualified people. People continue to renew their professional development all the time. And the government has just um- well in the past two years or so, made it quite clear that that's what they want [the profession] to continue to do. (Rose)

She found a similar pressure when doing some part-time teaching, reflecting that, "the expectations are that you continue to look at your own development". As Cruickshank (2003: 148) notes, within the neo-liberal ideology of lifelong learning, a cycle of 'continuous training and re-training' is presented as the norm. Within this ideal, the lifelong learner is:

...an individual with the motivation and capability to continue learning throughout life in a range of social and work contexts so as to achieve personal fulfilment and maintain employability. (Kearns *et al*, 1996: 6)

Indeed, Rose described her reasons for studying on this distance learning programme as being a response to the expectation that individuals are engaging in lifelong learning, both from employers and the government, and about fulfilling her wish to develop her professional and practice knowledge so that she could

undertake independent consultancy work by flexibly transferring her knowledge and experience to different areas:

...you see also government thinking is about lifelong learning, isn't it. And the expectations are that, you know, we have got the labour force linked to the educational system and we're working along that line. And, you know, people will be- you know if I'm going to be selling myself, you know, the expectations are that people are going to be looking to see whether or not I've continued, you know, to develop my own learning. So it's no good me going in to do some work with, you know, a group of staff and, you know, I haven't done anything from since the year dot. So that's all around my own thinking really. (Rose)

As we can see, Rose's continued participation in learning is an important part of how she would sell herself as a freelance worker. The fact that she has continued to develop herself is perceived to ensure her future employability and minimise the insecurity that contract work might hold. These narratives mirror the "training-as-panacea" discourse of lifelong learning (Cruickshank, 2003); that contrary to the realities of the labour market, lifelong learning will ensure access to better jobs and overcome insecurity. Likewise, Liz, who worked in the military sector, hoped that by engaging in this programme of study, she would demonstrate her ability to fulfil her work roles and to develop herself. The inference is that this development will take place outside of work time. She saw this as giving her "the edge" over her colleagues when it was time for the management to look at who would be a good worker and eligible for promotion:

There are a lot of [others] out there in similar jobs to myself, who are probably doing as equal a good a job as myself. You know, why shouldn't they be. We've all got the same sort of training, and we've all got the same sort of mentoring system in place to make sure we're doing a good job. So at the end of the day when...[management] are looking at your folders and thinking "Who shall we promote?". It's like "that person who's doing a good job, or that person who's doing a good job, *and* developing themselves?". (Liz)

Indeed, the survey data highlighted that seeking a promotion was a common motivation for studying, with 48.2% of survey respondents agreeing, and 5.4% strongly agreeing, that they were studying on this programme in order to "get a

promotion". Moreover, the most common motivation for studying was "to get the qualification" (52.8% strongly agreed and 41.5% agreed). Nevertheless, it is worth noting that a large proportion of respondents also disagreed that promotion was a key motivation (35.7% disagreed and 10.7% strongly disagreed). Moreover, responses to open questions in the survey showed that getting the qualification could often be about proving something to themselves and others, rather than a purely instrumental focus on paper qualifications.

Like Liz, Jim and Ian also saw their studies as increasing their marketability and demonstrating what kind of people and, more importantly, what kind of workers they are. Indeed, Ian stated that his participation in a distance learning course, as opposed to an on-campus course, would specifically add to his "marketability" by showing his ability and willingness to be flexible, to juggle many responsibilities and to develop himself in relation to his work:

I think it will demonstrate something else about me as an individual, my intellectual and other abilities to sort of fit study in around other work commitments. Um, I think it will demonstrate to a prospective employer that here's someone who is wanting to be able to think and learn a bit more strategically and apply that to the workplace. It won't actually affect the sort of jobs I go for, but I'm hoping it will add value to my applications for those jobs. (Ian)

In this way, being flexible is about presenting yourself as able to cope with multiple commitments whilst engaging in strategic, work-related self-development. Indeed, while Jim encountered many set backs during his studies, he was pleased to be juggling his many roles and responsibilities:

I'm pleased to still be in the game, I'm juggling this, work, family and two bands and still thriving - usually, anyway - and it's good to know I can still do that. (Jim, email)

As Field (2000: 65) notes, '...[f]or some, the capacity to handle the new and surf the uncertain is itself an important defining characteristic of the self'. Indeed, during the period of uncertainty while Ian was searching for a full-time job, his studies became important in terms of giving him structure and purpose, as well as

adding to his marketability in interviews. Ian noted that being able to say he had been studying while searching for a new job showed that he had been making good use of his time while not in full-time work:

I sort of keep a check of- it sounds a bit sad I know, I do keep a check of sort of the number of pages I read, approximately.

AR: And I suppose if you keep a record of it, it's something that you can look back on and feel that you've achieved something?

Mm. Well yeah, it's quite important for me, whilst- whilst I'm not working in [an HR-related] role, I've got to make sure I've got purpose to what I do. So the temporary work I'm doing gets me out and about three or four days a week. The other day or two a week I'm applying for jobs, attending interviews and doing my studies. So um- you know, it's trying to be balanced, even though I'm not in a full-time permanent...role, I still have to balance working to pay the month- to pay the bills, with studying, to keep on top of that.

[...]

So, it's quite handy for me to talk about [in job interviews], not just to talk about the temporary work I've been doing, but to say "Well in addition to applying for jobs, I've been doing my Masters studies". Um- so- so for me it's been something else to...demonstrate that I've been spending my time usefully. It's just that um- er- that the- that the right job hasn't come along and the market for T&D roles has been- has a couple of flat spots since the summer. (Ian)

There is a strong sense of morality in this participation in learning and professional development. Not only is there an individual responsibility for constantly updating their knowledge and skills, but to use time productively even when having been made redundant or, in terms of paid work, unproductive. There is a suggestion here both of the Protestant work ethic, within which the '[w]aste of time' is 'the first and in principle the deadliest of sins' (Weber, 1930: 158), and of the dominance of the commodification of time:

...'time is money' means that capital has a built-in clock that is constantly ticking away...Times when nothing happens – breaks and pauses, waiting and rest periods – are considered unproductive, wasteful, lost opportunities that need to be eliminated or at least minimized. (Adam, Whipp and Sabelis, 2002: 17-18)

Equally, however, this again reflects the necessity and the norm for adults to engage in continuing education and development (Blaxter *et al*, 1997).

So the key story in these different learners' narratives is of developing a level of flexibility about when, where and how they engage in paid work, and about taking responsibility for their personal development and future ability to remain in work. While this is seen as necessary for survival in the labour market, it is also seen as desirable in a number of ways. For example, as well as maintaining employability and marketability, these learners see studying as a way of gaining promotion, recognition at work, and potentially some sense of control over their future. Beth, for example, who worked in the education sector, was unhappy about her material circumstances and the uncertainty of her partner's job. She saw undertaking her studies as a way of bringing about a career change and ultimately aimed to use her qualification to move to a higher-paid and higher-skills job in the same sector:

But then I thought, you know, "If I do want to progress any more here, I've got to do something else...wanting to develop and do that...I want to do the Masters first. And then, maybe get onto like [a different, higher position] try and do something like that. But I don't know, you don't know yet. But that's- I'm just concentrating on doing the course at the moment. I might change my mind, by the time I get to the end of it. I might not want to do anything like that...But I'm hoping that I'll have learnt enough skills to be able to go for something like that and then- we'll see. Nothing definite, but if I want to progress, I need to do this course I think. (Beth)

Thus Beth perceived a need to learn in order to progress in her workplace, but also to tackle her concern about her material situation.

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, I have chosen to look at these particular narratives as a reflection of the timescape of these learners. Some of the dominant narratives that have been highlighted here are the necessity for flexibility, continuing development and learning, the insecurity of employment, and the individual responsibility for 'competence and employability' (Ojala, 1997: 455-6). These

stories in many ways reflect the narratives in the literature and policy of individuals bearing the burden of responsibility for their economic survival as:

- episodic workers, '*bricoleur[s]*' or tinkerers (Bauman, 2000: 139) moving from 'camping site' to camp site rather than co-building (or even having the opportunity to build) a long-term, shared relationship with employers (Bauman, 2000: 149);
- 'portfolio' workers, constantly updating and selling their skills, maintaining their economic survival through flexibility, planning and becoming 'your own security' (Handy, 1988: 21-23);
- lifelong learners, continuously learning throughout life in order to keep up with rapid change and to ensure employability, self-fulfilment, community cohesion and national and international competitiveness (e.g. ASEM, 2002; CEC, 2001; DfEE, 1998; FÁS, 2002).

The veracity of such narratives may be questioned, and depictions of work as highly flexible and insecure within the current timescape perhaps overstress the current insecurity of work and the stability of work in the past, particularly when considering social stratification and historical experiences of employment (Furlong and Cartmel, 1999). Nevertheless, these narratives do reflect a general sense of uncertainty and personal responsibility for employability that is perceived and, therefore, is part of these individuals' lived realities and way of knowing the social world. As Ahier and Moore (1999: 237) note, concepts such as flexibilisation and globalisation have entered into everyday language and understanding through:

...political debate, TV and newspapers [to become]...common currency...the touchstone for collective understandings of the 'way things are today'. (Ahier and Moore, 1999: 237)

As such, this language is evident in everyday conversations:

...especially as the conditions they denote have dramatically impinged upon many lives through the impact of 'delaying' and 'downsizing' and radical changes in services, such as banking, at those crucial points where the public (the 'global economy') transmutes into the private (the intimacy of the household). (Ahier and Moore, 1999: 243)

Indeed, as explored here, the material reality of downsizing and casualisation, as well as the personal impact of long hours and stressful working conditions, has impacted on many of these learners in one way or another and has led some to consider undertaking this distance learning programme as a means of tackling that sense of insecurity and potentially feeling some sense of control over what happens in the future.

Time and space are central to these stories of flexibility, insecurity and the necessity to learn. These reflect the timescape, telling us about why, when, where and how the multiple roles of worker, carer and learner are negotiated and performed, and what motivates these individuals to learn. There are, of course, other motivations to learn, and these will be explored in following chapters. Nevertheless, these narratives of insecurity and flexibility were particularly evident and striking within the interviews.

Conclusions

This chapter has sought to highlight an element of the timescape of this group of learners, with a particular focus on the narratives of flexibility, insecurity and the necessity to learn. These narratives arose as important when exploring learners' reasons for studying. Rather than telling us about the specific programme of learning, they tell us something about the historical time and location in which these learners perceive themselves to be, and how they have reacted to dominant discourses of flexibility and the responsibility of the individual for their continued employability.

In the first section of this chapter, I highlighted the interwoven stories and experiences of flexibility and insecurity, and some of the underpinning power

relations around time and space. In particular, this discussion has explored the sense of insecurity in relation to work, highlighting stories of downsizing, casualisation and redundancy. Related to this insecurity and flexibility, have been narratives of long working hours and the impact of flexible working practices on health and well-being, illustrating the greedy nature of these working practices in terms of eating into supposedly private time and space, but also the gendered assumptions about caring and reproduction that run through the idea of flexibility and appropriate times and spaces of paid and unpaid work.

In the second section, I focused on narratives of the necessity to learn and the way in which undertaking this programme of studies is seen as a way of both developing flexibility and working against the sense of insecurity by ensuring their future employability. Again, this is seen as reflecting some of the dominant narratives about the need for continuous development and learning, and the responsibility of the individual for their employability.

This timescape is an important element in seeking to understand the learners' motivations to study, and provides a picture, although necessarily limited, of the background against which they negotiate their multiple roles of carer, worker and learner. On the one hand this paints a picture of their work lives and issues of insecurity of employment, the need for flexibility, the over-work that results and the drive to undertake a programme of studies. On the other hand, this highlights some of the power relations underpinning access to and control over time and space. This illustrates, for example, the hierarchy of time and space in relation to paid work and caring work, with caring and reproductive work being seen as an obstacle to productive paid work. In both of these respects, the timescape presented here also forms a background – or context – to the rest of the chapters, providing a sense of the wider context against which the learners undertake their studies and negotiate their multiple roles and responsibilities, spaces and times.

Chapter 4

Times and Spaces of Distance Learning:

Anywhere, Anytime?

This chapter focuses on what might, on the surface, appear to be the more straightforward times and spaces of distance learning; namely, when and where distance learners study. As previously noted, distance learning is often seen as "anywhere, anytime" and, effectively, "anyone" learning. It is argued to overcome the barriers of time and space, giving access to education for those who would otherwise not have the opportunity. As such, distance learners are often seen as controlling the time and space in which they study. Roche, for example, sees distance learning as:

...a way of learning which enables you to manage your own learning. You are in charge. You choose the time, the pace and the place. (Roche, 1988: 60)

However, this seems to be a rather decontextualised reading of the multiple times and spaces in learners' lives. This decontextualisation is not only an inevitable part of research (we cannot hope to capture the whole of each respondents' life), but is also one of the ways in which power relations are masked. A time and space literacy can help us to address this. A decontextualised perspective on times and spaces in distance learning might lead us to argue that by allowing learners to study their course materials as and when they choose (within the limitations of the timetable), time and space are no longer an issue. But if we start to add the different layers of time and space apparent in learners' stories into this picture, we start to see that not only are there many times and spaces within which learners move (from "real" to imaginary), but that learners have differential access to these. Thus, as will be explored in this chapter, when and where to study is not so much a choice, as an on-going negotiation.

Section one draws on the survey data and interviewees' narratives to summarise when and where learners studied. The second section then moves on to consider in more depth how learners talked about fitting their studies in among their multiple roles and responsibilities at work and at home. I seek to highlight the social dimensions of time and space, and learners' constant negotiation of their time and space for studying. Notably, the majority of learners talk about work as the primary demand on their time and space, and the main responsibility around which they fit in their studies. However, while paid work is a dominant narrative in this negotiation, the time and space demands of caring and domestic work are also clearly interwoven, particularly in women learners' narratives, with the demands of the workplace. Thus I seek to highlight the greedy demands on learners' time of both the workplace and the home. I note that these demands can be particularly, although not exclusively, heavy for women with young children.

Section three moves on to consider the idea of managing and claiming time. I engage with the idea of time management, arguing that this idea overlooks the social and multiple, rather than individual and linear, nature of time. This is followed by further consideration of these multiple and power-laden times and spaces, exploring learners' stories around claiming, rather than managing, time and space for their studies.

Finally, this leads in the fourth section to a consideration of learners' narratives of the "right time" in which to engage in continued development and higher education, highlighting stories of when learners felt they had room in their lives to study.

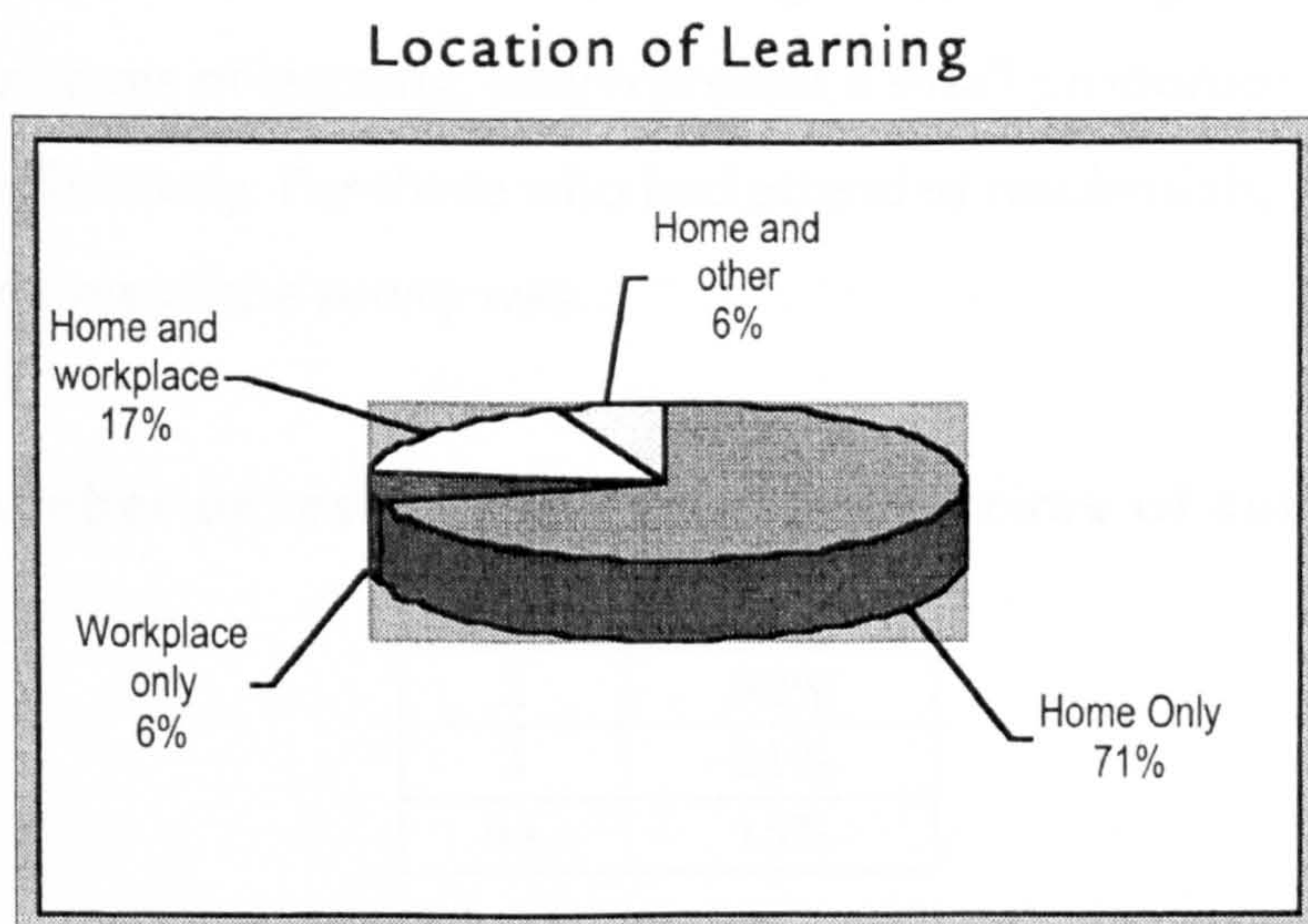
As far as possible I try to look at the multiple times and spaces of learning as simultaneous and relational, since they are interconnected both in terms of an individual's location in time and space, and the power relations around that time and space. Despite my efforts to hold time and space constant, however, when and where learners study often get separated out; both by myself as the researcher-writer and by the learners as storytellers. This perhaps reflects both the practical

need to separate out times and spaces to be able to collect and analyse data about them, but also how we conceptualise time and space within our own lives. Nevertheless, learners often spoke about where they studied without telling me when they studied in that space, and vice versa. For this reason, the data is often presented along these same lines. However, even to write that someone studies in bed or on the train to work is to signal a particular time-space in someone's everyday life.

Locations of Learning

I now outline where and when learners studied. This data from the survey and interviews provides a general backdrop against which the following more in-depth discussion about individual learners' experiences can be highlighted.

As the following pie chart shows, an open question in the survey found that the primary location of learning for these distance learners was the home. This reflects the findings of other research (e.g. von Prümmer, 2000), although this may not automatically be the case for all distance learning programmes.



The 4 respondents who studied at work only were all men. Since the sample is fairly small, it is hard to say whether this is significant. Most people who studied at work as part, or the totality of their study time, appeared to do so in what can be seen as their personal time, e.g. before work, during lunchtime and after work, rather than

within employers' time. Two respondents specifically stated that they were able to study during work hours, although the second still studied primarily at home:

I set time aside each day to study [at work] and as long as the day job is done no one minds. (SR 33)

Mostly at home but also occasional reading at work. Materials were also taken on holiday...I am able to schedule my own work. I also have a number of short periods of time free when I can fit in some reading. I have no major distractions whilst at home. Plenty opportunity evenings and weekends. (SR 45)

Indeed, several respondents noted that studying at work was very occasional and that home remained their primary location of study.

The distance learning programme examined here also includes a small number of teaching days and residential weekends per year. Although these were not mentioned as locations of learning, they can be seen as such. Indeed, 81% of respondents had attended a residential weekend (later replaced by teaching days). The 9% who did not attend wrote about time, cost and other commitments such as childcare as the main reasons for not attending. Nevertheless, these are not obligatory and learners did not attend these regularly, meaning that while they may be important in terms of learning, they represent a small proportion of learners' space and time for study. For those who had attended residential, the number attended at the time of the survey was:

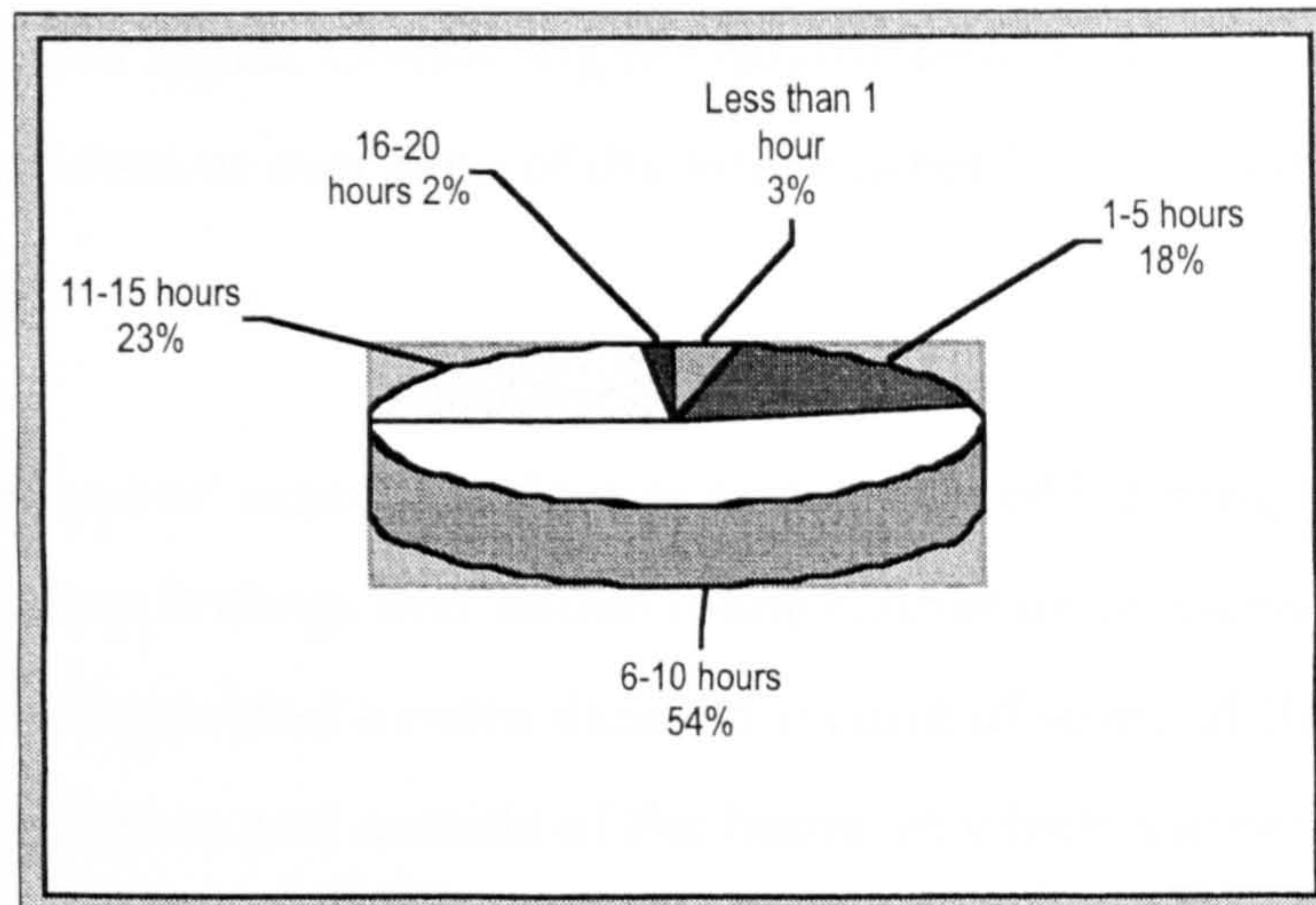
Number of residentials attended at time of survey

1	19%
2	32%
3	21%
4+	15%

Since respondents were at different stages in their studies, some may have attended more following the survey. The recommended study time for this distance learning programme is 10 hours per week. As illustrated in the following pie chart, the majority of survey respondents claimed to spend 6-10 hours per week studying their course materials (54%), followed by 11-15 hours (23%). The maximum hours

studied per week was 16-20 hours, with no respondents stating that they studied more than this.

Average hours studied per week



On a methodological and epistemological note, since times and spaces of learning were not a central focus of this research at the outset, the data on times and spaces is quite basic. Asking, for example, for an average of how many hours learners studied each week is perhaps a false representation of learners' study time. I now see this as reflecting the linear reading of time as easily organised and divided up into blocks of time for discreet activities (Adam, 1990, 1995; Davies, 1990). As one respondent noted, this representation of study time did not "suit...[her] learning style", since she tended to "work in blocks of time" (SR 26). For this reason, she stated that she studied for less than 1 hour per week. However, studying in blocks of time was a common practice among the interviewees and other distance learners spoken to over the course of this research. Therefore, I imagine that other respondents studied in a similar way, but had averaged this out in order to suit the confines of my survey. As another respondent noted, they coped with conflicts that arose between their studies and other areas of their lives by:

Being flexible - some weeks very little study, other weeks lots. (SR 22)

Again reflecting this linearity, knowing from the survey data that X number of people studied X number of hours per week is not terribly illuminating. However,

when we look at the combination of when learners can study, where they study, and what activities, roles and responsibilities impact on this, we can begin to get a greater sense of the social and power relations underpinning our access to, and claims over, time and space; as well as some of the emotional ties we have to time (Hughes, 1999) and space. Combining the quantitative and qualitative data of the survey with the narratives over time of the interviewees is particularly important in this respect.

Turning to interviewees' accounts of times and spaces of learning, these both supported the survey findings and added many further dimensions to them. The learners' narratives provided a more-detailed picture of some of the multiple times and spaces, both within and outside of the home, in which learners studied. Studying at home, for example, could indicate a range of locations within the home. The following table summarises the locations of study apparent in the interviewees' narratives. Where possible, what appears to be the main location of study for each learner is highlighted in the table with an asterisk (*). This could be difficult to gauge at times since, as will be explored, the location of learning could change, for example, according to whether they were reading or writing and with changes in circumstances such as changes in workplace or job roles. Nevertheless, there were general patterns over the span of our interviews, which indicated that for most interviewees the home was the primary location of learning. As already noted, when I refer to location here, I refer to both time and space.

Locations of Learning

Interviewee	Where	When
Beth	Workplace: desk in office, door shut	Outside paid work hours: early morning, lunchtime, evenings after work. (Able to take a number of half days off when writing assignments and to write at home)
	Home: on the floor in lounge or spare room, at the table in spare room	Evenings, weekends, half days given by work and annual leave
	Sitting in car, parked at popular spot	When finding it hard to study at home Beth sometimes went out alone in her car. She found it a good place to read.
Ian	Workplace: desk	When Ian first started his studies and later when he found a new full-time job. Early morning, lunchtime
	Home *: study	Evenings, weekends
	Travelling: on the train	To and from work and interviews
Jane	Home *: study	Evenings, weekends, Fridays, national holidays

Janet	Workplace: desk and room at workplace where she lived during the week. This changed later in her studies when she moved back to her original workplace and was able to live at home on weekdays.	Weekdays, occasional lunchtimes and in between activities
	Home *: study	Weekends, national holidays
Jim	Workplace: desk	Lunchtimes and occasionally able to negotiate some time during work hours when a deadline loomed as boss was sympathetic
	Home *	Evenings, weekends
	Travelling: on the train	To and from work
Liz	Workplace	Sometimes free periods during work hours when Liz was sitting with colleagues somewhere at work waiting to take part in training activities outside of the office.
	Home *	Evenings, weekends, national holidays
	Friends' homes	Whilst babysitting, house-sitting, dog sitting
Marie	Home * (moved around different rooms, e.g. kitchen, lounge)	Evenings, weekends, national holidays
	Travelling for work (airplane)	On the way to meetings, when not reading documents etc. for work
	Workplace (office)	Occasionally printed out notes and assignments in the office
Mark	Workplace (office, desk)	Mainly after work and outside work hours
	Home *	Evenings, weekends, national holidays
Rachel	Home * (study)	Evenings, weekends, national holidays
Rose	Home * (different rooms, e.g. kitchen, lounge, but never the bedroom)	Evenings, weekends, Fridays, national holidays
	Travelling (train)	When travelling around the country for work
	On holiday abroad (boat)	While friends were visiting different places, Rose decided to stay behind at the accommodation so she could study
Sue	Home * (initially main room and bedroom, later in new house various rooms, e.g. study, "quiet room", lounge, kitchen)	Days, evenings, weekends but only when writing, national holidays
	On holiday abroad	Time agreed with partner, so that partner could take children to do something elsewhere

Fitting It All In: negotiating time and space

I now draw on interviewees' narratives, and the survey data, to consider how learners talked about fitting in their studies. Rather than "anytime, anywhere", as will be highlighted, learners were constantly negotiating time and space for their studies around their multiple roles and responsibilities. In particular, the majority of respondents talked about work as the major demand on their time and space, noting the difficulties of negotiating time and space for studying around the greedy institution of the workplace. Nevertheless, while paid work often dominated these learners' narratives, caring and domestic responsibilities also clearly ran through learners' stories – particularly women's stories – of combining multiple

responsibilities and negotiating time and space for studying. As will be explored, it could be particularly – although not exclusively – difficult for the small number of mostly women respondents with young children to negotiate time and space for studying around both the greedy institutions of the workplace and the home.

A lack of time for study remains the major concern for these learners in combining their home life, paid work and studies. Thus, "[t]rying to fit it all in" (SR 8) was a common narrative, with adding studying to an already busy life consistently seen as one of the major difficulties. Ian, for example, stated that:

The hardest thing is balancing. Getting a degree when you're doing it full-time is a piece of cake. Now when I get up and I leave for work at 6.45am and I don't get back till 7 or 8pm at night, it's actually fitting in all the reading around the work, as well as, like everyone else here, we have other things that we do outside of work as well. So it's what I expected, the hardest thing is fitting it in, and something has to go...Challenging fitting it in around doing full-time work where I am travelling away and working long hours, probably like a lot of people on the courses, is the hardest thing. (Ian)

Notably, this was in contrast to an initial perception among interviewees that distance learning gave some kind of temporal and spatial malleability. This is perhaps a reflection of the malleability promised by the idea of "anywhere, anytime" learning. Thus, interviewees often talked in early interviews about being able to "squeeze it in" (Jim): squeezing time and shaping their lives in order to fit studying in between habitual activities and commitments and, as will be noted in the next section, not needing to give up any of these activities. However, many of the learners found it difficult to combine their studies with their other roles and responsibilities. This is not surprising, since undertaking continued education is generally an additional activity in adult learners' lives, rather than replacing another activity (Blaxter *et al*, 1997). Equally, this reflects the findings of other research on adults engaging in general continuing education (e.g. Blaxter and Tight, 1994; Blaxter *et al*, 1997) and distance learning (e.g. Bhalalusesa, 2001; Evans, 1994; von Prümmer, 1994, 2000). Most often, it became a case of "juggling" (Janet, Marie) and "fitting it in" (Ian) when and where possible, while trying desperately to "keep it all together" (Marie) and stay "sane" (Jane).

Previous studies of distance learning such as Von Prümmer (2000) and Lyall and MacNamara (2000) found that men were most concerned about a lack of time due to paid work commitments and that women were most concerned about a lack of time due to family and caring responsibilities. Von Prümmer (2000) argued that this was the case due to women's double or triple burden. Lyall and MacNamara (2000: 112) stated that this was because most men worked full-time while women tended to work part-time or casually and, indeed, because some women had decided to do this in order to 'dedicate more time to their studies'. However, the majority of my respondents, women and men, worked full-time. Reflecting the importance of paid work in these learners' lives, the central commitment around which the majority of respondents talked or wrote about fitting their studies, and the primary demand on their time and space, was their job.

A number of learners commented that the time demands of work included not only the length of the working day, often well beyond the idea of 9-5, but also the travel to, from and as part of their job. Indeed, one survey respondent commented that it was hard to fit in their studies when their "work and travelling usually takes 12 hours/day" (SR 37). Moreover, changes at work such as colleagues leaving, or a change in job role and workplace, could leave learners struggling to study at all. As Mark noted after moving to a new job, in his original workplace he could fit some study in within work hours. However, his new job was much busier and involved working out of the office for up to 3 days a week. Mark was particularly pressed at work just at the time when Mark was meant to be writing his dissertation, meaning his studies were put aside for a few months:

I found it quite difficult, because as I say at work, it's been extremely busy past couple of months and I didn't even think about my dissertation. Consciously or subconsciously really. So I didn't actually do anything. And er-pretty much of a case really at that stage where I was just going home and wanting to forget about doing things so I didn't actually do anything. So it has been difficult because of the pressures at work, and hopefully that's subsided a little bit now and hopefully I'll be able to motor on with it now.
(Mark)

Indeed, many learners commented that it could be difficult to focus on studying after a long day at work. For example, reflecting the negotiation of time and space both around work and home life, one woman wrote that it was difficult to study after work and had impacted on her relationship with her partner:

Work long hours and find it difficult to motivate myself to study when I return home. Very supportive partner who does most domestic chores, but feel I have little time for him...Try to motivate myself to study weekday evenings so free time at weekends can be devoted to personal life (SR 5)

Jane, Jim and Janet all found that pressures at work left them unable to find time to study, with all three eventually deferring. Deferral involved putting their studies on hold for up to 6 months and joining the timetable of the subsequent group of students who had signed up for the programme. So if they started in April, they would move to join the October group and their assignments would be due 6 months later than originally planned. During this time, they were not allowed to study their materials or to write their assignments. This was not an easy decision to make. Jane remarked, for example, that she was "being driven mad by work" and this had been compounded by various other expected and unexpected demands on her time and space at home. As one of the small number of women with young children, the heavy demands of paid work were combined with caring for a young family. While Jane was enjoying her studies, the anxiety caused by combining the multiple demands of both work and home meant that she opted to defer her studies in favour of "life". She particularly looked forward to spending time in the garden, which she often commented was therapeutic:

I did defer module 3 as I think I told you, I was getting a lot of anxiety symptoms.....the pace of life with work 're-shaping', course, children, elderly mother breaking her ankle.....it all adds up! Any way, I voted for life and have spent more time doing the garden, instead of doing module 3. I feel a lot better now. (Jane, email)

Reflecting the triple demands and greedy institutions of home, work and studies (Edwards, 1993), when work and caring responsibilities become very demanding, leaving little time and space that can be claimed for any other major activity,

studying also becomes a burden. Studying also demands time and space and, at these times, only serves to create an added source of guilt and stress. However, studying is the one demand out of these that can most easily shift or defer (Edwards, 1993; Morrison, 1992), particularly since it is difficult to opt out of caring and domestic or paid work demands. Indeed, the survey found that 19% of respondents had deferred their studies for similar reasons, with respondents mentioning heavy demands and changes at work, relationship problems and, as one woman wrote, "too much happening at home" (SR 35).

Deferring their studies is intended to give learners time and space in order to come through, or sort out, whatever has led them to get behind in their studies or, indeed, to reassess whether they should carry on. However, this did not mean that other events, or unexpected situations, did not crop up again once learners returned to their studies. When Jane returned to her studies, for example, she continued to struggle to find time and space for studying around the continued demands and pressures of her paid work (supposedly part-time but often far more) and family life. Similarly, when Jim returned to his studies, although it was still hard to find time, he was beginning to enjoy studying again. However, he soon started to find himself "over-stretched" at work again and then his wife fell seriously ill. Reflecting the care responsibilities that some men also have, Jim found it hard to focus on his studies and had little time between working long hours and caring for his wife. As a result, Jim deferred his studies again some months later. As he emphasised, to defer again had not been an easy decision, but he felt he had little choice. Since the things going on in his work and personal life could not be deferred, it was either that he gave in under the pressure, or his studies gave way:

It really was the only way out...my boss has retained me because I'm the only person with the facility to do the sort of critical analysis and do the writing and then throw things down on paper...There isn't anybody else in the division that could do it...So there was no way of deferring that. There was no way of deferring um- the- my wife's situation. I couldn't really defer the odd rehearsal with the band, because if you don't rehearse with bands, they tend to shut down on you. And in any case, that's my major recreation...so at that point, the degree just had to give. Because- I was getting into a spiral of- "I've got too much to do, I've got no breathing space". The performance in

everything was going down...It was getting towards being a panic measure. "Something's got to give, and if this doesn't give it's gonna be me! So just do it!" <laughing>. (Jim)

Both of these narratives reflect the greedy nature of work and home/caring. While these responsibilities are a necessary and inevitable part of life, they leave little time and space for learners to fit their studies in. It is worth noting here that while writers such as Edwards (1993) talk about the family as a greedy institution, I refer here to the home as a greedy institution. As with the case of Jim and others, I found that learners did not have to have a family in order to have caring and domestic responsibilities, or to experience the home as a greedy institution in terms of time and space.

We might stop here and ask why, in light of the already heavy demands on their time and space, these individuals take on the additional burden of studying? As explored in the last chapter, however, there is a considerable drive to engage in this continued development, both from employers and wider discourses of lifelong learning and employability, but also from individuals themselves.

The dominant focus on paid work in many of my respondents' narratives and responses probably reflects the group of learners that I researched. Nevertheless, as already seen, this does not lessen the importance of recognising the impact of caring and domestic responsibilities on learners' time and space for studying. Indeed, narratives of these caring and domestic responsibilities, while not necessarily foregrounded by the learners themselves, are intricately interwoven with narrative of the demands of work. Indeed, for a small group of learners who had young children, and particularly women, the demands of parenting, caring and domestic work, coupled with the demands of full- or part-time paid work, could leave little time and space for studying, and potentially create added tensions. This reflects the findings of other studies of women students in higher education (e.g. Edwards, 1993; Merrill, 1999; Pascall and Cox, 1993; von Prümmer, 2000). As one woman wrote in the survey, the main conflict she experienced between her studies

and other aspects of her life was that she found it very hard to get space and time for her studies in the home and around the family:

Do not have study, takes ages to settle down as I always seem to have some job to do. Family interrupt etc. (SR 27)

She wrote that her way of coping with this was to "Scream and shout! – not practical I know and the family usually wins" (SR 27).

Indeed, von Prümmer (2000: 70) notes that many women distance learners do not have a study space in the home that is 'taboo' for other family members. In the interviews this was certainly the case for Sue in the early stages of her studies. Sue and family were waiting for their new house to be built, and had moved to a small house, with little private space, in the meantime. When I visited Sue at this time we went to a hotel as Sue explained that she did not feel comfortable conducting the interview in her home. The downstairs part of the house was effectively one large room and, because her mother-in-law was visiting, there was nowhere in the house to talk in private. Likewise, when it came to studying, she noted:

So I'm looking forward to being in the new house, having space. To having my own study, to having my own computer. It will make a huge difference, you know? And having shelves where I can actually put all my materials. Because at the moment everything's in a *box*. I carry this wicker box. Carry this wicker box around with me everywhere with all the materials in <laughing> very difficult. No, it doesn't lend itself really. (Sue)

Sue found it quite hard not to be able to lay her materials, notes and books out without worrying that they would be disturbed when the children were playing. When they finally moved to the new house, it was clear that Sue was overjoyed to have a study, but also to have a large house in which she could move around with her reading, spending time studying in different spaces. von Prümmer (2000: 70) argues that, in having responsibility for organising their own learning environment and a 'conducive environment' in which to study, 'those students who have sufficient resources and sufficient power to establish their own and undisputed space' are favoured. Von Prümmer (2000) reflects on the gendered access to

resources, but we might equally note the classed access to resources such as a large home.

Sue and Jane both had primary responsibility for the care of their young children, whilst Mark had primary responsibility for the care of his young child for 3 to 4 days a week, as he had separated from his partner. When talking about their studies, and how they coped with fitting everything in, paid work was a particularly important and often dominant element of Jane's and Mark's narratives. This was perhaps less the case for Sue who was working part-time but did not seem to have as demanding and greedy a job as Jane. However, Jane and Sue talked far more about their caring and domestic responsibilities as a central part of their lives than Mark, who tended to focus heavily on his work commitments. When Mark spoke about his caring commitments, he talked about them very briefly and pragmatically as something that he just had to accept and to work around. When I tried to explore this further, noting that his situation was unusual, he emphasised that he was "no different to anyone else". However, his situation actually meant that for half of the week he was positioned, as a primary carer, in a role typically fulfilled by women. Mark did note in our first interview that it was difficult to combine his different roles and responsibilities, and that this was his main concern in negotiating his time and space for study. Nevertheless, despite further questioning, he tended to talk little about this relatively little in subsequent interviews. As we can see in the following quote, for half of the week caring was an issue, and for half of the week it was not:

I've got a daughter who I look after 50% of the time, I'm separated from my wife, so I look after her 3 or 4 days a week. So that's the biggest one really. And I was advised against doing this, but I thought there's never going to be a right time so get on with it. So that's the biggest press. That's very difficult really.

AR: So how have you tended to organise that?

By being organised, I've got to be organised anyway. So the days when I don't have her, it's not an issue, and I can get on with things. And obviously some days I don't want to do anything. Other days it's- while she's there she's got to have, she's only two, so she's got to have priority before she goes to bed.

But I find doing it at work away from distractions a big help, and um- leaving it till the end of the day. (Mark)

In this way, Mark was able to distance himself from his caring responsibilities for half of the week, whilst Jane and Sue were constantly negotiating their time and space for studying around their parenting roles. Indeed, this time and space are both physical and mental. As the home continues to be a place of work for many women and some men (Deem, 1986), domestic and caring responsibilities remain in their mind when in the home (Edwards, 1993). Deem (1986) notes, for example, that while the kitchen may be a location in which women can claim personal space and time, this space remains a constant reminder of domestic work. Indeed, this is not only the case for women with children. Beth, for example, noted in her learning journal that she was not able to study straight through, since she:

...had a couple of interruptions. One phone call, and had to help Liam make our bed – Sunday 2week ritual! (Beth, learning journal)

Indeed, she often remarked that, when studying at home, she was reminded of domestic chores, such as the clothes that needed ironing and that were stacked next to her in the spare room as she read her course materials. Reflecting on Prümmer's (2000) argument that women find it harder to claim time and space in the home, Sue stated:

I have to say I think it's harder for a woman to do a distance learning programme than a man. Um I know I've spoken to one or two of the others on the programme. The woman tends to run the house and look after the children. The man comes home from work and spends *a little bit* of quality time with the children and then they don't have to think about getting anything else done. They don't have to think about getting the- "Oh I've got the shopping to do and the ironing to do". That kind of thing. (Sue)

Studies such as Edwards (1993), Pascall and Cox (1993) and von Prümmer (2000) focus on women learners in HE, while Merrill (1999) focused primarily on women. For this reason it could be argued that men's experiences of domesticity and caring were overlooked. However, my interviews and survey, as well as additional stories gathered through interviews and discussions with other women and men distance

learners, highlighted that women talked and wrote far more about the impact of their caring and domestic roles. Men rarely, if ever, mentioned domestic chores such as cleaning, cooking and washing. As with other studies (e.g. Scott, 1985), it may be that men did not see these as relevant to their experiences as learners, thus omitting them from their responses. This perhaps reflects the view that men can more easily compartmentalise the so-called public and private spheres of their lives, due to the ability to distance themselves from caring and domestic roles in a way that is difficult, if not socially unacceptable, for women. It is also very likely that this pattern in responses reflects the material reality that women are left with the primary responsibility for care and domestic work (Pilcher, 1999).

Nevertheless, engaging in their studies could also challenge gendered expectations around these roles. As Sue noted, while she would "be terribly house proud normally", the time required in order to study meant that it was just not possible to spend the same amount of time on domestic tasks after she took up her studies. Moreover, enjoying her studies meant that her domestic tasks, as opposed to her family, became less of a priority in her life than an intellectual challenge and aiming for a more challenging job:

Well obviously I mean my family is sort of a big priority. My home *used to be* high on the agenda, but it's taken a back seat while I'm doing this programme now <laughing>. I don't- I don't notice so much that the carpet needs hovering or whatever, as I used to. Um- but- it's sort of *having* done this programme, it's brought home to me as well, how important it is to me to- be *stimulated* intellectually. Erm- and- sort of- with everything that I'm doing now, I want to be able to use that to go in to sort of do um- more work that's going to be sort of *challenging* for me. You know? Um- now that I have more confidence in myself and my ability, I want to go on to make use of what I've studied now, and put it to good effect really. (Sue)

It can be hard to distance ourselves from the home as a domestic space, since it often acts as a reflection of our goodness, respectability and femininity (e.g. Laurie *et al*, 1999). However, this change of priorities for Sue reflects the constant negotiation and contingency of gendered roles and responsibilities. Rather than being fixed, the expectations made of women and carers, both by themselves and

others, can change over time and in interaction with other roles. As Deem (1986) found when exploring women's time and space for leisure, women who were engaged in paid employment outside of the home appeared to find it easier to claim time and space for themselves; although this was often limited time and space due to their dual demands of paid and unpaid work. Again, this time and space is both physical and mental: in wanting to have more challenge in her paid work, Sue was able to distance herself to some extent from the demands, and her own high expectations, of domestic work in the home.

Managing and Claiming Time and Space for Studying

This section now considers the idea of time management, noting the way in which learners draw on this idea when talking about how they combine and manage their multiple responsibilities. However, this is an individualising discourse, which overlooks the multiple and socially constituted nature of time and space. Thus, the idea of time management overlooks the fact that learners' time – and space – is not individualised and linear, but is multiply-layered, socially constituted and, therefore, subject to the demands of a range of roles and responsibilities. I further note some of the difficulty that learners can have in claiming time and space for their studies.

The ability to manage time effectively is seen as one of the keys to success in distance learning, and 'poor time management' as one of the main reasons for student dropout in distance learning (Sherry, 1996). Indeed, this idea of effectively managing time is mirrored in learners' stories. As one survey respondent noted, he coped with his lack of time, active social life and fatigue after "long working days [by]...balancing each one against the other through good time management" (SR 23). Reflecting Foucaultian notions of self-discipline (Edwards and Usher, 2000), interviewees regularly talked about their personal need to be organised, motivated and disciplined in order to manage their time and to succeed. Thus Beth remarked that she had learned to "monitor myself and regulate myself a bit", and Sue felt that although she was already an organised person before taking up her studies, she had perhaps learned to multi-task:

I haven't *learned* to be organised because I've always *been* organised. So I can't say...that's been sort of a- a plus...I've possibly learned to juggle more balls at the same time. Whereas in the past I was probably somebody who liked to concentrate on one thing at a time...now, I can have sort of a few things going at the same time. (Sue)

Indeed, when asking interviewees to reflect back on how they had felt they might fit their studies into their lives before starting the course, or how they now did in practice, some thought that how they managed their work time and space would transfer to managing their studies. Rachel, for example, explained that she would organise her studies in the same way that she organised working at home for her job. She told me that her study room was already set up at home, due to working at home twice a week and very often outside office hours. Rachel went on to explain how she managed to combine working at home and looking after her daughter:

So I've got everything at home and then I try to- that's where I study as well. What I've done with my daughter, she has her own desk in my office, so she does whatever she's doing whilst I'm doing whatever I'm doing. I mean she's actually very good, I have to say, if I say to her, "I've got to do something", she'll go and entertain herself for a couple of hours. But that's where I- you know I do it. (Rachel)

This focus on time management individualises time for study, clearly reflecting the linear understanding of clock time, with its schedules, timetables, deadlines and ability to be divided up into neat chunks of time and dedicated to discreet tasks. This contrasts with the disorganised, multi-tasking, and multiply layered nature of social and other times (Adam, 1990, 1995, 1998; Davies, 1990). Indeed, As one survey respondent remarked, he did "not [even have] enough time, to time manage" (SR 41). As Morrison (1992) notes in her study of part-time learners, a male respondent commented that women learners who had left the course, or did not attend regularly, were unable to manage their time effectively, whereas:

...he organised 'a daily/weekly plan with the aid of a personal organiser' (Morrison, 1992: 55).

Thus, while learners' time is socially constituted and lived, subject to a range of power relations, it is treated as individualised, decontextualised and, thus, easily organised. This overlooks the impact of a heavy workload (Burgess, 1992), and the power relations involved in access to and control over time (Adam, 1990, 1995; Davies, 1990; Morrison, 1992). Being able to manage time is not simply about the timetabling of events or, as Morrison (1992) notes, keeping an electronic diary, as might be suggested by linear readings of time. Managing time - and space, which is overlooked in this concept - is mental, physical, social, emotional, ideological and material. It is not simply a case of claiming time and space, for example, but of coping with the realities of what space we have access to, and can make claims over. von Prümmer compares distance learners' time and space to the privatised time and space of "teleworkers":

...the home workers/students are thus in charge of their own success or failure. Any conflicts between working/studying and the private sphere with its family commitments have nothing to do with the employer/DTU [distance teaching university] and must be solved independently by the teleworkers/distance students. (von Prümmer, 2000: 55)

Indeed, distance learning requires learners to negotiate time and space for studying within locations that are usually devoted to other home- or work-related activities, and in which study-related activities are unfamiliar (Kazmer, 2000). This is perhaps not entirely different for other learners, particularly part-time learners who are also expected to study for a considerable amount of time at home (Morrison, 1992). Nevertheless, we could argue that for learners who attend lectures or seminars on-campus, there are particular times and spaces that are timetabled in, but claiming a dedicated, protected time and space is down to the constant negotiation of the distance learners themselves. This seems to relate to ideas of absence and presence, although as will be explored in Chapter 5, these learners do not necessarily see this apparent absence from the spaces and times of the university as negative.

Equally not recognised in an individualised focus on learners' need to manage time and space for study, is the impact that unexpected events can have on learners' ability to manage. Coping with the unexpected could mean that learners suddenly

had little or no time and space in their lives for their studies. Rose, for example, told me that she had planned to fit in some extra time for her studies during the Christmas holidays. However, she was distressed when things did not go to plan. Her daughter returned home with flu, and then they both fell ill. As she reflected:

It's only when those unexpected things, you know, crop up. That makes it actually very difficult to try and get the work done. (Rose)

These unexpected events could also leave learners wondering whether to continue with their studies. Experiences such as bereavement, for example, could inevitably have a considerable impact on learners' mental and physical time and space for studying. Early on in her studies Liz, for example, lost a close friend very unexpectedly. She wondered whether to continue studying, particularly as she felt she was falling a long way behind other learners. However, finding that others were in a similar situation, and with encouragement from her partner, she decided to continue:

So at the moment, I am behind. And I *feel* very behind. The only difference with that is that I've met people today that are at the same stage as me...Because they too have got their own personal problems or agendas, or work or what have you. That's made me feel a little bit better because- I was coming here with the view to make or break this weekend, or this particular module is going to make or break. (Liz)

Liz's story highlights the importance of contact with other learners, and the benefit of being able to share stories about the difficulties they faced in combining the different elements of their lives. Contact with other learners is considered further in Chapter 5.

Indeed, learners could be surprised at how hard it was to claim, let alone manage, time and space for their studies. Reflecting the gendered nature of demands on, and ability to claim, time and space in the home and in "personal" time outside work, Rachel noted that the difficulty was in claiming time that was totally for herself and not given over to others:

What's quite interesting though is- is what's been difficult is- making the time. Not because it's the study in itself, but it's because it's something for *you*, so it's, in a way- it sounds a bit daft, but it's like making time for a hairdresser appointment. It's the same principle. So that, you know- funnily enough, that kind of thing has been more of a problem than sitting down and getting to grips with it and enjoying it. (Rachel)

As Deem (1986) notes, in order to claim time in the home, it is important that women's activities and claims on time are recognised as legitimate. Indeed, from Rachel's case, it is clear that this legitimacy needs to be recognised not only by those living with women learners, and by friends, but also by the learners themselves. Thus, while Rachel was divorced and lived alone with her child, needing to find time and space for her studies in among the demands of her work and social life, had led Rachel to reassess "how I use my time" and particularly "personal time more than my work time". This was quite a different story to that of Ian. When asked with whom he had talked about his decision to study on this distance learning programme, Ian stated that, other than his managers at work, he had not really talked to anyone, although he had told his girlfriend "this is what I'm doing". In other words, there was no doubt as to the importance of Ian's claim over time and space to study.

Taking up their studies, and perceiving this need to time manage, could lead learners to reassess their time use. Interestingly, Rachel explained that this was the second time she had experienced a major shift in relation to how she organised and understood her time. The first had been on becoming a mother, when she made a radical change in how she used her time; shifting her focus from paid work to meeting her daughter's needs and expectations:

It was a major shift for me after I had my child, to- drawing a line across my work time because I used to just work *all hours*. Um- so that was a huge shift for me, saying "Right, you know, when I pick her up from school then she has expectations of my time and therefore I can't do very much maybe until she's gone to bed". So that was a real mental thing. And what I find, the irony is, is you're probably just as productive because I think you focus much better. (Rachel)

The second time, prompted by undertaking her distance learning studies, involved asking what she did with the time she had, and how she could better protect and claim her time:

So now for me there's been this other shift, which is "Well I *have* personal time, it doesn't *feel* like a lot, but I have time in the evenings, or at weekends or on public holidays, what am I doing with it?". And what was quite interesting, what I found was, again, that time was being drained away by other people's priorities and I wasn't doing any- study or otherwise, I didn't seem to be doing anything *I* wanted to do. So what I did was I sat down and said, "Now hang on a minute, you know, I've got to look at this". (Rachel)

Trying to better manage her time and space for studying, as well as for things such as sorting out her finances, Rachel decided to "get some ground rules", which included having at least one weekend a month at home alone with her daughter and declining friends' invitations.

Likewise, Mark started to ask what he had spent his time doing before he started his studies. Rather than a feeling of not being able to claim his time and space, he was surprised to find that he was able to build his studies into his routine, commenting that he "must have wasted...[his time] and slobbed about a lot". Nevertheless, he noted that some of the things that he had given up in order to study included watching television, going to the gym and taking part in sports at the weekend. Indeed, he now sometimes found it "hard to relax" because he felt he should "be doing something". In reflecting on their time use, these learners are drawing upon the linear and rational readings of time and space which focus on efficiency, output and productivity, whilst overlooking the multiple and necessary layers of emotional, mental, social and physical time and space. As Jim noted, however, it is physically and mentally important to be able to relax and to have time for different things. Indeed, he noted his own resistance to the way in which a timetable-focused approach to time management made him feel that necessary personal and recuperative time and space was being wasted:

What I was giving up, was the time when I wasn't doing anything. Which is probably an issue in itself...But it's just the time where you stop and watch TV for the sake of it. Or the time you find you're reading newspapers or odd books. Or just listening to music and not doing anything. *That* was the time that got eaten into. So I was very hot on the diary, I was very hot on the um-

well I've gotten all the "to do" lists. And that period of down time- Now, I think a proportion of everybody's down time is wasted. It's probably more than they actually need for rest and recuperation. Um it's just really difficult to- I mean I hated it when I first started using the PMI organiser system [Jim had purchased a palmtop organiser], because it's "All this time is wasted!". No it isn't. Because you've got to allow yourself time to put yourself back together. (Jim)

Equally, just as privatising the organisation of studying leaves the learner to sort out any potential conflict with their home/work life (von Prümmer, 2000), so individualising time and space denies any responsibility on the part of the learning provider or employers, particularly if they have encouraged employees to undertake continuing education and seek to benefit from it, for ensuring that learners have time and space in which to study. It appears to be important that employers do give this time and space for studying and perhaps even more so for women learners who often experience different demands on their time and space at home. This now brings me to consider the idea of the "right time" in people's lives in which to engage in studies.

The Right Time: having the room to study

Narratives of the right time in which to engage in continuing education were common within the interviews. As one survey respondent noted, they were able to maintain their time spent studying each week:

Because I am at a stage in life where there is room to study. If circumstances changed this might affect my studies. (SR 12)

As will now be explored, stories of the right time tended to focus around two themes. On the one hand, there were stories of having time and space due to being single, not having children, having older children, or living alone. On the other hand, there were stories of just getting on with something that had been considered for a long time, since there was never going to be a right time.

Learners who were single, had no children and/or lived alone, seemed to feel that this meant they would have time and space for their studies. For example, one

respondent commented that since he was a "Single person", he had "plenty of free time!" to study (SR 6). Similarly, one woman commented, "I live on my own. I have no problem allocating my time" (SR 53). Among the interviewees, Beth felt that she was in a space and time in her life when she had room to study since, although she lived with her partner, she was young, did not yet have children, and was focusing on her career:

And now, at the age I'm at, no responsibility, no children, no, you know-
<long silence> I know my job inside out, so that's fine. I mean I've not got a
pressurised job. So I thought, that's the reason why I wanted to do it. (Beth)

Janet, too, remarked that since she lived alone and had not had children, she had "time to do it". She saw herself as lucky in this respect, comparing herself with a male friend who had also wanted to study on this distance learning programme, but had decided not to because of his family and other commitments.

Being single, not having children, having older children, and/or living alone, however, did not necessarily mean that learners had visibly more time or space for their studies than others. This was certainly clear when talking to Beth and Janet. Beth, for example, studied partly at the workplace and partly at home, although the home tended to be her primary location of study overall. When reading her course materials, Beth often studied in her shared office at work, fitting in some reading before work hours, at lunchtime and after work. However, during weekends and when writing assignments and her dissertation, this was done primarily at home. Beth did not have a specific study space at home. For example, her learning journal mapped her times and spaces of studying at home over a number of days. One Sunday Beth studied "On the floor in the lounge with laptop" from 6.30pm-8.30pm and then 11.00pm-11.30pm. She spent the time reading and taking notes from the course materials. She also studied in a spare room upstairs, which, as noted above, contained washing waiting to be ironed, her partners' computer and records, and boxes that were being stored. She often commented that it was not an ideal space, since she had to squeeze the laptop and her books into a relatively small and cluttered space. Indeed, Beth tended to study in her workplace during the

week because she found it easier to get time and space alone, and without distraction, than when studying at home.

Beth's partner also had things that he liked to do on his own at home, such as listening to music, watching television or doing things on his computer, meaning she could claim some study time and space at home. Nevertheless, she had to negotiate borrowing a laptop computer from work, so that she did not have to use her partner's computer and so "we don't fight over that". Also she felt guilty when she had been studying upstairs in the spare room for a long time, and her partner wanted her to spend some time with him:

But he's pretty good. Sometimes he'll be like "Come downstairs, don't read that anymore" <in kind of pleading little voice, and laughing> Do you know what I mean? Or sometimes like if I have a barnie with him, I take all my reading and I go upstairs. (Beth)

Equally, she felt guilty about not spending time with her parents and siblings, and with her friends. The spare room where Beth often studied had little space for her books and the computer, but she liked to study in different spaces around the house, with some spaces being where she liked to read, and some where she liked to write notes or assignments. Sometimes when she felt frustrated trying to study at home, however, she would get into her car and drive to a popular parking spot nearby where she could sit and read her course materials in the car.

Or sometimes if I'm like in a real bad mood, I go off in my car. I've got this place...where I read. I bet everyone thinks "She's a weirdo" <laughing>...And sometimes like you're in the car, and if it's like nice day, it's nice because you're kind of out but you're in. It's weird. I find it quite- concentrated, reading in the car and taking all my notes <laughing>. (Beth)

This is a clear example of someone trying to claim a time and space that is totally for themselves and undisturbed. Even without children, learners' time and space in the home remains subject to negotiation around relationships, roles and responsibilities. Sometimes the only way to avoid this negotiation is to be somewhere else, whether that is at work before anyone else is there, or in the car on your own. Thus, Beth made time and space for her studies by changing her normal

sleeping and travelling routines and studying in her office when she could be there alone. This highlights, again, that single people who do not have children still experience a range of demands on their time and space, and are still combining multiple roles and responsibilities.

Similarly in the case of Janet, when we talked about her life and how she organised her studies, it was clear that she had little time and space for her studies. As we can see in the following quote, while Janet claims to have time because she is single, the fact that her job required her to live away from home all week, living at her workplace, meant that her time was constantly available, even after hours:

No I'm on my own so I'm ok...so I've got time to do it, and I don't mind a bit of work at weekends. Especially if I'm a bit behind. You have every intention of doing something during the week and then this happens and that happens, the other happens. And you've taken your disk from home to work and you take the same one back to do some more. It is difficult juggling it. But at least you've got the time to do it.

AR: So do you find you're able to fit it in around working here? Like you said, you bring it with the intention of doing something but it doesn't always work out.

It depends if you're on course or not. At the moment I'm running a three week course and this is the third week. Which is the most important week for students really and we have...meetings in the evening and sometimes they'll just say "Is it okay if we have a...meeting?". "Yeah, ok, fine, we'll have one". And so the hour that you'd put aside, is no more. (Janet)

Thus, Janet was only really able to study at weekends when she returned home. This could also be difficult, however, since although she did not have any close family members to visit, it was at the weekends that she would see her friends at home. However, later in her studies, Janet got a new job back at her original workplace. This meant she could live at home and she felt that this would make it a little easier to combine her home life, paid work and studies, particularly since she had had to repeatedly ask for extra time for her second assignment and did not want to repeat this situation. Indeed, Janet reflected that she had "been away from home for nearly 4 years". As with many of these learners' stories, this again reflects the

greedy nature of work and how this competes with the greedy nature of home and studies.

Marie had wanted to study for many years, but she now felt that she had more time and space in her life to study. Indeed, having waited till her children finished their exams and went to university before she started her own studies, she reflected that she "just never had the circumstances or the time". When I asked if she felt she now had space in her life to study, Marie reflected that perhaps she had felt there was a gap in her life when her children had moved out of home and her mothering role had changed:

It was for me a gap I suppose, yes...I did find that. It was something where at the weekends if there was nobody there, um- that you *had* to be- well you had to- you had to come home and read the books and it gave you a bit of focus. So yes, there was a certain gap as well, you know. Because I'm a single parent and have been for 7 years so, I suppose, you know, it kind of- gets you over this- this- this- problem of "What will I do now when I don't have to run around making dinners anymore?". So that was there as well, yes. (Marie)

Nevertheless, while women (in particular) and men may find they have more leisure time when they no longer have younger children to care for (Deem, 1986), or do not have children, they perhaps inevitably maintain a number of caring and domestic roles and responsibilities. Indeed, a number of women learners commented, both in the survey and interviews, that family-oriented times such as Christmas, Easter, birthdays and school holidays could be particularly busy, demanding their time and space. Thus, while Marie's children had both recently left home, they lived close by and she could still be called upon to do various things. Equally, when they came home for a weekend or for a special occasion, she accepted that she would get little studying done. Likewise, Rose commented that although her daughter had moved out of home, she often came back to get some motherly attention: having a favourite meal cooked for her and having her clothes washed; being cared for when she was ill. Such stories reflect the nurturing, care-giving and domestic roles that women and mothers maintain throughout their lives, even after their children are grown. Men may also share some of these roles, however these were not evident in this research. Nevertheless, both Marie and Rose

remarked that since they lived more or less alone, they were able to study in different spaces around the house, and they clearly liked to be able to do this.

Notably, what might have appeared to be spare time and space in which to study, was not necessarily free time in reality or practice. We have already seen that unexpected events could impact heavily on learners' physical and mental time and space, but also that learners could underestimate the amount of activities in which they were involved. Indeed, a second theme in the stories of the "right time" to study, was of just getting on and starting the course, because there was never going to be a right time. Rachel, for example, noted that while she worked long hours in her paid employment, and had a young child to care for, deciding finally to engage in continued education was about making a statement of the importance of her own needs and interests:

...something else always came up. And then I'd started to think a little bit more about it, and the two things came together if you like, I felt a *need* to know more than I do, and I thought "Well, it would be good to do something". So for *once* the two things came together, which is probably why I looked more seriously than I might have done so in the past. I had quite a dilemma about not *what* to study, but *when* to start the course. And I thought, "Shall I put it off?" and then I thought "No...the course is for *me*", and I'm sure a lot of- particularly women have said to you, you know, their own needs are pretty low on the list of priorities and that's very much the case. So I thought "No". Because if I put it off it was somehow saying something about what my- what I wanted and where I saw that. (Rachel)

Similarly, Mark felt that his work pressures and, more recently, caring for his young child had always put him off studying. Reflecting the strong feeling of a need to study, and the expectation that we should be able to successfully manage adding studying to our multiple responsibilities, Mark decided that letting these responsibilities stop him was about making excuses:

I've been thinking about doing this for years, I've been doing something for 5 years and I've always had an excuse not to do it. So I was set in my mind what I wanted to do...

AR: And before you started the course, did you ever sort of daydream about how you would add studying to the other things that you do in your life?

Yeah, that's why I put it off I think. Um- I always thought "Well I've got to do this and I've got to do that" and there's always outside things isn't there. So this is probably the best time. And I- I- I'm fed up of hearing excuses really, so I just thought to myself "I'll just get on and do it", 'cos otherwise I would never have done it and regretted it I think as well. I thought "Take the plunge". (Mark)

Rachel and Mark, among others, both felt that there was little point waiting to start their studies, since the right time was unlikely to arrive, with the demands of their work and caring commitments clearly remaining a constant in their lives. Mark noted the various demands that other learners had around work and home, seeing himself as no different to these other learners. Indeed, we could argue that the increasing number of adult learners in higher education, and the growing dominance of women students in many areas, means that it is increasingly seen as the norm, rather than as other to the traditional idea of a young, single, on-campus student, to combine multiple roles of paid, care and domestic work with higher education.

Conclusions

While distance learning might appear, on the surface, to enable learners to study anywhere and anytime, this chapter has explored some of the multiple and power-laden times and spaces in which these learners seek to negotiate time and space for study, highlighting that these are socially rather than individually constituted and negotiated. Thus, I have explored: the locations of studying – with home being the primary location; how learners talk about fitting in their studies around the time and space demands of their multiple roles and responsibilities; the problematic idea of managing time, and the more relevant idea of claiming time and space; and the time in which learners felt they had room in their life to study and which, in fact, is usually not free or spare time and space.

While narratives of negotiating around the greedy institution of paid work were dominant in many of the learners' stories, I have highlighted that interwoven into

these stories are the simultaneous demands of negotiating around the institution of the home, and around caring and domestic responsibilities. Indeed, it could be particularly difficult for women with young children to claim time and space at home for their studies. Nevertheless, the home can be a greedy institution for many learners. We have also seen that women and men who do not have a family to care for can also have considerable caring responsibilities, including expectations as a partner, and the majority of women talked about the heavy demands of domestic chores. While these illustrate many of the gendered power relations around time and space in the home, they also begin to highlight some of the commonalities and shared experiences between women and men of paid work, in particular, and of caring. This illustrates that we cannot dichotomise the time and space of caring and the home as "women's time and space", and the workplace as "men's time and space". Nevertheless, we do need to recognise that while caring and domestic work are neither "naturally" women's work nor the markers of "women's time", from the evidence presented within the lives of these respondents, women are still left with the primary responsibility for these roles and, as such, face greater difficulties in claiming time and space at home for studying. While my research supports the findings of others studies of women distance learners in this respect, it also adds to the complexity of our understanding of different learners' times and spaces for learning and the commonalities as well as differences between women and men distance learners.

In the following chapter I will now build on this discussion to consider some of the ways in which absence from the time and space of the educational institution is seen as an opportunity, not only to study but, particularly for women, to claim some time and space in the home.

Chapter 5

The Opportunities of Absence: Time and space to study

As noted in Chapter 2, physical presence within, or absence from, the specific space and time of the educational institution is central to what is recognised as distance education. Drawing on learners' narratives and data from the survey, this chapter explores further the idea of absence, which is seen as typifying distance learners' experience of their studies. Some of the debates in the literature are summarised, before outlining the issues covered within the subsequent three sections of this chapter.

Physically, the university campus has been the 'dominant spatial form of higher education...since the Middle Ages' (Cornford and Pollock, 2002: 172), despite various changes in terms of who is admitted and what is studied. As Cornford and Pollock note:

Throughout its history, most people with a university education have 'gone to' a university and they have gone to it with others. (Cornford and Pollock, 2002: 172)

The apparent absence involved in distance learning means that many regard it as an inferior and marginalised form of education (Kirby, 1993). Considered as a substitute for the real thing (Gilliard, 1993), distance learning is not only seen as an 'emergency measure' (Peters, 1998: 218), but as a 'pathetic and almost contemptible activity' (Holmberg, 1989: 20) for those who cannot 'avail themselves of the traditional forms' (Garrison and Shale, 1990: x). Hierarchical conceptions of time, space, presence and absence clearly underpin such views of distance education; positioning distance learning and learners as other in relation to "traditional", "real", on-campus, face-to-face education. Indeed, the inference of learners' failure to avail themselves of an on-campus course, is that learners are responsible for ensuring their access to education, rather than the "traditional"

system's failure to make learning available to them. Thus, distance learning provision is rejected as a "second best" approach and as lacking, rather than both recognising the disadvantages in distance learning and the power relations surrounding attendance of, and participation in, on-campus education. This position reflects the wider social perception that presence is not only linked to having power, but, as Fuery maintains, is seen as central to our very being:

Presence is valued, held up, invested with power...Presence, it appears, constructs, connects, holds together...is the determining feature of being, subjectivity, ideology, textuality, systems of speech and writing, presentation and representation...Presence is, non-presence is not. Such is the construction of presence, even absence, its taxonomic opposite, is seen as a formation and formulation of it...The force of this relational schema has led to the conceptual figuring of absence and absences only because there is presence, or a register of presence, to begin with. (Fuery, 1995: 1)

Thus, to be present within a certain time and space is simply to be, while being absent from it is almost to not exist; although as Fuery argues, rather than a binary of being/not being, absence can be a potential state of presence that is '*held-in-readiness*' (Fuery, 1995: 2 original emphasis).

As Massey (1994) argues, however, presence with specific spaces and times does not guarantee our access to a more authentic experience, since this would require that spaces and times were static, rather than fluid, multiple and relational. Moreover, Massey maintains that identities related to certain spaces (e.g. as a learner) are not bounded by those spaces, but extend and exist beyond them and are interrelated with multiple social and economic relations, and with time. Indeed, this apparent absence from the times and spaces of the educational institution – or being present as learners in other spaces and times – is seen by some as an opportunity. For example, it is seen as challenging traditional educational approaches and widening access to learning by: creating independence and self-reliance (Arnold, 1999); being learner-centred and responsive to individual needs (Nicoll, 1997; O'Rourke, 2002); being accessible worldwide, particularly to women and those in developing countries whose opportunities would otherwise have been

limited (Najeeba Matool and Bakker, 1997; Sharmer, 2000); and providing a form of liberation from the constraints of the institution (O'Rourke, 1999). Indeed, Dibiase argues that:

...while connections with real, live places may be sacrificed, vital new connections with real, live students who might otherwise not be served should more than compensate. (Dibiase, 2000: 134)

Cook (1989) reflects on her own experience of this absence as an educator. While on a teaching exchange in China, Cook (1989) temporarily became an "external" tutor for a women's studies course that she taught in Australia. Contrary to her worries of being culturally and geographically distanced from her Australia-based "external" students whilst in China, she found her absence from the educational institution a liberating experience. Indeed, Cook reflects that a space was opened up for 'spontaneous' dialogue (1989: 30) and a level of self-direction that was unseen among previous groups of learners. Her initial view of, and resistance to, distance education, was thus replaced by a sense of increased opportunities:

...distance education, with all of its pre-thought study 'guides', standardized pacing, written-not-spoken, desire to 'contact', with 'control' implicit....What had seemed to run counter to my group learning/hands-on methodologies, had opened rather than closed possibilities: by dissociating 'I' from the institution Jackie Cook had empowered all the other 'I's into operation. (Cook, 1989: 36-37)

These outcomes were both desired elements of the women's studies programme and contrary to her own beliefs, and recommendations from the literature, about the experience of the 'underprivileged', isolated distance student (Cook, 1989: 28-32). Indeed, Jarvis (2001: 89-90) asserts that since distance learning materials are 'in the public sphere', the learning that takes place is not entirely under the control of the 'centre' (e.g. the institution). As such, he sees the separation of tutors and learners 'in both time and space' as leading to '...a possibility of a greater opportunity for the learners to develop their own autonomous action than in face-to-face learning' (Jarvis, 2001: 89-90).

This chapter is now organised in three sections. In section one, I highlight how these distance learners primarily talked about this absence from the spaces and times of the educational institution as an opportunity. Rather than creating a sense of otherness, it is most often seen as giving them a sense of control, allowing space and time in which to take up their studies alongside demanding jobs and caring roles. Notably, learners' narratives highlight that distance learning is seen as the "norm" for professionals engaging in continuing professional development.

Section two then considers the impact of the lack of presence in the times and spaces of the university, on communication with other learners. This was one area about which learners occasionally talked about missing out. As will be highlighted, however, learners generally did not take up the opportunities within their programme of distance learning to engage with other learners, due to the time required.

In section three, building further on the discussion in Chapter 4, I explore the sense of space and time that learners talked about gaining through this apparent absence. Focusing on the narratives of four of my women respondents, I explore the narrative of engaging in distance learning, and being absent from the spaces and times of the university, as being about claiming a space and time for themselves. For some this was a space and time away from negative past experiences of education, and for others this was a space and time in the home away from domestic and caring roles. This time and space is important, since it can provide an opportunity to take up alternative roles and identities. Such narratives partly reflect the wider literature on women learners and higher education. Two important issues will be noted, however. Firstly, this finding is contrary to some of the research on women and distance learning, which has argued that this form of learning is less suitable for women, since they need connection, dialogue and communication. Secondly, while in the women and higher education literature the university is often seen as a place to escape to away from the home, it is specifically within the home that these women distance learners are seeking to find time and space for

themselves. I explore the narratives the women draw on in claiming time and space in the "private" sphere of the home.

Absence as Opportunity: learning outside the institutional space and time

These learners primarily saw engaging in a distance learning programme, as opposed to on-campus education, as an opportunity. Rather than creating a sense of absence or otherness in relation to the idea of a "real education", distance learning was seen both in the survey and the interviews as facilitating access to education by not requiring their physical presence. One survey respondent, for example, noted that there was:

No need to live near university
Not tied to attendance at university/college (SR 14)

Similarly, another wrote that their expectation of distance learning was:

To be able to complete an academic course without having to attend a university either full or part time. (SR 23)

One respondent felt that distance learning was "[c]onvenient for staying at home to study" (SR 33). For another, their geographical location meant that not having to be present in the university was important, although studying on their own was their main priority:

I did not want to travel to classes - living on an island makes this very time consuming. Most importantly I prefer studying alone. (SR 42)

In the interviews, Rachel felt that distance learning offered opportunities not previously available. This was particularly as she was seconded abroad, but wanted to do a course in a specific subject area and with a British university:

...it's great. The fact that there was the opportunity which you just never used to have, makes a huge difference. Particularly for someone like me. I mean if you're here, then there's lots of things

you can do part-time or evening classes or whatever. But when you're all that distance away, you're a bit stuck aren't you? So it's great. (Rachel)

Indeed, Rachel had been disappointed to find that many of the courses she looked at were not what she considered as proper distance learning, since it was important to her that the programme would not require her attendance:

One of the things I did notice when I was looking for a course, there aren't a lot of *truly* distance learning courses. When you look, you think "Oh that's interesting". When you start to look at it, it says well "You're required to come for a week every term" or whatever. And you start to cross...them out. (Rachel)

In this way, absence is not perceived as problematic or as alienating, but as an opportunity to do something she wants and needs to do. Janet, too, felt that her busy and unpredictable schedule meant that learning at a distance was the only possibility for her to study. Reflecting some of the views of distance learning noted in Chapters 2 and 4, being absent from the institutional space is equated with controlling her own time:

...you cannot really attend anywhere from here because you're so busy with the...[job]. And you're involved early morning till sometimes late evening. And that would have been an impossibility for you to be released to attend college, university or whatever. So distance learning is a lot *better*...but you've got time to do it, in *your own* time, at home, at weekends and stuff like that. (Janet)

Jim was seeking a course in a particular area of interest, but he also wanted to minimise the need for attendance due to his health. This led him to consider distance learning:

I was looking for a course that built on my (original) personnel and management services background, while not automatically requiring me to go to residential or tutorials (I have health issues here). (Jim, email)

Jim chose this programme despite having poor past experiences of studying on correspondence courses. On this occasion, as well as the topic, two further aspects motivated him. Firstly, his need to upgrade his qualifications in order to ensure his future employability and, secondly, the physical demand and fatigue of trying to attend lectures after work:

I have tried correspondence courses in the past with little success, but given the practical constraints it was either this or just wait for the P45 and take my chances. (Jim, email)

And having said all that, a long day is very tiring and trying to make the relevant lecture after hours is not good for the attention. (I know I have health issues and I'm sure I'm not the only one). (Jim, email)

...if I had to go up to [university in the nearest city]...two nights a week, or three nights a month, I wouldn't be able to do it. I would get to the end of the day and go "No, I *really* don't feel like it". [distance learning]...is an ideal solution, it's excellent for people like me. I mean because of the epilepsy, I'm registered disabled. Um- because of the health issues and the no need for a seminar...[this university] is better for me than [another distance learning institution that required presence at seminars]. (Jim)

Since for Jim it was not really possible to be present at the university, he accepted the absence involved in distance learning, due to the opportunity it afforded him. Reflecting the individual "timescape" (Adam, 1998) of learners' lives, this decision also reflected where Jim was in his life and career. Although part of him would have liked to re-live his undergraduate days, browsing in the university library, he could not afford to give up work to study full-time:

On balance, having all this stuff to read suits me fine - oddly, my only regret is that I have to squeeze it in around work, as I could cheerfully browse the libraries for a couple of years longer. I suspect it comes from too many clubs and side-interests at University...and I'm still trying to catch up on all the learning I should have done then... (Jim, email)

Likewise for Rose, part- or full-time attendance at a university was seen as unrealistic, due to where she was in her life and career. Indeed, at the time when she

was deciding whether to apply to study on this programme, the fact that this was a distance learning programme was an important factor in her decision, since she "needed to do it". Rose had enjoyed being a full-time undergraduate, and sometimes reminisced about those times, although she reflected that it had been hard as a mature student with a young child to support. However, Rose stated that she was in a different time in her life now, meaning that she needed to keep working to "pay the bills" and "keep a roof over my head". Financially and practically, in terms of travel and stress, it would not have been possible to study any other way:

...as I said, full-time would have been difficult because of financial reasons. Erm- and trying to do it part-time and going up to the university to attend lectures, I think it would have been too much, I wouldn't have done it actually. I don't think I would have done it.
(Rose)

Mark admitted that he was a little "envious" of someone he knew who was studying full-time, attending lectures and spending time in the university. On reflection, however, Mark felt he was happier working and studying at the same time, since the practical link between his learning and work was important to him. Moreover, he particularly "liked the approach of distance learning", since he would not need to get time off work to travel to the institution.

Ian, too, saw distance learning as particularly appropriate for him due to long work hours and his lack of need for presence and interaction with others:

...the work I- I do, generally it's a full-time job anyway. Um- and therefore with that all the problems you get with having to fit things in as we were saying earlier. So it was always likely to be self-study...it had to be distance learning, self-study, because I would never get time off work um- and I'm the sort of person who can cope with studying on his own. So, you know, [this learning provider] was always sort of- at the top of the pile shall we say. (Ian)

Ian had been made redundant just days before this interview, so it is understandable that he spoke about the need to balance his full-time job with his

studies. Nevertheless, he still felt this way even after searching for a new full-time job for some months and doing temporary, contract work. Indeed, he often talked about being personally suited to distance learning. Ian described himself as "the sort of person that's happy to study alone", having previously studied for his professional qualifications by distance learning. While he felt that not everyone would be able to cope with distance learning, since "a lot of people need to interact with others", he often stressed that he was "basically a fairly self-contained individual", a "fairly disciplined person" and that "a lot of it probably comes from me as an individual and my personality". When asked if he would recommend distance learning to other people, he contrasts his own approach with his partner's needs as a learner:

My partner on the other hand is someone who just wouldn't get on with it. She does need the interaction. Therefore, when she's done a-a year or so ago, a...Diploma, that was very much an evening class, um- yes, assignments to do, but very much practically-based. So that she is gonna' be more of an activist, whereas I'm perhaps gonna' be more of a- a- theorist-reflector. So I think you- I would need to have- understand people's preferred ways of learning. (Ian)

Ian draws here on learning styles discourses (e.g. see: Honey and Mumford, 1982 for discussion of activist, theorist, reflector, pragmatist styles) and on the psychological discourses of connection and detachment (e.g. see: Gilligan, 1982/1993), to characterise himself as the ideal distance learner. Thus he presents himself as the right kind of person to deal with absence from the spaces of the institution and the absence of interaction with other learners. Again, absence is seen as an opportunity rather than a sense of otherness, or as lacking authenticity when compared with physical presence in an on-campus programme of studies.

There was a sense in which learners felt they gained a level of control through this absence from the spaces and times of the university, although as we saw in Chapter 4, times and spaces of learning are subject to a range of power and social relations, and to negotiations around other roles and responsibilities. Nevertheless, the

narrative of control due to absence from the physical spaces and times of the institution is evident for the vast majority of these learners. In response to the questionnaire survey, for example, when asked what their expectations of learning at a distance were, one respondent simply wrote, "Control" (SR 12), while other examples include:

I could control and study what I wanted at my own pace and style. (SR 57)

Freedom to study at a time which fitted in with my work and family. (SR 42)

As Nowotny (1994), writing about time and work, states, having a sense of control over our own time is important to our sense of autonomy and meaning, and to our levels of stress; although we have seen that many of these learners' narratives also reflect individuals' lack of control over time and space in the face of the greedy nature of work and the home.

As has already been touched upon, the absence of distance learning was seen as an opportunity since there was often no other way in which these individuals felt they could study. In this way, absence from the times and spaces of the university is simply about access to education. All of the learners interviewed felt there was no other way to fit their studies in alongside their multiple roles and responsibilities. Similar views were expressed in the survey, for example:

It was the only way that I could study considering all my other commitments. (SR 31)

As Forbes notes:

...as students combine education with the rest of life, making a little room among family, career, travel and other commitments, the topic of distance education is often raised as the answer. (Forbes, 2000)

My survey and interview respondents, including those in Hong Kong and Malta, consistently emphasised that the fact that this was distance learning was central to their choice of programme. As Jane noted:

I did look at others, but the distance learning angle of this, as well as what's being offered in the curriculum, was very attractive really
(Jane)

Moreover, when interviewees were asked whether, in an ideal world, they would like to study full- or part-time, they consistently stated that they preferred to study by distance learning. In most cases, as illustrated, distance learning was seen as the only realistic option in the face of their multiple roles and responsibilities. Indeed, some respondents commented that, had they needed to be present, attending lectures and studying on-campus, they would either not have considered studying at all, or they would have given up their studies when they had encountered problems. Jim, for example, noted:

If I had had the same health/work problems on a traditional course I would probably have had to drop out by now, and the demands of a 9-5 are bad enough already. (Jim, email)

In many cases, the tradition of presence in the times and spaces of the university is seen as restrictive and out-dated: blocking rather than widening access to education. Thus the vast majority of respondents were positive about not needing to be present within the institution, seeing distance learning as an opportunity and, moreover, as a choice. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that choice is often mediated by an individual's gender, class, responsibilities and so on (Hughes, 2002b). Indeed, respondents' decisions to study on this distance learning programme were fairly constrained by paid work and caring roles, and by the area of study. Learners often noted that the course they wanted was only offered by distance learning, thus limiting their options in that sense. Mark, for example, stated that he chose this programme due to the topic, remarking that "there weren't that many about", while Rachel remarked that "particularly if you've got a subject focus, there's only a handful of things". Equally, Sue stated:

...it's the subject matter that I wanted to cover...I don't know whether there is anyone here that offers that subject on a part-time basis. (Sue)

Importantly, Mark noted that distance learning was seen as more "feasible" by and for employers, particularly since it meant that workers were not studying in the time of the workplace, and/or did not need to be absent from the workplace to attend a university. Here we can see that absence from the workplace has equally negative connotations as absence from the educational institution, even though these learners are studying on a professionally oriented programme. Indeed, when reflecting on his motivations for studying on a distance learning programme, after reading the articles that I wrote for the learning provider's newsletter, Jim remarked that it was hard to get time off work and, as such, to be visibly absent from the workplace:

It is also increasingly difficult to get many organisations to give you the relevant time off for study, particularly as you get into higher level (read higher visibility) roles. (Jim, email)

Indeed, employee's time is highly valuable to employers (Adam, 1995, 2001). Ian noted that, while there may be financing for further professional development, many employees would have to study in their own time, meaning that distance learning was preferable:

And *also* with the modern workplace, means that it's relatively cheap for a company to er- throw £2000 at me for a year's study, but to give me some time off work? No, no, it actually starts to cost a lot more. Um- so having worked in a number of major companies, they're- they're *normally* happier for people to study by distance learning methods. Quite happy to throw a bit of money at the problem, but it tends to be I think people's *time* that is more valuable to an employer...most *good* companies will fund studies, but it's gonna' be self-study, residential weekends, you know, not huge amounts of time off work, highly unlikely, I would have thought, in a lot of- in the majority of companies I would think. (Ian)

In this way, absence from the times and spaces of the educational institution is preferable to absence from the workplace. Moreover, distance learning is seen as the norm for employees wanting to study and develop themselves.

As one survey respondent stated:

I didn't purposefully choose a DL course. This particular course most closely met my learning/ development requirements.

Allow flexibility - to fit in with work/ home commitments. (SR 11)

Indeed, 44% of survey respondents had studied by distance learning before, with one respondent saying this was the third time they had studied by distance learning.

In this section, we have seen that the wish and/or need to study, combined with lack of time due to the various demands on learners' work and home lives, meant that distance learning was often the only means through which they felt they could study for their Masters. Moreover, these factors also mean that being a distance learner is seen as normal, rather than as "other", and that both learner and employer see distance learning as an opportunity. We could argue that this norm also reflects the fact that these distance learners are studying for a Master programme, returning to higher education to study at postgraduate level rather than entering it for the first time. However, as a post-experience programme, learners do not necessarily require a degree in order to gain entry, since entry can be based on professional experience. Indeed, as will be explored in Chapter 6, a number of these learners had not studied in a university before.

Lacking Presence: the impact on contact with other learners

While the distance learners overwhelmingly saw absence from the times and spaces of the institution as an opportunity, one aspect that learners occasionally reflected on was the impact of the lack of physical presence on their contact with other learners on the Masters programme. Contact with administrative staff and course tutors was important to many of the learners, and occurred to differing degrees depending on the individual learner. I focus here on contact with learners since this was one aspect that some respondents did talk about missing out on. A lack of communication and interaction with tutors and other learners is seen as one of the major shortcomings of distance learning (Sumner, 2000). My respondents did not

necessarily talk about this lower level of contact in terms of creating a sense of otherness and exclusion, however. We have already seen that distance learning was often the only opportunity for these individuals to engage in education. It is perhaps for this reason that learners tended to be pragmatic about this lower level of contact with other course members. Rather than a simple binary of absent and present, inside and outside, respondents' stories highlighted the complexity and sometimes contradiction of their position as distance learners. This section tries to demonstrate some of this complexity and contradiction. For example, there were times when the level of contact was lower than learners felt they needed. However, despite their wish to have more contact, respondents often prioritised the other demands in their lives, and their wish to "get on" with their studies, over having contact with other learners and with tutors.

Having started their studies, some learners began to reflect that they perhaps needed more contact with other learners than they had foreseen. For example, since Ian saw himself as suited to distance learning, he was quite surprised to find that contact with other learners at the teaching days enhanced his learning, giving him a chance to "bounce ideas off of" other learners, as well as tutors. Rather than feeling he was missing out, however, he saw this as an additional source of learning that he had not necessarily expected to find useful. Jane, on the other hand, noted early on that she particularly benefited from being able to talk through her ideas and learning. Reflecting some of the arguments in the literature around "social learning" (e.g. von Prümmer, 1994, 2000; Kirkup and von Prümmer, 1990), Jane argued that this need for "group thinking" was a particular issue for women; this idea will be considered further in the next section. Having reflected on the many positive aspects of distance learning, Jane began to think that being able to talk through her ideas was going to be more difficult in a distance learning programme. Jane noted her need for contact on the one hand, and the problem of fitting this in around a busy life:

I was just going to say that having started the course, I think there are now downsides to the whole distance learning thing...That is much clearer to me now, that actually I am going to miss *a lot* by not having regular opportunities to have seminar groups with other people and so on. And I do learn very much more *effectively* by debating my thoughts. I need to verbalise them. I find myself talking to myself as I'm reading and so on, because I just have this need to have speech basically! And so just being on my own is- I am questioning how much I am getting out of this course as opposed to how much I'd get out of a course that I went to and spoke with people about it. You know, kind of have regular meetings.

AR: And have you made any links with say study groups or other learners at all?

I think the word study group is a bit misleading really. I mean it's very difficult. I mean we're all so spread. How on earth can you get hold of a study *group*? I've made contact with a person who lives <nearby> and we'd very much like to do *more* of meeting up and talking about things. But both she and I are completely stretched in our lifestyles, so that's proved very difficult. (Jane)

In our second interview, Jane again stressed that this was a "really big gap" for her but that, due to lack of time, she had not really pursued making more contact with other learners. Jane had talked to one learner via email, and knew of a number of other people she might contact, but had not followed this up as she was too busy:

...I mean I know there is the possibility of, you know, contacting other students and setting up meetings and all the rest of it, but I just don't know how to do that really <laughing>. I don't know how to fit that in as well. (Jane)

In Mark's case, although he did not have time to attend a full- or part-time course, he found that being with other learners and tutors at the teaching days was very important in organising his ideas and planning his assignments. This seems to highlight that contact with others can also be important for men learners. Indeed, Mark noted that it was important to be able to "have a moan and worrying" with other learners in a similar situation. Like Jane, Mark reflected that when signing up for a distance learning programme he had perhaps overlooked his need to talk with others about his learning. For this reason, the teaching days became very important because "you're getting that face-to-face contact". Mark and five other learners

were keen to maintain contact after meeting at their first teaching weekend (in July 2001 when we also conducted our first interview). Indeed, at the start of the programme, the learning provider gave students a list of all people starting the programme, with contact details where the learners had given permission for these to be distributed. The learners were also given information about how to form study groups and encouraged to get in touch with people living nearby. Mark was sceptical about study groups, however, due to the problem of being located in different parts of the country, the time involved, and what he would get out of that kind of contact with other learners:

...a study group, I'd not be that sure, if we spent 3 hours discussing something, we could just discuss something and I could walk away and think well my time is precious, and that's 3 hours I could have spent doing something at work really. So I've got mixed views on that, I'm not sure. (Mark)

Nevertheless, Mark's group followed the advice to stay in touch by telephone and email, planning to meet up at the next teaching session. Mark found this particularly useful in the early stages of his studies. For example, when finding a reading in the course materials hard to read, being able to email another learner to discuss this difficulty provided assurance and helped them realise that they were not alone in this:

But that was useful at first. Certainly on the first one, if people were struggling and you'd get an e-mail like "I read such an article on such and such and I didn't understand a word of it!". And that was quite reassuring really, to get that feedback. Erm- probably needed it more at the beginning really, but I think just to er- you know, just- find out that other people were struggling and things like that, because you're obviously very isolated. That was quite useful at the beginning. Probably less now. But it would occasionally be useful... (Mark)

Over time, the combination of having built up his confidence, being very busy, and having many of the group defer their studies, meant this contact became less important to Mark. So he was able to be quite pragmatic when contact between the

group members "pretty much dissipated". Despite having visited the university a handful of times, Mark felt that he did have a sense of identity within, and an allegiance to, the university. Nevertheless, he also reflected that, while it was not vital, remaining part of a specific group of learners till the end of his studies might have meant, "I'd have known that I had more identity" within the university. Here we can see that the learner identity is not entirely linked to presence, but may potentially be heightened by it.

When we look at the learners' narratives around the opportunities of absence, and the impact on contact with others, both the complexity of this apparent absence, and the contradictions in learners' positions, are evident. Thus, like all of the learners, they felt that distance learning was their best option, since they did not want to be bound by the times and spaces of the institution; with lectures and seminars to attend and, for Jane, having the "huge scrabble" to get books from the library when studying part-time. Equally, while Jane and Mark wished they had more contact with other learners, being busy in other areas of their lives meant that, like most learners, they did not necessarily seek out this contact or make full use of the different means of contact that were built into their distance learning programme.

Indeed, while respondents might wish that they had more contact with other learners, they tended not to make use of the various means of contacting other learners that were offered by the learning provider. The survey found that 55% of learners had had no contact with other learners. When explored further in the interviews, the tendency not to seek out contact with other learners was primarily explained as being down to the time that would be required. For the 45% of survey respondents who had been in touch with other learners, they primarily communicated by email, although a small number had set up study groups and/or used the telephone. One respondent was part of a group that occasionally booked facilities at the university to hold group discussions.

An additional source of contact that was facilitated by the institution, but was very under-utilised, was access to a dedicated computer-mediated communication (CMC) system, within which learners could: communicate online with other learners all over the world; take part in general or themed online discussions with tutors and learners; and communicate one-to-one with tutors. This kind of contact with a diverse group of learners from around the world is seen as one of the benefits of distance learning (Sherry, 1996). Learners received a guidance pack with their course materials on how to use the online communication software, and were introduced to it at the teaching days. Previous research on the use of this CMC-based system (Raddon, 1999) showed that while this was popular with those learners and tutors making use of the system, very few learners actually made use of the facility. Again, this current research found that not one of my interview respondents made use of this facility, while only 4 survey respondents had made any use of it. Again, interviewees generally talked about not making use of the CMC facility due to the time required. For Jane and Rose, lack of time was combined with general lack of confidence with computers. Many early studies of online learning found that women tended to have lower confidence in their computing skills than men, however, Gunn *et al* (2003) found that the difference between women's and men's confidence with the new technologies used in computer-supported learning has decreased considerably over the last decade. While I have not focused on online learning in my own research, due to the minor role it plays in the learners' experiences, this lack of confidence would seem to need considering for all learners. Jane, for example, felt that using email and making use of online forms of contact provided by the institution would fill the gap in communication for her. Her lack of confidence with technology, however, meant she was "terrified frankly" and found this approach "alien". Jane recognised that she would need to overcome her fear of technology before she was able to make use of these forms of contact. As she noted:

...at some point I'm going to have to take the leap and try to do that.
(Jane)

Nevertheless, while she wished to have more contact with other learners, and to try these different forms of contact, Jane also felt that she had little time to make contact as she was busy with her job and her home life. Thus, while she did use email to keep in touch with one or two learners, she did not pursue trying to use the CMC facility. Similarly, Rose felt her lack of confidence with computers was a barrier. Rose remarked that, towards the end of her studies, there was a training session with library staff on the different things they could do on the computer. This session was valuable for Rose, but she felt it was "too late" for her, as this would have helped her early on in her studies:

Because if we're distance learning students, the computer becomes, you know, part of your communication. Yeah? I'm not all that computer literate, but I think that process would have been- better, you know, *right at the beginning*. (Rose)

Following this, Rose was reminded about the CMC facilities for the distance learners when she received an email from the university about newly-developed facilities. Rose realised that this would have been "*really* helpful", but felt it was too late in her studies to try and find out how to use it.

They've just e-mailed us this thing about the blackboard or something? And you know, I'm just thinking, "Oh God" and I tried to click on it, but I didn't know how to- you know what I mean?...And for people like myself who's not really conversant with the computer I can do certain things, but not *enough* to- to um be able to communicate. So yeah, I think I would have liked that. (Rose)

Indeed, Rose initially had worked hard to initiate telephone contact with other learners in her group. While she did not feel a specific need to be in the same space and time as other learners, she did want to make a connection with at least one other learner with whom she could discuss the programme and experiences. Rose found one like-minded person, who later deferred their studies. Seeing how another group of learners were working together at a teaching day made Rose particularly aware of what she was missing out on:

...I didn't find anyone in my year very um- useful to sort of you know, try to work with. As I said, I tried phoning a few people, and either their numbers weren't right or I couldn't get through or, you know, I don't know. Maybe it was just the time frame. And yet when you go there, you see one year- I think it was the year that came in after us, they're *really* strong as a group of people. Because I've sat with them at lunch, they were having, you know, having lunch, and um- you know, talking to them and you see that they're helping each other out. And they've got um- groups going that they work together. And I thought "Ooh, I *really* miss that". (Rose)

Like Jane and Mark, Rose's narratives showed her conflicting feelings about presence and absence as a distance learner. On the one hand, Rose enjoyed her studies and appreciated the ability to study without needing to attend the campus, particularly when she was ill and could not travel even short distances. Indeed, at this time, her studies became a way of carrying on with life when she was too ill to work or go out. Rose did not feel she had time or space in her life to attend a part- or full-time course. On the other hand, while she enjoyed the teaching days that she attended, being at the university for those days made her wonder if she should have studied on-campus:

But I did like going down there, so I found that useful. And meeting lots of different types of people. And talking to the lecturers. And getting ideas from other people. And I quite have enjoyed that. And I thought maybe- I should have done it taught? So that I was there in- you know? (Rose)

In the end, the difficulty of finding other students to work with meant, however, that Rose felt that she would not study by distance learning again; although she did not want to study an academic course again at all, despite pressures from her profession. Similarly, Jim was generally very positive about studying at a distance from the institution, since he did not feel he had time for, or could physically cope with, attending lectures or seminars at an institution nearer home. Nevertheless, having encountered a number of problems and having deferred his studies twice, he reflected that while the course administrators and the tutors had been very

supportive, it might have helped to be able to pop in and talk things through as and when he needed with tutors or other learners:

I've found their support system to be very, very good. Um- *but*- <gasps> I mean there is a but. It doesn't substitute for the talking to somebody else who's going through it and sort of mutually whingeing. And it doesn't really substitute for- <puffs> I mean it sounds- <silence> it sounds petty but- but one of the good things at university was that if you were up a tree, you could go to somebody and just talk something out. That *really* isn't easy if you're on the phone and you're e-mailing. Because you've got to have- you've got to have done so much pre-thinking yourself, to know what you're talking about. And well-. Let us- again, let us not whinge. I chose to do this, I wasn't pressed ganged into it... And my health situation- my *own* health situation, is such that it wouldn't be in my best interests to go charging off to <the university> for 36 hours intensive. That would batter me somewhat. (Jim)

As for all of these learners, how this lower level of contact with other learners was viewed could depend on where they were in their studies and their lives. Later on in their studies, with growing confidence and more certainty about what was required of them as students, respondents would often remark that they felt less need for contact with others. On the other hand, if they had encountered problems, they may also have come to feel that they had missed out on that contact. Nevertheless, overall these distance learners tended not to take up the different forms of communication with other learners that were offered to them. This was often due to the perception that it took time to contact other people, although for two learners this was also linked to their lack of confidence with the software being used for computer-mediated communication.

Studying at home: women claiming space and time

This section returns to explore the perception of absence as an opportunity, focusing on women respondents' narratives of finding space and time for themselves through this absence from the university. While such narratives were not evident in interviews with men learners, they raised some particularly important issues for women distance learners. Two key narratives of gaining time and space

for the self will be looked at here. Firstly, it was an important experience for some learners to be able to study alone, at home, and away from the times and spaces of the institution. This absence from the educational institution was seen as giving them an opportunity to focus on what they wanted to learn and achieve, and to develop confidence and a sense of identity as a learner away from negative past experiences of education. Secondly, studying at home enabled some women to claim a space and time for themselves specifically in the home. Rather than feeling a need to hide their studying when at home, lest they be seen as neglecting their roles (as in Edwards, 1993), two women, in particular, actively made claim to their time and space in the home for studying. This is politically important given that, as particularly noted in Chapters 2 and 4, women's time and space in the home can be very limited due to the heavy demands of partners, family, caring and domestic work. Before highlighting these two key narratives, however, I briefly consider some of the readings in the literature of presence and absence in relation to women distance learners.

The wider literature on women learners and higher education has highlighted that, for many women, becoming a university student and being present in the spaces of the university can involve finding intellectual and physical space and time away from caring and domestic responsibilities (e.g. Cox and Pascall, 1993; Edwards, 1993; Quinn, 2003). Despite tensions around combining multiple roles and the perceived selfishness of women spending time on studying rather than caring for others (Edwards, 1993), many women find being present in the spaces and times of the university a "haven" from other aspects of their lives (Quinn, 2003). On the other hand, research on women and distance learning has questioned the suitability of this kind of learning experience for women due to the absence and isolation it can involve. As noted in Chapter 2, Grace (1994: 13) argues that women distance learners' absence from the university exacerbates women's lack of recognition, visibility and isolation in the masculinist academy. If we consider that the number of women in higher education in the UK and other "developed" countries is now higher than ever (Quinn, 2003), we could suggest that women are experiencing less

invisibility and exclusion in higher education. There does, however, remain a certain lack of visibility and physical presence for all distance learners, potentially making it difficult to bring about change in a male-dominated culture. However, as noted, presence within a specific place is not a guarantee of a truer or more authentic experience (Massey, 1994). Moreover, this presence does not necessarily lead to change. On the one hand, as Ozga and Deem (2000: 152) note, while there are many tensions around women's changing positions in tertiary education, women's presence in the higher ranks of the academy 'at least indicates the possibility' of working towards some kind of transformation. On the other hand, Quinn (2003: 59) reflects that the increased presence of women as learners and academics in HE has not led to great change in the "malestream" curriculum. Indeed, as von Prümmer (2000) states, despite the growing number of women distance learners at the German distance institution she researched, the male gender is used to describe the "normal" distance learner:

...the FeU demonstrates that the typical distance student - '*der* typische Fernstudent' – is male. '*Die* Fernstudentin' – the female distance student – must consider herself subsumed under the generic, i.e. male terminology. But many women feel that being subsumed also means being subordinated. A more sensitive use of the language would definitely be more women-friendly. (von Prümmer, 2000: 11)

Moreover, von Prümmer regarded the curriculum used in many of the distance learning courses as male-biased, although many of the learners were women. It could be argued that it is easier for this lack of recognition to occur when women are not present and physically visible within the institution, seemingly making it easier to accept the male as universal and neutral (Smith, 1988). However, it also seems that presence is not necessarily a guaranteed force for change.

Another way in which forms of presence and absence have been considered in women's experiences of distance learning, is in terms of women's learning styles. In a comparison of students in the UK and Germany, drawing on the ideas of connection and detachment explored in the research on women's ways of knowing

(e.g. Belenky et al, 1986; Gilligan, 1982/1993), Kirkup and von Prümmer (1990: 30) argue that interaction is particularly vital for women's learning. They state that '...[t]he female "independent" learner does not enjoy or benefit from isolation'. As von Prümmer (2000) later reflects on their work:

Our research has shown that women tend to prefer the learning style which has been termed 'social learning', and in this our results bear out feminist theories on the learning styles of women, especially mature students (see Gilligan 1982; Belenky *et al.* 1986; Kirkup and von Prümmer 1990, 1992). The emphasis placed by the FeU [the FernUniversität, Germany] on the self-sufficient and isolated learner has the effect of creating a hostile environment for women distance students who are more interested than men in elements of social interaction, in contacts with tutors and other students, and in cooperation with other learners. (von Prümmer, 2000: 8-9)

However, the stories of my women respondents differ in a number of ways from the above views of presence in the university as a haven, and absence from the university as isolating and hostile. Distance learning, and studying away from the institution, was seen by a number of women as enabling them to claim a time and space entirely for themselves. For example, one woman survey respondent who had a particularly demanding job, wrote that her initial expectation of distance learning was:

That I would be able to dedicate more time to myself and studies (SR 63)

Unfortunately her expectation was not fulfilled, since long working hours and travel for work meant that she did not get this time:

No my job really takes up a lot of time particularly as I have a standard 3-4 hour journey each day and additional long travel while at work...My job is not fixed in working times - many appointments can be 100s of miles away - I have to carry out work for my organisation during the journey so its impossible to use that time for study. (SR 63)

Nevertheless, several women interviewees also seemed to feel that by studying at a distance, and being absent from the spaces and times of the university, they were or would be able to claim some time and space for themselves. Reflecting arguments

in the feminist literature (e.g. Deem, 1986; Tamboukou, 2003), both Rachel and Rose noted that it was important for women generally to be able to claim time and space for themselves, since they so often put others' needs and others' demands on their time and space, before caring for themselves; failing to recognise the legitimacy and importance of their own needs and desires. Rose reflected that women were socialised to put others' claims on time and space before their own, leading them to feel guilty when they put themselves first. It is worth noting that while studying was one way of putting themselves first, Rose also noted that women learners needed to have time beyond their studies, in which to care for themselves physically and mentally:

...if you do put yourself into the equation, then you feel guilty. Because you think "God, I should be picking up and reading my materials, or dissertation, or I should be reading something- my book or going to do my literature review or you know?...I don't know if that's part of our- our upbringing? You know, it's probably a psychological thing. You know, you don't look at yourself as- important at that time...And we do it in our studies as well. And then we do get the opportunity, if we are going to look at ourselves, then we feel guilty. And I think we've got to sort of um- re-educate ourselves, you know, to think "Yes, I am important. I do need- it is important for me to have this time. Even if it's a day. I'm not going to do my studies today. Because I'm gonna listen to music. Or I'm gonna go and have a swim. Or I'm gonna meet up with my girlfriend and have a cup of tea, or go to the cinema or do something. In this busy period or phase, I'm just gonna leave it. And I think that's important, for people- especially mature women that are going to do studies, should try and remember to leave some time out for themselves. Yeah? Put that as part of their timetable. (Rose)

I will now focus on the experiences of four of my women respondents. Beth and Marie saw this absence from the spaces and times of the university as giving them space and time to learn and develop their knowledge away from past negative experiences of education. For Jane and Sue, this was a way of claiming a space and time for themselves in the home outside of caring and domestic roles.

In the case of Beth and Marie, there seems to be a reversal of the idea of the university as a haven. Rather, it is in being absent from the times and spaces of the university, studying alone at home, that a sense of space and time for the self is either sought or found. For Beth and Marie, this absence from the university was about finding a time and space in which to explore the study materials and issues that were important to them without challenge, and without re-living past negative experiences of education. Beth had a very low self-esteem in terms of her educational ability. After being successful on a Diploma by distance learning, her confidence grew and she decided to study for a Masters, hoping that she might move into a better career:

I've always- at school I didn't really do very well and I thought I was really thick. Not thick, but you know, I wasn't really interested in learning then and now I've proved to myself by doing the Diploma that I could get onto the Masters and you think, yeah, why not? I think it's hilarious <laughing> that I'm doing a Masters! (Beth)

Getting onto the MSc programme and doing well studying on her own meant that Beth started to see herself as someone who was able and was interested in learning. However, being absent from the university, and working on her own, was particularly important to Beth. By studying on her own, working at her own pace through the materials, and distancing herself from other students, she felt she was able to develop her own ideas, rather than questioning herself and following other people:

I don't want to get involved. I don't want to get involved with anybody. You know, I'm quite like that, I'd rather just cut myself off and get on with my own stuff. 'Cos if I work in a group like that anyway, you tend to get led by people. I do anyway. I was always like that, thinking "Oh yeah, your answer is obviously right. I don't know what I'm talking about". So it's good for me probably to learn on my own. And interpret the reading and then come up with *my own* ideas rather than get led by somebody else. (Beth)

So, for Beth, being able to study on her own meant that she had time and space to distance herself from negative experiences of learning in the past, and to develop

confidence in her own knowledge and ability. Equally, as she had people at work to talk to about her studies, she did not feel a strong need to form links with other learners on the course; although she was not sure if "keeping her distance" in this way was a good thing.

Similarly, Marie felt that studying outside of the university suited her because she liked to study on her own. Equally, she was particularly bothered by the comparison, competition and lack of recognition of different abilities that she found apparent in education generally. She had developed this awareness due to her own experiences of education and then subsequently through her children's experiences:

I always felt [in previous experiences of education] that there was a lot of comparison made and comment about your essay results. I didn't really- I tried to focus away from that, because I suppose with the experience with my children as well, you know...that's not what it's about. It's not the best people in college make the best people in industry, you know. So I feel that you don't have that now...and I have two...[fellow distance learners]. And I talk to them now and again but we're very kind of adult about it. I'd never ask them what they get. I'd only ask them how they were coping and how they were interacting with things. I like the fact that they're not there all the time. I mean, I like to study on my own. And yet I'm a groupie you know <laughing>, I don't see myself as- I like to work in teams.

AR: Yeah, because you said you're a "people person"?

Yeah, but I wouldn't like to do that- maybe it was from the fact that, you know, maybe my early intervention with education was- like I was the one in school who wouldn't sit down and shut up and be quiet and listen. And I never came into the category of "good". I was good at school because I kind of pulled it off <laughs>. But it was my default more than because I sat down and studied. I didn't. And I know my son can't do that either. So we never came into the "good student". And maybe- there is a certain- thing in me that- "God, what if I was the worst", I don't know. But- I-I-I don't- I'm just very comfortable doing it on my own. (Marie)

In this way, being absent from the spaces of the university is also about being absent from the competition and comparison that takes place, and the need to live

up to the idea of a "good" student. Thus, while Marie saw herself as a "people person" in her working life, enjoying interaction and team work, she found that these were not as important to her when studying. Equally, when Marie compared her past experiences of studying on-campus at a university, with her current experiences of studying at a distance, she found that the need for presence in a specific university space, and at a set time, was restrictive. Marie felt that studying by distance learning gave her a level of control over how she organised her time so that she could study when she wanted, rather than it being dictated by the institution:

...when I was working in...[past workplace] finishing at half five and being at college for 7 and being there till 10 and doing the subject. I'm much more- um- I can structure outside of that. I find that very rigid. And if I didn't want to go uh- I'd feel almost the structure would put me off. (Marie)

Equally, she felt that it gave her a sense of space in which to learn at her own pace, focusing on what was important to her personally.

I come now to the experiences of Jane and Sue. They both had young children and partners, and were constantly negotiating between their mother, partner, worker and learner roles and responsibilities. Both felt it would have been very difficult to fit in their studies except by distance learning. Nevertheless, being absent from the times and spaces of the university was also been about claiming time and space for themselves in the home. This was time and space entirely for themselves, and in which they hoped to explore a side of themselves outside of their mothering roles.

Early in her studies, Jane, for example, found negotiating her multiple roles as partner, mother, worker and learner very stressful. Nevertheless, the opportunity to sit on her own at home and read through her distance learning course materials was seen as providing a quiet, contemplative space and time that she did not experience in any other area of her life. Reflecting the greedy nature of the family and caring

roles, Jane felt she had lost touch with part of herself since having children and she hoped to regain this by having this time and space to herself:

Well- actually one of the things that is true is that- I love the peace and quiet. And it's something I don't get in any other sphere of my life really. So the opportunity to sit and read and think, it was what kept me going through that really bad time actually. It was realising that when I don't feel so bad, is when I am just doing this reading. So although it has added another stress and it's a bad time, it's something which is getting me in touch with a bit of myself that I really probably have lost touch with really. (Jane)

This space and time was emotional and intellectual. As Jane later stated:

...the process of thinking through, um- helped me to reclaim part of myself I think. And to- to feel alive and intellectually alive, that kind of thing. (Jane)

Jane and Sue both made quite clear boundaries between their time and space for studying and the times and spaces of caring and the family, at times deliberately isolating themselves in order to claim this study time and space as their own. Thus, Sue made sure that there was a distinction between family time and her time for studying. Despite being present in the home, this was time and space that could not be called upon by her family:

Um- <long silence> I don't know, I suppose it's made me appreciate as well the time that I spend with the children and when I sort of- we make the most of that time with the- with the children, you know? Because I'm *not* available to them 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. And they appreciate that, and they're fine about that you know? Um- yeah, they see my studying as being a real plus as well, even at such young ages, you know? (Sue)

Indeed, later in her studies they moved to a new, much bigger house. Sue had been looking forward to having this space and was really pleased to find that she was able to get away and read or write quietly on her own while the children played at the other end of the house:

So when I'm doing my *reading* I actually lock myself in the quiet room. Which is sort of quite a distance away from the living room where the children would be. So it means sometimes even when the children are around, I can just disappear into the lounge, lock the door, and sort of do- do some reading or whatever. So that's great.
(Sue)

Similarly, Jane felt able to demand physical space and time at home for her distance studies. This was in terms of her study space, her availability to her children and partner, and organising who got to use the computer:

...there are Saturdays and there are times like in the holidays when I have to just say "Look I'm not available, and what is more, neither is the computer, because I am using it". And um- and they just have to put up with it really. But they've been pretty good about that, so far.
(Jane)

Thus, while the spaces and times of the home are heavily subject to gendered power relations, these women with young families were nevertheless making a claim to space and time for themselves. Importantly, these women were not doing this by leaving the home to attend the university, thus being absent from: the spaces and times of family activity; the gendered relations of time and space in the home; and the constant visibility and surveillance of women in the home (Tamboukou, 2003). Instead, they were claiming time and space for themselves specifically within the home. By engaging in higher education, which is seen as a public sphere activity (Edwards, 1993; Pascall and Cox, 1993), they were effectively making themselves absent from the private sphere activities of the home; although they remained physically present in the home. Whether shutting others out of a study room, or shutting themselves in a quiet room, they are less visible and their time and space is less available. In this way, isolation from others (whether other students or family members) is not necessarily a negative or hostile experience.

Tamboukou (2003) notes that the giving over of the supposed public and private spaces to the interests of men has meant that women have not had a private space. Indeed, it is politically important that women are able to claim time and space for

learning and for the self in the home, particularly in light of: power relations around time and space in the home and society more widely (e.g. Adam, 1995; Davies, 1990; Deem, 1986; Massey, 1994); the difficulties women entering higher education can face in trying to claim time for studying alongside the "greedy" institutions of home and work (Edwards, 1993; Wisker, 1996); and the relational nature of women's and carer's time (Davies, 1990), which is subject to heavy demands from others. It is interesting that these women are claiming this space and time in the home by: 1) studying by distance learning and thus being absent from the space and times of the university and, 2) engaging in what is seen as a public sphere activity in the private sphere of the home. Perhaps, as explored in Raddon (2003), the fact that these women's learning was related to their work made it easier for them to claim this time and space, since it was linked to the economic and material well-being of themselves and their family. Equally, since they are not attending the spaces and times of the university, there is perhaps a further legitimacy to their claim to time and space to study in the home. Having this time and space within the home can be seen not only as practical time and space for study, but also 'existential' time and space in which to be creative and reflective (Tamboukou, 2003: 4). Nevertheless, as Jane noted, it could be hard to maintain this space and time for herself when, for example, she wanted to spend time with her children or they wanted to be with her. Similarly, when one of Sue's children was very ill and had to go to hospital, she inevitably had to drop everything else. Moreover, as explored in the last chapter, for all of the learners the demands of paid work in terms of time and space could impact heavily on time and space for studying. These four women's experiences of absence as finding a space and time for themselves highlight that the isolation and lack of connection with other learners that comes from this absence is not necessarily a negative aspect of distance learning. As well as being about access to education for people who are negotiating multiple roles and responsibilities, perhaps this view of absence from the spaces and times of the university as an opportunity reflects the notion of "standing apart". O'Rourke makes use of this idea, arguing that it has been particularly important for women in seeking to find their own space and identity in education:

...distance is not necessarily a negative factor to be overcome, but is simply a reality to be recognised...distance means 'standing apart', and 'in standing apart, we also stand *for* something, whether it is our community culture or our individual uniqueness' (Haughey, 1995). For women, who have struggled to establish their own identity in the world of education, this 'standing apart' is particularly significant. (O'Rourke, 1999: 105)

Indeed, an ability to stand apart has been a common theme in feminist literature and political action. Examples include: Woolf's (1929) call for a room of one's own; Thompson's (1983) efforts to establish women's adult education as a space in which to challenge the status quo; and the institution of Women's Studies as a separate discipline in universities (e.g. Bird, 2001). Thus while Grace (1994: 13) argues that the absence from the university of women distance learners can create an added lack of recognition and 'invisibility' for women, for Beth and Marie, not having to be present in the university is about finding a time and space in which to move away from poor past experiences of education and to develop their confidence and recognition of themselves as learners. Similarly, studying at a distance meant that Jane and Sue were able to make a claim to time and space in the home to do something for themselves and outside of their mothering roles. In this way, while these narratives reflect those in the wider literature of women finding time and space through higher education, they add a further dimension to the idea of seeking and finding time and space through education. Importantly, rather than seeking this time and space through presence in the university, they sought it through absence from the university combined with a form of both absence and presence in the space and time of the home.

Conclusions

This chapter has explored the idea of absence as an opportunity. While the absence involved in distance learning is often seen as a negative aspect of the learning experience, positioning the distance learner as other to the traditional on-campus student, these learners' narratives highlighted that this was not necessarily the case. The first section highlighted that absence from the spaces and times of the

university was seen as giving access to education in a way that would otherwise not be possible alongside demanding jobs and caring roles. In the second section, the impact of this lack of presence on contact with other learners was explored. It was highlighted that rather than a simple binary, there were complex and sometimes conflicting feelings around absence and presence. Thus, while learners might wish they had more contact with other learners, they did not necessarily seek out this contact. Equally, they might wish they were able to attend an on-campus course, but they also stated that they would not wish or be able to attend a full- or part-time course.

Finally, the third section highlighted that absence can also be experienced as an opportunity by women in terms of enabling them to learn away from past negative experiences within education, and to claim a time and space for themselves within the home. Rather than there being clear cut gendered preferences and patterns to how women and men prefer to learn, the data throughout this chapter demonstrates that all learners shift between wanting independence and interaction, and absence and presence, rather than these being fixed or specifically gendered needs. Equally, while the narratives of finding time and space partly reflect the wider literature on women learners and higher education, they also added different dimensions to this narrative of finding time and space in the private space of the home, through the public activity of education. Moreover, while it has been argued that the isolation and lack of interaction that comes from absence from the university means that distance learning may not be suitable for women, absence from the competitive nature of education or ability to make themselves absent from family activities within the home, meant that it was primarily an opportunity, rather than a negative experience, for these women learners.

Chapter 6

Different Spaces: The practitioner meets the academic

The university is both a physical and a metaphorical space. The last chapter touched upon perceptions of the physical spaces of the university, highlighting that these learners saw absence from the physical spaces of the university primarily as an opportunity to access learning. This chapter now focuses on the more metaphorical spaces of the university, asking what the university stands for in these distance learners' narratives, and what kind of power relations are involved in entry to this space. The learners' narratives portray the university as a space that contains a privileged set of values and knowledge; a knowledge space that is often seen as dichotomous to the knowledge space of the practitioner. While the issues raised in this chapter often relate to space, time is nevertheless important, with the multiple layers of time (Adam, 1995, 1998) highlighted through the learners' stories of their educational history, their search for validation as practitioners and the development of their writing skills during the course of their studies. These aspects highlight the non-linear nature of time and of knowledge development, and the continuation of the past in the present (Adam, 1995; 1998). Moreover, as the learners drew on their biographies to talk about their entry into higher education, power relations were raised around knowledge, class and gender. These narratives reflect the wider literature, but also provide an account from the learner-practitioner perspective of some of the tensions and power relations between valuing the university as a privileged knowledge space and resisting it as ascendant to the everyday knowledge space of the practitioner. I now briefly consider some of these tensions within the literature, before moving on to explore the distance learners' experiences.

Diverse literatures overlap with these issues, considering, for example: the role of the university in the production of knowledge, with growing links to industry and the need

to produce "useful" knowledge (Jarvis, 2001); the relationship between higher education and professional development (Eraut, 1994); the changes brought about in academic careers and what it means to be an academic (Altbach, Ed. 2000; Evans, 2002; Tight, 2000); how to develop programmes of learning that relate to everyday practice and engage practitioner-learners (Thacker, 2002); and the power relations inherent in access to higher education and the university (Anderson and Williams, 2001). This diversity reflects the many debates and tensions that surround practitioners as they become adult learners within the university; a space which, like all others, is subject to a whole range of power relations around class, gender, ethnicity, age and so on. Notably, learner-practitioners' own stories about these tensions are relatively quiet within these areas of research. Thus, I draw these quite diverse strands of literature together here to explore these learners' experiences of the university.

Traditional spatial narratives of the university paint a picture of distant "ivory towers" inhabited by the detached, theorising academic (Duke, 1992) who is out of touch with the world of the practitioner (Thacker, 2002); a cloistered space or 'secret groves' to which only a small elite has access (Price, 1989: 61); and an institution surrounded by a 'moat of "science" and "mysticism"' (Gary Knowles and Cole, 2002: 200) with high walls designed to keep outsiders firmly out. The metaphor of the ivory tower, while not entirely 'groundless', does not reflect the current state of higher education (Duke, 1992: 110), however, it continues to maintain a strong hold over individuals' images of the university as a privileged knowledge space. This space is often seen as dichotomous to the everyday, pragmatic knowledge space of the practitioner. In the educational research literature, for example, debates continue as to whether academic researchers should research the teaching profession, or leave this to teachers themselves (Raddon, 2001b). In the management field, there is a similar story of the 'dry', detached academic caught up in theory versus the tried and tested, hands-on practitioner (Knights and Wilmott, 1999: 21). In both cases, the school or the organisation are seen as knowledge spaces from which academics are detached and disconnected, while the

practitioners inhabit, understand and can engage with the day-to-day realities of those spaces. Indeed, some university lecturers may themselves maintain this view by rejecting the "book" knowledge of the academic sphere in favour of their personal practice knowledge (Knights and Wilmott, 1999).

Despite this common picture of the difference between academics and practitioners, the university remains an important source of legitimation for the practitioner (Eraut, 1994; Knights and Willmott, 1999). Nevertheless, there can be tensions when integrating professional practice into the sphere of the university. Although this integration is important to the legitimation of a profession's body of knowledge, and its public representation, it can also create new forms of knowledge that do not correspond directly to those of practitioners, thus creating tensions. This integration can:

...help to organize and codify much of the knowledge accumulated within the profession as well as facilitate the import of concepts and ideas from other subjects...the selection and framing of this reorganized and newly created knowledge will be strongly influenced by the norms and expectations of the higher-education environment, possibly at the expense of needs identified within the profession. (Eraut, 1994: 14)

Thus, the university is seen as the physical, intellectual and ideological space of the academic profession, and as holding different values that compete with those of other practitioner spaces. Indeed, when 'applied knowledge' becomes part of higher education, related to professions and practice and often attracting working class students, it is often held in lower esteem than 'pure' knowledge (Morley, 1997: 117). Bourdieu (1984) and Bourdieu and Passeron (1977/1994) argue that higher education, like other areas of education, is involved in developing and reproducing certain legitimised ways of knowing, being and doing. Thus particular knowledges are valued and recognised above others, creating and recreating privilege, distinction and social inequality. In this way, gaining access to the knowledge spaces of the university is about developing that status and privilege; a status that is not only necessary within the

spaces of the university, but within the wider social world and, importantly here, the world of work (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977/1994).

The following sections now explore some of the ways in which this narrative of separate knowledge spaces has colonized these learners, and how they engage with it in ambiguous and conflicting ways as they undertake their studies. In particular, the privileging of theoretical, academic knowledge over everyday, practitioner knowledge is explored. I draw out some of the power relations implicit in these different spaces, but equally some of the ways in which learners attempt to resist the ascendancy of academic knowledge in favour of "real world" practice-based knowledge. In order to do this, I focus on three aspects of the learners' engagement with these different knowledge spaces.

The first section focuses on narratives of what it means to get a university education. I draw on three learners' perspectives, in particular, to highlight the metaphorical meaning of the university and some of the power relations that are evident within the learners' narratives of gaining access to it. Section two then moves on to focus on how the respondents learned, through the course of their studies, to re-value practitioner knowledge spaces, using it to support but also potentially challenge and resist the ascendancy of the university knowledge space. Finally, section three focuses on some of the difficulties experienced when learning in this new space, with a particular emphasis on writing and the idea of becoming academic. This area particularly highlights the dichotomy between the "real world" and the "ivory towers", with not only different spaces, but different ways of communicating and thinking being necessary in order to succeed in different spaces.

Being Educated: the university as privileged knowledge space

This section considers what the university means to learners as a metaphorical space and why this remains important although attendance at the physical space of the university does not. As Quinn (2003) found in her research on women in HE, what is important is not so much what the university actually is, as what learners and others see it to be. Gaining access to the university as a privileged knowledge space is a common theme running through my respondents' narratives of being a distance learner. I will focus here, in particular, on Marie, Mark and Beth's stories of what it meant both professionally and personally to get a university education. These learners' narratives perhaps most powerfully illustrate this since they had not spent any considerable time as students within a university, while all but one of the other respondents had an undergraduate degree. Power relations around class and gender are particularly evident when exploring this aspect of the university as a metaphorical space. Moreover, the powerful hold of the ascendancy of the privileged university knowledge space over the practitioner space is particularly evident. As will be emphasised throughout this chapter, however, this hold is ambivalent, since these distance learners both want to be part of this space, which contains socially legitimised and recognised knowledge, and to reject it as having nothing to do with their real, everyday life and practice. Although this may be similar for on-campus learners, it is particularly interesting to consider these perceptions and tensions for distance learners who may spend little time in the physical space and time of the university and who study alongside their everyday practice at work.

Some years ago Marie had left her undergraduate studies early to care for her parents. She could not return to study due to the material pressure of needing to "earn a living". She later studied independently for a diploma while raising her children on her own. Marie emphasised that not having a degree had not held her back in life, and strongly resisted the valuing of people by their qualifications, stating that while:

...the perception of the person out there if you do have a degree and if you don't have a degree is so dramatic...it makes no difference to what people can do. (Marie)

Indeed, she claimed to practice this belief when looking to recruit people in her own company. Nevertheless, Marie found that a university degree was something that others judged ability by and it had now become a necessity. Indeed, while she did not consider aspects such as gender to be of importance in her life (although we might see her caring responsibilities as deeply gendered), Marie saw her educational background as the major barrier in her work life:

I found that the only barrier I have ever had in business was because I didn't finish my education. I've never felt it's the male/ female thing, you know, that it was to do with that. But if you went to talk to somebody and they looked at what you had, even if it had a full script at the end, if it said that you didn't have a [university] education, they wouldn't actually buy it. Whereas if you said you did, their impression of you would be totally different. And- so I used to leave it out <laughs> you know? (Marie)

Although Marie does not talk about the class relations underpinning this valuing of university-level education, her narrative strongly reflects the literature on working-class women and education. Many women have written about their own and other working class women's fears of being seen as frauds within higher education, remaining silent about class as a way of avoiding rejection (e.g. Morley, 1997; Skeggs, 1997). As Morley (1997: 115) notes:

The academy, with its claims to authority and knowledge production, provides perfect preconditions for feelings of fraudulence. The hierarchical nature of its organization reinforces social class hierarchies to provide potent feelings of self-doubt. (Morley, 1997: 115)

Marie felt that she faced these kinds of attitudes when she applied to study on the MSc. She was deeply troubled and angered by what she saw as elitism in the academy.

From Marie's point of view, she had been made to feel that she did not belong in the privileged space of the university because she was not a graduate and she "mightn't be quite that type of blood type O". Again this echoes the ideas of privilege, belonging and class, with people entering higher education because of their family and class background, rather than their ability. While Marie saw it as positive to come to university as an adult professional in a different time and space in their life than the traditional (young and inexperienced) university student, she felt this was not recognised when entering the space of the university:

Particularly, I'm not in my 20s, you know, and I have a lot of life experience...And I don't think they should dismiss that, and I think there's a lot of that...And I would feel that even though I mightn't have...finished the degree, I was capable of doing it. And I'm sure, God, that it's not that much that it's cracked up to be. It's a cult I felt almost. I have a problem with that. (Marie)

As Anderson and Williams (2001: 2) note, there are many "non-traditional" students (with '18 year-old entrants in possession of three A levels...[being] constructed as 'normal' students') moving into 'an institutional space that has historically excluded them'. Inevitably, this can lead to tensions around access and insider/outsider status within what has long been, and in many cases continues to be, a privileged, classed and gendered knowledge space.

Similarly, despite his management experience and professional qualification, Mark regularly described himself as "missing" theoretical grounding and a university education. Gaining access to the knowledge space of the university, and seeing if he could study at this level, were strong motivations for studying. Mark talked about his lack of knowledge and theory as pulling him back, possibly to the pathway from school to which he often referred. He noted, for example:

I've never done this form of qualification before, I left school at 16 and came through the day-release route. (Mark)

Indeed, he was concerned that this would impact negatively on his academic writing; as will be explored in section three. Thus, Mark gained a lot of confidence in recognising himself as able to study in higher education, particularly "in the theoretical side of things", and he drew on this regularly in his work. He noted that this theoretical grounding, which was more than simply a matter of needing recognition to do a job, was always "a gap" and "one of the issues that was nagging away at the back of me". He also recognised the cultural value of the qualification, noting, "the kudos of the qualification would be great", but this was less important than feeling he belonged within academic knowledge spaces.

Beth saw studying for a Masters as an empowering experience, particularly in terms of taking up the (classed and gendered) academic identity. Even one year into the course, Beth was still shocked to be studying at this level, reflecting that she was the first in her family to have this opportunity. Although Beth had always wondered what it would be like to go to university, she did not seriously considered going until other people told her she was capable of doing it. Encouragement from others had been vital in beginning to see herself as a learner:

Ability to know that I can apply myself and get on with it. And- just like- self confidence just increased and- worth...Just compared to other people it just makes you think "Yeah, I'm doing a Masters" <puts on a posh voice>... "Hello! My name's Beth and I'm doing a Masters" <laughing> I should have the t-shirt on shouldn't I? I just can't really believe it...I know it sounds really stupid, I know it's only a blummin' qualification. It just got- it just sounds really funny, do you know what I mean?...Cos I've never been to university have I? I've never done that thing...I never thought I could do a Masters basically. You know none of my family ever went to university or- did higher education. I got through college, you know, A' level equivalent...I'm lucky I've been given opportunities to do it and people encourage you. Which I think I probably *need*. You need somebody to encourage you to make you feel- like you *can* do it. And sometimes that gives you enough. Someone says "Oh I think you can do it". You think, "Oh yeah, maybe I *can* then" ...But, you know, if you wanna' better yourself, and I mean I'm young enough

now to get my Masters, you know, go on and take a go at a completely different route. (Beth)

Again, this understanding of the meaning of the university reflects the literature on class and higher education, with going to university being a way of bettering yourself (Archer and Leathwood, 2003). While Beth comments that it is only a qualification, the learning and the qualification gained carry a status, privilege and capital; as suggested by the use of a "posh" voice when talking about having a Masters. As such, having a university education and having access to that knowledge space suggests a means of accessing middle-class knowledge and, therefore, opportunities.

The metaphorical space of the university as one of privilege, value and status has a clear hold over these learners, whether this be: Beth's sense of belonging as a university student and her future opportunities; Marie's sense of recognition as a business woman; or Mark's sense of knowledge and validity as a practitioner. Nevertheless, while these learners seek to gain access to this knowledge space through their Masters studies, their sense of being academic, and of belonging in this space, is not necessarily straightforward. Their narratives seem to suggest that a university education can give learners a different status and authority to that gained through practice. Equally, underpinning these narratives are issues of class and power, with people being valued according to whether or not they have a university education. These learners felt that there was something missing in one way or another, due to the fact that they had not been to university. As well as positioning individuals as knowledgeable, higher education retains a social status which, as Rosalind Edwards notes, was important not only to the mature learners she interviewed, but to herself as a mature woman returning to HE:

Studying for a degree had been a long-held ambition and education itself held a certain status in my eyes. I was thus very proud to have obtained a place at the local polytechnic. (Edwards, 1993: 12-13)

Edwards (1993: 58) respondents saw 'academic knowledge' as a:

...particular way of knowing, a way of 'getting above' the social that was abstracted from their everyday lives. (Edwards, 1993: 58)

Again, there is a perceived dichotomy between the academic knowledge space and the everyday knowledge space. Similarly, Archer (2003: 125) notes that some non-participants in HE not only regard having a degree as socially valuable, but as something that 'talks'; that says something about them and their value as a person.

While they may resist this credentials culture, having access to the university and what it stands for socially and culturally remains important to these learners. Marie, Mark and Beth all saw a university education and the related qualification as giving them status, increasing self-worth and confidence and, in Marie and Mark's cases, giving them credibility as practitioners. This highlights the difficult relationship between the knowledge spaces of the university and the practitioner: Thus, Marie both rejects the need for a degree as a practitioner with experience, and recognises the social and cultural value of the qualification, with legitimacy, status and respect coming through academic qualifications rather than practice. As Eraut remarks:

Qualifications are frequently perceived by individuals as indicators of achievement. This may be viewed in personal terms as an indication of capability, i.e. external evidence of one's knowledge, skills and qualities, or in employment terms as an indication of competence, i.e. confirmation that one's performance meets external expectations for a particular job or occupation (Eraut, 1998). (Eraut: 2002: 65)

Indeed, as a marker of legitimised knowledge, university qualifications become a tradable value in the market economy, thus enhancing practice. Moreover, as Maguire (2002) notes, since academic knowledge is often held in higher regard than practice knowledge, being recognised as academic is also about being able to speak with authority within the space of the practitioner.

Thus, gaining access to higher education, seen 'historically [as] the exclusive preserve of men as speakers of truth and knowledge' (Luke, 2000) and of the middle classes, can give a sense of empowerment. Nevertheless, Jane, who had been to university before, highlighted that while a university education might appear to be a way of distancing oneself from a working class background, classed identity never really goes away; as supported by various research on classed identities (e.g. Hughes, 2001; Mahoney and Zmroczek, Eds, 1997). Jane had spent some time making sense of her classed background, drawing on her political literacy, feminist understandings and past experience. She reflected on being the first person in her "ordinary working class" family to go to university. Entering the privileged space of the university was both an amazing and intimidating experience:

I did a- undergraduate degree with <University>...*that* was where- I suppose I thought- well I suppose after that really, I thought quite a lot about the class issue. Because um- before that I was in comprehensive school and, you know, um- just sort of ordinary state schools and what have you...So- going to university at that time was quite- an amazing experience. And I had *no idea* what impact it would have on me really. I went because I was the only person in my family ever to have done it. I went because I could. Because I seemed to get A' Levels easily enough. Because "Why not?". And it was a way of leaving home really. And um- I went with my boyfriend, you know we came from the same sort of place, same sort of background. And then *met all these people* <laughing> I couldn't believe, from public school. And lots of different social backgrounds. And felt very intimidated really. (Jane)

The sense of moving from the everyday to a privileged space is particularly striking here. While Jane's education enabled her to enter the professions, "living a middle class life", she felt conflict around her own position of "trying to be middle class" by "hiding" parts of herself, and how she was seen by those in her caring profession and in the working class communities she was working with. Jane thus highlights not only the legitimating but also appropriating nature of education:

...this education thing is something that middle class culture thinks that it donates to other people. And therefore can have you. And actually, you are still you. You may have adopted other parts of life, you may have gone into jobs which are kind of *service* jobs to working class people like me, for example...people that come from *similar* circumstances but through education have- have climbed the professional ladder in some way. And- and there's a whole *load* of dynamics that go on there, in terms of identity, who you are and who people think you are. (Jane)

In this way, entering the university knowledge space, getting an education, can be seen as a form of erasure of non-middle class ways of living and knowing. Working-class learners are expected to adapt to the culture of the university, rather than the reverse (Archer and Leathwood, 2003), since their knowledge is not recognised as legitimate (Skeggs, 1997). Indeed, the risk of losing one's classed and raced identity (Archer and Leathwood), and of challenging one's masculinity and recognition among peers (Parker, 2000), is raised in studies of (non) participation in higher and continued education. Nevertheless, Jane's experience and the mostly auto/biographical work cited in this section highlights that this subjectivity or identity is not lost, but continues to exist as one of a number of different, sometimes competing, sometimes complementary, sometimes unacknowledged identities. Again, this highlights the non-linearity of time and identity, but the continuation of the past in the present.

We could argue that part of the power of higher education and the university as an institution, is related to its spatial reach (Massey, 1994), or ability to extend power beyond the material, physical spaces and times of the institution and into the wider social discourses around education and the world of work. In particular, the narratives of enlightenment, knowledge, ability, value, respectability, status and power. As noted in Chapter 3, it is argued that distance learning has extended the disciplinary and surveillance practices of higher education into new realms (Edwards and Usher, 2000). However, individuals have long been subject to the values attached to being educated and to the idea of belonging within the metaphorical space of the university. The value that is placed on being a part of this knowledge space, and the way in which access to

it acts as a social measure of achievement and comparison, creates a sense of an intellectual and social space and time which many adult learners feel have missed out on. For these distance learners, gaining this knowledge and experience, although they are not insiders within the physical and material institution of the university, both responds to these feelings of lack and gives a sense of belonging within the university knowledge space. Moreover, this extends to their feelings of validity, belonging and knowledge in their professions and their practice at work. As has been illustrated in this section, however, while distance learning may open up new opportunities for learners to access education by not requiring presence, it does not remove the power relations involved in the privileged knowledge space of the university.

Validation and Re-valuing Practitioner Knowledge Spaces

This section now focuses on how respondents learned to re-value practitioner knowledge spaces through the course of their studies. These learner-practitioners have a changing and ambiguous relationship with the metaphorical space of the university. Exploring what the learners felt they were gaining from their studies illustrates further this difficult and dynamic relationship. It was common to see studying as a way of seeking validation for past practice, reflecting the hierarchy of academic over practitioner knowledge spaces. Nevertheless, in the process of reading about different theories and assessing different approaches to practice, the learners re-valued their practice knowledge. In this way, knowledge from what was often seen as the dichotomous space of the practitioner was drawn in to the university knowledge space in a more dynamic way: in order to reflect and to support, but also to challenge and at times resist the ascendancy of the university knowledge space.

Many respondents talked about seeking some form of validation for their practice. A common narrative was that by accessing the academic knowledge space, they would gain a theoretical perspective that would both give authority to their future practice

and validate their past practice. This is both a reflection of the ascendancy of the academic knowledge space and of the multiple layers of time and the continuation of the past in the present (Adam, 1995; 1998), with learners looking simultaneously to validate their past and future actions. Sue, for example, felt that she needed a qualification related to her work in the hospitality sector to validate her past, present and future practice. The ascendancy of academic over practitioner knowledge spaces is clear in Sue's narrative. Despite years of experience as a practitioner, accessing academic knowledge offers legitimacy and a grounding for practice:

...I thought "Well it's all well and good to be doing this and I haven't actually got any formal qualifications in this area". And so that's what sent me down this avenue...it helps to get a knowledge of the sort of theoretical side of things as well. To sort of validate some of the things that I'm doing...Because depending on what level you're carrying out training at, you will always get people who- not quite challenge, but who question what you're doing. And while I can answer it from a practical point of view, it will be helpful I think to have sort of um- theoretical backing as well. (Sue)

Thus, Sue felt a need for a more theoretical, academic backing in order to defend her practice, and she saw her studies as giving her access to that knowledge. Similarly, Jim wished to "pin down" his field of practice and to:

...'validate' it with a professional background/certificate. (Jim, email)

This was particularly driven by his previous experience of being unemployed and unable to communicate his knowledge and experience. Having a Masters degree and being part of the university would give him instant recognition as being knowledgeable (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977/1994) and as having an 'authorised perspective' (Bourdieu, 1991: 241). Nevertheless, he also stated that, regardless of whether he completed the course or not, he had gained justification for his past and present practice:

Has it changed perspectives - yes, because (as I said to someone recently) even if it all went wrong now, or I had to discontinue for any reason, I have picked up a lot of info that I didn't have before in terms of theoretical justification for a lot of what I do (or have done). (Jim, email)

While Jim talked about a change of perspective, this was primarily related here to gaining information and justification for current and past actions, as opposed to raising critical questions about these or future ideas and practices.

Beyond providing "kudos" and "a few more letters after my name", Ian sought confirmation of his past practice. Nevertheless, he also expected the course to change his perspectives:

Um, greater theoretical knowledge, the ability to relate 11 years of working in HR to theories, to be able to have the theories confirm or deny that my thinking is backed up by research and so on. Equally so to broaden my outlook, so I will look at things differently. (Ian)

Indeed, in a later interview, when comparing this programme of learning to his previous experiences in higher education, Ian reflected that he had learned to consider alternative responses and perspectives rather than seeing one truth:

It's more- interactive. I mean I got my degree in '84 and it- the first degree things were very much more lecture-driven. Here, it is more tutorial-based <tutorials are given over the telephone and at the teaching weekends/days, this interview was conducted at a teaching day> ...it's more round, there is no one right answer. So that's one thing that's come through. That yes, the tutors will quite often give their opinion, but they're guarding us to say, well, "It depends". So that, for me, was a big difference to this and my first degree. And some of the things I've done as I've- things aren't so black and white perhaps as sometimes I've been led to believe or believe myself. (Ian)

This development of reflexivity and interactive learning within distance learning is contrary to what many see as a one-way transmission of knowledge, effectively

positioning distance learners as empty vessels and 'precluding' interaction and critical debate (Sumner, 2000: 273). As Jarvis (2001: 89-90) notes, however, even in paper-based forms of distance education, often seen as less interactive, there remain 'opportunities for critical debate and action about the learning materials'; although, contrary to Ian's initial view that he did not require interaction, the tutorials were vital for him in this respect. This kind of impact on respondents' world view (e.g. as fixed and static, or as contingent) was not generally covered in the interviews, and was not an area I specifically set out to explore. Ian's narrative partly reflects the impact of postmodern thinking in education – that there is no one truth, but multiple truths and possibilities. It can be difficult, however, to reflect back on past actions in this way, potentially questioning our sense of identity and competence as practitioners. In seeking validation for practice, it is likely that learners will find, and need to deal with, a challenge to their long-held beliefs and everyday practices. It was more often the case, however, that these learners talked about their entry to the academic knowledge space as confirming rather than challenging their views and actions as practitioners. In light of the difficulty of questioning our beliefs, learners are perhaps being selective about the values and ideas they choose to take from their course materials.

Marie also talked about gaining "credibility" and validation, and was keen to develop a more disciplined approach to reading around her area. She felt this would improve her competence in her practitioner space:

OK, I felt that I just needed to um- have a more disciplined approach to reading around the business I'm doing. And I felt that a Masters would give me that. I felt that I was doing a lot of *ad hoc* and I wasn't really sure, ah- if I was kind of capturing the full span out there of what I needed to know. I also wanted to know erm- what was the best thinking out there and the practice out there...And I felt that an MSc would be interpreted by customers as valuable or as a representative of a sort of, I suppose, professional competence as distinct from the that *ad hoc* reading that I was doing. (Marie)

On this occasion, Marie's narrative presents the direction of knowledge as being from the university to the workplace (confirming competence and authority), however, she later told me that her studies had given her the terminology and language to name her ways of being and doing as a practitioner. For many years Marie had practiced an experiential approach to learning in her training courses and, while this worked, she felt that others might have considered these practices as "crazy":

I would go down into a factory and I would be talking to everybody and I would have them all making paper. You know, I mean that's not in any book. It's part of what my creativity was about. While I saw it as good and I mean they got it and they had a great time and they loved the course, I didn't know it was experiential learning, I didn't know what it was called. And now I do. And I'd be more confident to use-

[...]

...it raises the question that sometimes people do know but they're not talking in the language -er or they haven't a name or a writer or an author for it, it doesn't necessarily mean that they're not able to do the thing...it has put language on things that I've been trying to express.

(Marie)

Through her studies, Marie realised that there was a wealth of research and writing validating this practice. Recognising and learning to name her practice meant she felt able to speak with legitimacy, noting "I suppose the piece of my experience that was missing was the MSc". However, while Marie gained access to the official, symbolic language of the academic knowledge space and the legitimacy that comes with that (Bourdieu, 1991), she was also able to re-value her practice knowledge. Thus, while all of these learners seek validation through entry to the privileged academic knowledge space, they are also learning to re-value their practitioner knowledge spaces; albeit primarily not by challenging the ascendancy of academic knowledge spaces.

This search for a theoretical basis and validation reflects the more traditional, modernist narrative of the role of the university as being to produce knowledge that will lead to progress and improvement of practice more widely in society (Jarvis, 1997;

Tierney, 2001). Being able to access the knowledge related to the space of the university is seen as enhancing practice and sense of belonging within the workplace: the space of the practitioner. In this way, these learners not only come to see themselves as belonging within the privileged spaces of higher education, but see themselves as potentially more competent and knowledgeable as practitioners too. Again, we can see a reflection here of the multiple and interlinked layers of time (Adam, 1995; 1998). Rather than the learners' relation to knowledge development being linear and progressive, as implied by the more traditional view of academic knowledge, these distance learners are both looking for progression and improvement in relation to their current knowledge, while looking for confirmation and justification of their actions and knowledge in the past, present and future.

The dynamics between the privileged university knowledge space and the everyday practitioner space often appear to be one-way; although learners also re-value their practice knowledge. However, there were some important examples of the practitioner knowledge space entering the academic knowledge space in ways that resisted the ascendancy of academic knowledge.

Jim, for example, found it increasingly hard to form a relationship between the theory he was reading about and the everyday working practices he observed. He was interested to find out whether other learners were having difficulty relating their learning to their workplace. While he found it "surprising" that things he was reading about would "pop up" in the workplace, he found a disjuncture between the academic knowledge and the rapidly changing daily practice:

I think there is still a conflict between theory and practice and this may be - now - because the pace of change is such that the 'routine' answers to questions are rapidly becoming outdated. Once upon a time you didn't use book answers at work because work was a traditional place where practical wisdom sufficed. Now, the books are slipping behind - especially, although not solely, in cases where HR and other support

teams are still having to show cost effectiveness, or 'added value'...and find ways of explaining their contribution which don't match up to theory. Very often this can be of the quick and dirty variety - 'we can deal with your redundancy/sickness/disciplinary issues and get rid of your staff for you' - although not always. I don't know if others are coming up against this conflict! (Jim, email)

There are some clear tensions and conflicts here between what are seen as academic and practice knowledge and ways of dealing with different problems. While they are seen as dichotomous in the past – with craft knowledge being enough – these are now recognised by Jim as different but overlapping spaces that bring different knowledge to the issues faced in everyday practice. Equally, there is a strong sense of different and changing times, with the simultaneous arrival of more fragmented, uncertain, postmodern times, alongside the yearning for answers and for truth when seeking to explain their contribution as practitioners. Indeed, while there is some resistance to academic knowledge, there is also resistance to, and questioning of, HR practices.

This simultaneous questioning of both practice and university knowledge spaces occurred for other learners as well. Mark, for instance, felt that the distance learning programme, and particularly one lecturer at the teaching weekend, had helped him to develop his critical thinking by questioning academic knowledge. Rather than taking things on face value, as he felt he had in the past, he was developing his "[a]nalytical skills"; drawing on his practice knowledge in order to assess the validity of the course knowledge:

...being able to look at the information and not just accept it, but consider whether it's actually valid or not in my opinion and experience. 'Cos for the first module, I was reading things and saying "Well if it's written down here, that must be true". I didn't even consider whether, in my work experience or in my view, that was the case. Ah, it was only when I went to the first residential, if you don't agree with something, that's fair enough. Umm- I've forgotten the chap's name, now-...he stood up and yeah his lecture was superb. Worth, you know, 300 hours of reading I think. He showed us the picture of Pavlov and he was saying, you know, "the man's an idiot, he talked to a bunch of dogs for 20 years!

I think he's an idiot!" <laughs>. And he was doing it obviously quite blatantly, but he just made me realise that you don't necessarily need to agree with things, just because it's presented. So I think doing that, it's quite useful. (Mark)

Moreover, Mark was confident that this ability to read more critically had helped him in his everyday work practice, such as when reading the "personnel press". By seeing one of the lecturers question the authority of academic knowledge in this way, Mark realised that it was okay to question the immediate legitimacy of academic knowledge and theory. Questioning what is presented as legitimate knowledge within the privileged knowledge space of the university can be a risky undertaking, however, particularly since so much is invested in producing and reproducing that legitimacy (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977/1994). The risk and the power involved perhaps makes it feel all the more empowering to do so. This was one of the changes that Mark particularly felt he had seen in himself during his studies, and which he particularly valued.

Inevitably, it takes a certain level of confidence to question legitimised knowledge, making it hard to do so when lacking confidence or the experience to draw on. While most of the respondents seemed to doubt themselves and their knowledge at some point, Beth was the only respondent who was not able to draw on a practitioner background in order to question what she was learning. This meant that during the teaching weekends and teaching days, Beth found it hard to cope with other learners who challenged the course materials and the tutors. She stated that those who drew on their own practice to understand the materials were "confident and think they know it all", whereas she commented, "I just believe what I'm told". Early on in her studies, Beth felt that these learners used their resistance and questioning as a front to conceal their anxiety in a new situation, whereas she would be silenced:

But they're probably nervous and coming across in harsh way. You know where- but if I'm nervous, I don't say 'ought. I'll just shut up and listen. Where some people will be like, <puts on posh voice> "Oh"- you know,

challenging everything. To make themselves look confident when probably they're not at all. 'Cos you're just there to learn aren't you.
(Beth)

Beth's lack of practice knowledge in this area meant that she felt a need to look to the knowledge in the course materials to form an opinion, whereas the other respondents often talked about either having an opinion already, or forming an opinion drawing on both their reading and their practice. For example, when having to assess the advantages and disadvantages of action learning, she was frustrated to find that "they all say it's really good!". Nevertheless, it would perhaps be too straightforward to say that Beth does not question the course knowledge at all, since she also seemed reluctant at times to show that she had her own ideas about things. For example, when Beth claimed to "just believe what I'm told", some of her colleagues had walked into the room during our interview (we were conducting the interview at her workplace during her lunch break). I suggested we should stop the interview for a moment, but Beth wanted to carry on. However, her tone of voice changed and she seemed to want to hide her knowledge. After her colleagues left the room, I went back to this issue and found that not only did her tone of voice change again, but she reflected that she did actually critique the materials and she did try to draw a link between her studies and her work, although a problem could be that "sometimes you don't feel like know *enough* to be able to criticise it".

The narratives explored in this section have illustrated some of the ambiguity experienced by these practitioners as they enter the knowledge space of the university, whilst being in the knowledge space of the practitioner. The search for validation perhaps reflects the traditional idea of academic knowledge as a basis for better, more legitimate practice and the more traditional role of the university; perceived as going 'hand in hand' with the modernity project of progress and enlightenment (Tierney, 2001: 353), and the production of scientific, 'universal knowledge' (2001: 355). Nevertheless, we can see that this seemingly more fixed and definite academic

knowledge is also challenged and questioned when the learners draw on their own experience and start to form a more dynamic and two-way relationship between the university and practitioner knowledge spaces. At these times, the interviewees appear to move between this more traditional view of knowledge, and what is seen as a more postmodern view of knowledge as fluid and negotiable (Jarvis, 1997). Within this more postmodern perspective on universities and knowledge production, groups are seen to 'create' rather than discover knowledge, with knowledge being 'socially constructed' and subject to a constant and dynamic struggle, rather than *a priori* (Tierney, 2001: 359). The role of the university is thus no longer to 'develop a unified theory', but to become 'a conduit for diverse conversations about the nature of a particular phenomena' (Tierney, 2001: 362). As Jones *et al* note, changes in the student body have brought about changes in the relationship between academic and other discourses and knowledge:

Instead of the academy representing itself as a homogenous and unified entity, to which outsiders must seek access through learning its ways, there is now more negotiation to be held between the particular institution's processes and discourses on the one hand and, on the other, the uniqueness of students' individual cultural and linguistic-related histories. (Jones *et al*, Eds. 1999: xvii)

This brings me to consider academic writing and becoming academic, further highlighting the ambiguous relationship the learners have as they move between the university and practitioner knowledge space.

Learning in the University Space: writing the academic self

This section now focuses on some of the difficulties these learners experienced when learning in the metaphorical (if not physical) space of the university. More specifically, I focus on writing as a means of becoming academic and of belonging within the knowledge space of the university.

Learning to write in an academic style relates not only to the means of course assessment and the production and maintenance of knowledge, but to potentially taking up new ways of knowing, being and doing. The difficulties students encounter with writing in higher education are often understood in terms of a deficit of skills in the learner, as opposed to understanding writing as a social practice that is embedded within the culture and epistemology of the university (Jones *et al*, 1999; Lea and Stierer, 2000). In this way, learning to write in higher education is not merely about acquiring a set of skills, but about learning what counts as knowledge within HE, developing an identity and a mode of communication within that space. Stierer (2000: 193), writing about schoolteachers undertaking a Masters courses with the OU, notes that when professionals enter the university as students, they are surprised to find themselves recast as 'novice academics'. While these learners undertake their studies as a means of becoming '*better informed or more effective professional[s]*' (Stierer, 2000: 193 original emphasis), they are seen by the institution as wanting to become academics, with learning to write in an academic style being an important part of that process. Indeed, their professional knowledge is not recognised until they are able to express it in an academic language:

The discourse and knowledge that schoolteachers bring to their studies, and indeed the discourse and knowledge that schoolteachers manage to construct for themselves as professionals as a result of their studies, are only sanctioned by the institution when they can be overtly realized in the language of the novice academic.' (Stierer, 2000: 193)

In this way, it is not enough to gain access the knowledge that is seen as contained within the university, learners must also learn the academic language that is used within that space, in order to gain validation of their knowledge.

Rather than an interest in the content of my respondents' writing, I explore their narratives around writing assignments as a further reflection of their relationship with

the metaphorical space of the university. These narratives particularly highlight some of the dichotomous images of the "real world" of practitioners and the detached "ivory towers" of academics. The kinds of tensions that practitioners experience between the discourses of the "real world" and the "academic" world, and the forms of writing necessary for assessment, have not featured widely in the literature (Hoadley-Maidment, 2000; Lea and Stierer, 2000; Stierer, 2000). As will be explored here, academic and practitioner styles of writing and, by inference, thinking and communicating, are seen as appropriate only in certain times and spaces, with little room for overlap between the two. There can be particular resistance to what are seen as academic styles of writing. Nevertheless, again highlighting the ambiguous nature of this relationship, the learners simultaneously resist the ascendancy of the university knowledge space and its related practices whilst seek to develop and claim belonging within them.

Many of the interviewees noted the difference between the kind of writing habitually required for the workplace and the "academic" form of writing required for their studies. Hoadley-Maidment (2000) argues that distance learners have fewer informal opportunities than full- or part-time learners to practice the new academic discourse they are becoming a part of through their studies, with the emphasis being placed on their written work instead. She notes that this problem may be lessened in the case of learners whose studies are closely related to their work. For most of my respondents, however, these different forms of writing were seen as very different, if not dichotomous.

Sue, for example, noted that her habitual practitioner writing was quite the opposite of that required by the university. Nevertheless, she found being able to write in an academic style again after years of writing for work in a management style, and gaining recognition for her academic style, a positive and pleasing experience:

I must say, the one thing that I'm delighted about in both my assignments, the feedback that I've been given is that my *style* of writing is very appropriate for somebody doing a Masters. Which is great, because I mean it's an *awful* long time since I'd actually *written* anything academic. And *also*, in the meantime, what I've probably been used to writing is very much sort of *management report styles*, which is exactly what they *don't* want. So to be able then to go back and to write in- in- the manner that they want, just to write is *great* you know? (Sue)

In a later interview Sue told me about her very negative experience of undergraduate studies. Having worked very hard as an undergraduate, she thought she had probably had a "mini nervous breakdown" during her final exams, meaning that she did not get the results that she or her lecturers had expected, doing her "confidence *huge, huge* damage". This was evidently still a difficult and painful experience for Sue and something that she "never got to the bottom of- how come?". After doing very well on her first Masters assignment, Sue experienced a strong sense of empowerment and big increase in confidence, leading her to re-evaluate her abilities and her academic identity:

Oh! I was *delighted*. I really was delighted yeah. So um- <silence> yeah I suppose in a way, I've always felt since- a slightly- um- I suppose a lack of self-confidence really...I suppose *insecure* in my ability and- felt that- other people were- more academically able than me...even when we started the Masters...And yet I was the one that ended up with [this grade] you know? So- something I did must have been right, <laughing> to end up with that. So that was a huge boost to my confidence, I have to say. (Sue)

Ian, too, found it challenging to return to an "academic...style of writing" after almost 20 years since he studied for his first degree. He drew a particularly stark line between his everyday style of writing at work and that required for his Masters, seeing these as dichotomous:

...because I haven't done any academic work since 1990- since 1984, it's getting back into academia. The style of writing for this MSc will be diametrically opposed to what for I do for business writing 5 days a week. So it's actually a completely different writing style that I am going to

have to get back into the swing of again, and at a higher level. So again, that's a challenge. And I found that- I found that quite hard. (Ian)

This view did not change during the course of his studies, indeed, he emphasised his position on this from the very start of our interviews right through to the final interview. Having written several assignments, Ian stated that it required him to:

...put a sort of different mind set on...to *think* academically, not real world! (Ian)

Again, this mirrors the image of the university knowledge space as being dichotomous with, and detached from, the everyday world of the practitioner. Moreover, he made a clear distinction between when and where the academic style of writing was and was not appropriate, emphasising, again, that communicating in an academic language would be totally inappropriate in the workplace:

Because academic writing is diametrically opposed to the writing I do um- most of my time in work. I know, I am writing to communicate *succinctly- with people*, um- yes, putting a balanced point, making recommendations, but not in an academic style. If I submitted an academic paper to my boss, they'd- <shocked silence> a- a- you know, be appalled! (Ian)

Academic skills and forms of expression are clearly seen to belong in a different time and space to that of the practitioner. Interestingly, although academics are also practitioners and often not only as lecturers but in other fields of practice, this is not recognised by the learners. The academic space is described as a world apart from the "real" world. Marie, for example, was keen to find out if tutors had experience "outside".

Nevertheless, it was not always easy to distinguish between the skills needed for practitioner and academic modes of communication. Jim drew a divide between what

was required for his Masters studies and his "very different" everyday writing at work. Interestingly, however, he also highlighted the similarity between his undergraduate education and his style of writing at work:

In work, I like to absorb all aspects and info then fire off a response/report etc that's got almost everything in it - legacy of a philosophy degree - but the course is showing me that the questions and issues are too large for this and need a step-by-step approach. I can't just come up with a solution, they want to see all the footprints that led there! It's a very different way of absorbing, synthesizing and writing.
(Jim, email)

Indeed, he found that the same writing skills he used at work were drawn upon when writing assignments, meaning that it could be very tiring to continue writing after work.

For Sue, Ian and Jim, this was a return to academic styles of writing. For other learners, however, it was not just the difference with everyday writing practices, but also the lack of familiarity with academic discourse and styles of writing that caused anxiety and concern. Indeed, there are rarely set models of how to write an academic assignment (Lea and Stierer, 2000). As Read *et al* note:

...learners such as the apprentice tailors in Jean Lave's (1982) study acquire their skills through attempting to copy examples of work that are clearly and generally held to be exemplary. In contrast, the standards set for academic essay writing are far from obvious, for students and tutors alike...Failure to correctly utilise these 'rules' can be put down to general illiteracy on the part of the student rather than a failure to grasp an extremely demanding and complex style of writing unfamiliar in the world outside the university (Lillis, 1997; Lea & Street, 1998). (Read *et al*, 2001:388)

Again, the practices and values of the university knowledge space are contrasted here with those of the hands-on practitioner.

While this anxiety was particularly evident at the beginning of the programme, it did not necessarily dissipate with time since feedback from each assignment, and planning

for the dissertation at the end of the programme, usually meant this was an ongoing concern and continuous area of development. Mark, for example, was particularly anxious about academic style. Being able to succeed in the practice assignment – where learners get a chance to try out their writing skills – and in the first graded assignment were particularly important to his confidence in developing this style of writing:

...the practice assignment was a major breakthrough for me, 'Cos I did that and got the feedback which was positive, so it's given me a lot of confidence...the academic style of writing, I was a little bit wary about that as well. So that was a big breakthrough for me I think. So I think if I get over my first assignment, get that done, that will be another little milestone really. (Mark)

Mark was pleased when he did well as he saw this as writing at a higher level than in his professional practice and qualification, highlighting, again, the ascendancy of academic knowledge and practices. Although Mark's confidence grew throughout his studies, he remained very concerned about the dissertation because he did not have a degree. However, by the time he came to the dissertation, he reflected that it was no more difficult in reality than writing the assignments. Once he had developed his writing skills, which we can see as coming to understand the 'repertoire' (Ten Have, 1999: 273) and the linguistic capital (Bourdieu, 1991) of the academic sphere, he realised that it was "not really more difficult...just, it's new and a little bit different". Nevertheless, learning to write is not about the linear development of a universal set of skills which can be transferred to any situation, rather, it is a socially embedded practice which is subject to the culture and epistemology of the space in which it occurs (Jones *et al*, 1999; Lea and Stierer, Eds, 2001). As Janet noted, after years writing in a descriptive way as required in her work in the justice sector, she was learning a new style of writing specific to the university:

Because it is different, completely different way of writing things. Because I've been so used to writing reports etc. etc. in the past 20 odd years, and then you are writing completely different really...I did get a good write-up the last time I submitted it and got through. But they said

"You're still too pedantic" <laughing> I always have tended to be descriptive. Yeah. Which is what we have to do. And it's getting out of that way of writing and into the other writing. (Janet)

Beth reflected on learning to write through trial and error when she studied on a Diploma course prior to her Masters studies. Again highlighting the linguistic capital of academic writing, Beth remarked:

But it's a skill, isn't it? I mean when I first started the Diploma, I was like- "Oh my God what do I Do?". I were like, "And once upon a time" <laughs> You don't know. But now you *know*- So it *is* something that you get- it will get easier I'm hoping. (Beth)

Nevertheless, she remained clearly quite insecure about the quality of her writing and her knowledge. Since writing is not only about fulfilling assessment needs, but about developing a sense of academic identity, dealing with some of these experiences could be very demoralising. During the time when she was writing up her first assignment, Beth was torn between feelings that she had done her best, and people thinking she was stupid:

You enjoy it if it sounds good and what you've written isn't a load of rubbish. You think "Oh yeah that's alright, I feel like I've done something constructive". But at the minute, I'm- you know, I'm not very happy with what I've written, so I just think "Oh" ...if somebody read my assignment...and thought, "God she's a right thick cow, what's she going on about?" <laughing>. Which they probably might, you know, but I want to do- at least I know I've done the best I can do and I can't do any more than that. (Beth)

Learners who had been to university before also experienced this lack of confidence. Jim referred to himself as a "word specialist", however, he found that this did not necessarily transfer directly to his assignment writing. Indeed, Jim expressed similar concerns to Beth about his writing. We corresponded by email whilst Jim was writing and editing his first assignment. With only a short time to make changes and feeling

under pressure to complete his assignment, Jim worried that his work no longer made any sense:

When, with 48-72 hours to go, I came to putting it together I also started editing and trying to make sure that each point was 'snapped to the grid', i.e. referred back to what I was trying to prove (some of my anecdotes were getting out of hand). It was at this point, about 2/3 of the way through, that I started to lose track of what I was doing and get halfway through a sentence only to find I didn't know where it was going. (Jim, email 25/4/02)

The two weeks grace to incorporate these runs out tomorrow, it's half past nine at night and I'd just started writing gibberish... (Jim, email 27/4/02)

For some learners, it could also feel empowering to challenge the ascendancy of academic styles of writing. In particular, bringing experience and knowledge from the personal and practitioner spaces into academic writing, thereby locating themselves in their writing, were seen as empowering although potentially risky practices. Jane was pleased to have incorporated something of herself in the draft of her first assignment. Although she removed some of this following tutor feedback, it had evidently been liberating to incorporate her personal and professional knowledge and experience into her academic writing:

And I actually did enjoy doing the first assignment. I felt like there was a bit of me in it. It wasn't just doing something in order to pass or in order to kind of um- for the sake of it or to please work or anything else. It felt as if I could- really put bits of me right in there. And actually some of the feedback that I got meant that I did cut out quite a bit of the bits that were actually me, really <laughs>. Because, um- because I realised that I was just writing too much and I had to be more focused and business-like about it. But all the same, the process of thinking through...helped me to reclaim part of myself I think. And to- to feel alive and intellectually alive, that kind of thing...it was really good to feel that I was being disciplined about following an argument through, and- discarding things that weren't actually relevant to me maybe. (Jane)

Jane perhaps drew on her previous experiences of creative and autobiographical writing for women when bringing the self into her writing: a form of writing that contrasts quite heavily with the business-like and disciplined approach she eventually took in order to meet the requirements of her academic assignment.

It could be hard when this investment of the self into academic writing did not seem to pay off, however, and could potentially challenge not only learners' knowledge but, equally, their knowledgeable practitioner identity. Mark picked a topic for his second assignment that he had opinions on, and experience of, through his own practice. This had been the opposite situation with his first assignment on learning theories. With the second assignment, Mark already knew what he wanted to argue before he read the course materials. While he felt more confident writing in this way, he was anxious about the risks in doing this:

...the first assignment I didn't have a clue, it was all new to me, so I had to read the material. Whereas this one, it was an assignment where I knew what I wanted to say but I needed the material to back up rather than just pushing my opinions...But I was a lot more certain this time on what I wanted to do and why I've done it. The first time I just put some material in that I thought would impress people, where this time I- and that may be a bad thing I don't know.

AR: When you seem more confident in what you are writing?

Well my introduction was "Well this is what I'm gonna do" and I don't know whether, you know, they might disagree with my methodology and the way I've done it, but at least it was a bit clearer I think. So that- that gave me a bit of confidence really. And I believed in it and hopefully that will come over. (Mark)

Mark initiated our third interview, although we had agreed to do our next interview at a later date. He e-mailed me to say that he was feeling uncertain about his third assignment and was planning to talk to a tutor, and he wondered if I wanted to interview him. Contrary to his experience with the second assignment, he was having trouble thinking through what he would do for his third assignment. It soon became apparent that this lack of confidence was related to the feedback from his second

assignment, which he had been disappointed with and which he clearly wanted to talk about. Mark chose his second assignment question specifically because he felt knowledgeable about it as a practitioner. This knowledge was challenged, however, when he got a slightly lower grade for his second assignment:

I mean the other issue as well was um- I got my feedback from my last assignment, um- and I thought my second assignment was *miles* better than my first one. But my grade wasn't as good. Only slightly less...but I remember getting my feedback and being really disappointed with it...so I wouldn't mind some feedback on that as well really. Regarding the structure. And having gone through the feedback, I'm still a bit lost as to- how I would have done it differently. And I think I need to sort that out before I start structuring my assignment as well. So there's *that* to it as well. I mean in hindsight, being disappointed with my mark was a bit daft, erm- I think I based it on the fact that I did it on appraisal and I thought I'd got a lot of knowledge on that, but er- maybe over-emphasized that a bit, you know, the knowledge that I've got. I didn't put it across. (Mark)

Although Mark partly put this lower grade down to structure, it seemed that his disappointment was related not managing to convey his personal and professional knowledge in the right (by inference academic) way. We gain a sense here of the tensions and contradictions that the learners experience when bringing knowledge from the practitioner sphere into their developing academic knowledge and writing. While it feels empowering to bring practice or craft knowledge to the academic arena, there is a sense of insecurity and uncertainty about the ability to succeed in the system when doing this, as well as a potential questioning of work-related knowledge and, potentially, identity when this is questioned within the academic knowledge space.

Conclusions

This chapter has explored some of the tensions learners experience as they enter the metaphorical space of the university, and some of the ambiguous feelings they have about both wanting to be part of and rejecting the ascendancy of this knowledge space. Section one highlighted how learners see themselves as gaining status and

legitimacy by entering the academic knowledge space whilst simultaneously resisting its ascendancy to the practitioner knowledge space. In drawing on their personal and professional biographies, these stories highlight some of the power relations involved in entering the university space, in terms of being practitioner-learners and in terms of educational background and, in particular, the classed nature of higher education. While issues of class and gender were generally not necessarily foregrounded in learners' narratives, or raised as issues that concerned them, these power relations nevertheless ran through many of their stories around entering the knowledge space of the university.

Section two then focused on narratives of gaining validation and authority as practitioners be entering and seeking belonging within the university knowledge space. While university knowledge was often portrayed as ascendant to practitioner knowledge, respondents also learned to re-value their practitioner knowledge spaces. Moreover, they were able to draw on their practice in order to challenge academic knowledge spaces.

Finally, section three explored some of the difficulties experienced around writing and developing an academic identity and language through this process. This necessary part of becoming academic proved both a difficult and fulfilling process. On the one hand, learning to communicate in an academic style could enhance confidence and sense of legitimacy within academic spaces. On the other hand, working to adopt a new style of communicating could undermine the confidence they had as practitioners, and could be a painful and difficult process. Equally, however, the styles and forms of writing deemed appropriate within the academic knowledge space were seen as being outside of the "real world" and as dichotomous with that required in the practitioner space. These traditional images of the dichotomy between the elite and privileged "ivory towers" of the university, as opposed to the everyday, "real" spaces of the practitioner were highlighted throughout this chapter, and clearly maintain a strong

hold over these learners' perceptions of the university. This demonstrates not only the persistence of these traditional images within how we understand the university as a metaphorical space, but also their spatial reach into wider society (Massey, 1994). While the metaphorical space of the university would undoubtedly be of importance for on-campus learners as well, it is particularly interesting to consider the meaning of the university as a metaphorical space for distance learners who have little or no physical presence within the institution.

Space has been a central focus of this chapter, nevertheless, underpinning this discussion of the metaphorical spaces of the university have been the multiple layers and directions of time. This highlighted the impact of learners' past educational biographies on their present entry into higher education, and the way in which they simultaneously seek validation of past and present practice, illustrating the continuation of the past in the present. Equally evident is the non-linear development of knowledge and writing practices. Rather than being a linear process of enlightenment, through which we develop easily transferable knowledge and writing skills, these are continuously re-developed, challenged and re-worked over time, changing as learners move between the different academic and practitioner spaces.

The following chapter now provides a concluding discussion and reflections, reviewing what has been achieved in the research and drawing some overarching conclusions from the different dimensions of time and space that have been explored.

Chapter 7

Concluding Discussion

This concluding chapter seeks to review what has been achieved in this research, considering both to what degree I met my aims, and some of the overarching conclusions that can be drawn from this research. The chapter is divided into three sections. Firstly, I revisit the literature that relates to the issue of time and space in distance learning, considering how I aimed to respond to this in my own research. Secondly, I briefly revisit some of the multiple times and spaces and underpinning power relations that were highlighted in this research, reflecting on how far I achieved the aims of my research and what this perspective has told us about this research area that another might not. Finally, I draw two wider conclusions from the ways in which gendered power relations featured within these women and men's stories of being distance learners. I consider the implications of commonality and difference, focusing on narratives around work. Then I consider the implications of focusing on a broad set of areas, highlighted by learners' narratives, as opposed to focusing specifically on areas in which gendered power relations were most evident, or on the specific needs and experiences of women; as is often seen as the aim of feminist research.

Responding to the Literature: bringing a feminist perspective to times and spaces in distance learning

Chapter 2 argued that the dominant way in which time and space are treated in the distance learning literature is as straightforward, natural facts of social life. I then explored some of the more critical literature that deals specifically with issues of space and, to a far lesser degree, time in distance learning. It was noted that this more critical literature around space is useful in highlighting the socially constituted nature of space, in particular, emphasising that space and, to a lesser degree, time are not negated or overcome through distance learning but, rather, are differently constituted and experienced within different contexts. Nevertheless, I argued that

there remained a clear gap in the research knowledge in terms of: critical readings of time; feminist perspectives on time, space and distance learning; and the linking of theory with empirical data.

In order to respond to these gaps in the literature, I have drawn on a feminist time and space literacy. Namely, I have drawn on (primarily) feminist perspectives of time and space from the wider literature in order to highlight the multiplicity of times and spaces in social life, and the power-laden nature of these times and spaces. The dominant time-space narrative within feminist research has been a dichotomy of private-public and female-male time and space. While this is the case, as emphasised, feminist perspectives on the times and spaces of the home are particularly useful in demonstrating some of these multiple times and spaces in social life, and the gendered and other power relations underpinning them. In the subsequent chapters I made use of this feminist time and space literacy in order to consider the multiplicity of times and spaces, and related power relations, within the stories and interview responses of a small group of learners studying on one Masters distance learning programme.

To date, I am not aware other research in this area that seeks to look at time and space in this multi-layered, power-laden and interconnected way, or focuses on both time and space as central concepts. Thus, while previous feminist research in distance learning such as von Prümmer's (2000) work, has touched upon some of the gendered issues around time and space in distance learning, it has not focused specifically on these, or sought to look at them as multiple and interconnected. As noted in Chapter 2, this is not surprising, given that there is little feminist research that focuses on the complexity and multiplicity of times (Hughes, 2002b) or spaces. Moreover, as when time and space are explored in the wider literature, while they may be highlighted as equally important and interlinked, research often focuses on one of these concepts in depth, with a brief mention of the importance of other. However, I would argue that recognising and exploring the multiple times and

spaces of social life can be a useful tool in trying to avoid an either/or, binary, approach to the times and spaces in women's and men's lives.

Re-viewing the Times and Spaces in Distance Learning

This research sought to explore the different times and spaces that could be seen in learners' stories of being a distance learner, and the gendered and other power relations that underpinned those times and spaces. I also sought to bring together the theoretical and the empirical in order both to make sense of these times and spaces, but also to test out ideas such as absence and presence, distance learning as "anywhere, anytime", and, indeed, the binary of public-private and female-male time and space apparent in many feminist perspectives on time and space.

Moreover, in using data that was gathered in different ways and over time and space, I hoped to add many new layers to the stories about, and our understandings of, time, space and distance learning. As stated in Chapters 1 and 2, I did not set out to focus exclusively on gender, but to make use of this feminist time and space literacy in order to consider – within the four key areas of interviewees' narratives and responses that related to time and space – both the multiplicity of times and spaces, and the range of power relations underpinning them. In order to consider how far I met my aims, I will briefly summarise in the following tables the times and spaces, and underpinning power relations, that were highlighted through my research.

Chapter/ Focus	Key times and spaces explored	Key narratives/ discourses in learners' stories	Underpinning relations of power
Chapter 3: The Timescape	Social and historical time-space in which learners are located; public work time shifting to private time and space; diminished time and space for care work and personal time and space for themselves	Re-organisation of work; flexibility; insecurity; balancing paid work and care work; being the ideal worker; unemployment; impact on health; learning for survival and employability	Power dynamic between organisations and workers; hierarchy of times and spaces of paid, productive work over unpaid, reproductive and care work; greedy nature of work superseding greedy nature of home and shifting into the home

Chapter/ Focus	Key times and spaces explored	Key narratives/ discourses in learners' stories	Underpinning relations of power
<p>Chapter 4: Distance learning: anywhere, anytime?</p>	<p>Home and work; Socially-negotiated and constituted times and spaces of learning; the times and spaces of paid work, care work, domestic work and studying; simultaneity of heavy demands on time and space from care, domestic and paid work; the "right" time to engage in higher education and professional development</p>	<p>Squeezing time and space to fit learning into a busy life; work as primary demand on time and space; interwoven narratives of the heavy demands on time and space from care and domestic work; managing time, being organised; coping with social expectations of caring; coping with the unexpected; reassessing time use; having time and space in life to study</p>	<p>Linear readings of time focusing on the individual nature of time, neglecting the social nature of times and spaces; times and spaces for studying constantly negotiated and subject to negotiation around paid, care and domestic work; hierarchy of times and spaces of paid, productive work over unpaid, reproductive, care and domestic work; greedy and competing nature of home, workplace and higher education; difficulties for women, in particular, of claiming time and space in the home due to gendered demands and expectations of care and domestic work; women and men's shared experience of the demands of paid work; times and space of caring seen for both women and men, but women continue to have primary responsibility for care and domestic work whether related to partner or family; women (and those around them) not recognising their own claim to time and space as important or a priority; time that is not related to paid work being viewed as spare time, leading us to view our recuperative and restorative time and space as wasted and unproductive</p>

Chapter/ Focus	Key times and spaces explored	Key narratives/ discourses in learners' stories	Underpinning relations of power
Chapter 5: Opportunities of absence	Studying outside the physical times and spaces of the university; studying at home; who controls times and space; claiming time and space in the home	Absence primarily seen as an opportunity; only opportunity to access education due to lack of time and space; being the ideal distance learner; controlling time and space; absence from the educational institution as the norm; more negative impact of not being present in the university for some due to lower levels of contact with other learners; too busy to contact other learners; claiming time and space to study away from negative experiences of the educational institution; claiming time and space to study in the gendered space of the home; absence from the institution as absence from the demands of the home	Presence in a space-time seen automatically as positive and absence as negative; "traditional", on-campus education privileged over distance learning; being outside the confines of the times and space of the university, through distance learning, as providing greater access than traditional education; struggle between individual, workplace and home life for control over time; hierarchy of productive work time and space over time and space for studying; individuals' time seen as money, as productive, as owned by the workplace; women resisting their past and present positionings in relation to educational experience (not the "good" students), and gendered expectations and demands in the home (caring, mothering and domestic roles); women recognising the legitimacy of their needs and claiming time and space for themselves within the gendered time and space of the home by studying at a distance

Chapter/ Focus	Key times and spaces explored	Key narratives/ discourses In learners' stories	Underpinning relations of power
Chapter 6: Different Spaces: practitioner and academic	Tensions and intersections between the knowledge spaces of the practitioner and the academic; the university as a metaphorical space; the "real world" and the "ivory towers"; dichotomous knowledges, identities and languages that characterise the practitioner and the academic space; past and present, personal and professional, biographies; development over time of knowledge and writing skills	Tensions between dichotomous spaces of the practitioner and the academic; overlaps between these spaces and their related knowledges; dichotomous ways of knowing, being and doing as academic and as practitioner; seeking legitimacy and validation through higher education; tensions around taking up the ways of writing that characterise the academic knowledge space	Valuing and resisting the university as privileged knowledge space; re-valuing the practitioner knowledge space; struggle over hierarchy of the academic over the practical and hierarchy of the practical over the academic; the ascendance and continued hegemony of the academic knowledge space; the university as a privileged, classed and gendered space; access and exclusion; hierarchy of middle- over working-class knowledge; spatial reach of the university as metaphor; positioning of academics as outside the "real world", overlooking their role as practitioners; linear view of time overlooks the non-linear nature of knowledge development and development of writing skills

Exploring these four key areas of distance learners' narratives thus highlighted a range of times, spaces and power relations. In this sense, I would argue that I did achieve the aims of my research. Nevertheless, one difficult aspect was writing about these times and spaces as interlinked and simultaneous in practice. As noted throughout this research, it is not easy to focus on large, multiple and complex concepts such as time and space. I found that to hold time and space together, and to think and write about them as simultaneous, can be extremely difficult, often unwieldy and at times verging on the incoherent. Thus, while I theoretically recognised them as equally important and inextricably interlinked, when writing about the four key aspects of learners' narratives that particularly raised issues of

time and space, the balance between time and space could be hard to maintain. For example, in Chapter 6, this was particularly the case, with the dominant narratives about the university, albeit as a time-space, being spatial; although we could argue that the discourses on which they drew to talk about the university and the practitioner space as "ivory towers" and the "real world" are marked by historical and imaginary time.

Indeed, in order to talk about, capture, analyse and write up these multiple and simultaneous times and spaces, it is easier and often necessary to separate them out. We often separate times and space, overlooking their inter-relationship, when we talk about our everyday lives. This was certainly the case in my respondents' narratives. For example, as noted in Chapter 4, while survey respondents and interviewees might write or talk about where they studied, they would not necessarily say when. It could be seen as a shortcoming of this research that I did not capture this kind of detail over the course of these distance learners' studies, although this kind of data was pieced together from the questionnaire, observation, interviews and the learning journals. Perhaps I could have captured such details better had I asked the distance learners to keep a precise record over the course of their studies of when and where they studied; although I do not think I would have engaged many participants in such time-consuming research! Moreover, while this kind of data might be useful to some extent, it could also lead us towards a linear reading of the times and spaces of distance learning. People do not necessarily talk about their lives in a chronological way, or perceive time-space in a kind of longitude-latitude way, whereby we can map their exact location at a specific time. Although, as Adam (1990, 1995) and Massey (1994) note, we do most often talk about and perceive time as the linear time of clocks, timetables and deadlines, while space becomes a backdrop to our lives, rather than being central to our lives in a range of ways, being both constituted by and constitutive of our everyday lives. However, as outlined in Chapter 1, I was interested not so much in quantifying or verifying these distance learners' survey and interview responses, but in exploring these as stories about how they combined their home life, work and

studies. As noted in Chapter 4, data about locations of learning is useful, but it is when we combine this with narratives about learners' roles and responsibilities, that we begin to see some of the multiple layers of time and space, and the negotiations around them.

So what did this theoretical approach tell us about distance learners' experiences that another approach might not have? What is the contribution of this approach to the wider knowledge about distance learning, but also about time, space and power? If we take the example of the debates around absence and presence, touched upon in Chapter 2 and explored further in Chapter 5. Absence and a sense of missing out are often seen as characterising distance learners' experiences of studying. This is due to their lack of physical presence within the university campus and the educational institution. Reading this apparent absence and lack through a feminist perspective on time, space and power relations, and drawing on learners' narratives over the course of their studies, led me to look at the distance learners' narratives in a less binary way. Instead of assuming that absence is automatically negative, and presence naturally positive, I tried to look at absence as potentially "both/and:" both potentially creating a sense of missing out on a "traditional" educational experience, and potentially creating new opportunities by providing access to education outside of the institution. Drawing on a feminist perspective, I kept in mind the hierarchy and power relations surrounding the idea of traditional and non-traditional education, absence and presence, and some of the differently gendered narratives that became evident in different learners' stories about being absent from the space of the university. Thus, I was able to explore learners' stories of the different, multiple ways in which physical absence from the space and time of the university can simultaneously be both positive and negative. Indeed, this focus on times and spaces as multiple rather than singular, and a wish to explore the dynamic rather than fixed nature of women's and men's times and spaces, led me to draw rather different conclusions to some influential studies of women and distance learning. While some previous research has argued that the isolation and lack of presence of distance learning is counter to women's learning styles and

preferences (von Prümmer and Kirkup, 1990), the findings of my research added two further dimensions to this story. It could be potentially difficult to have contact with other learners when not attending the university, and this was something that both women and men could experience as a problem at different times, rather than this need for contact being gender-specific or constant. Equally, absence from the institution could be politically important in enabling women to make a specific claim to time and space for themselves in greedy institution of the home. It is this both/and approach, and the recognition of multiplicity rather than linearity or binary positions, that I feel has been particularly important in this research.

Therefore, despite some of the difficulties of holding on to these concepts, I would argue that focusing on time and space has been very fruitful in pushing the boundaries of my readings of distance learners' spaces, times and experiences. Moreover, attempting to address issues of both time and space simultaneously, while not always possible, adds new layers and brings further perspectives to the research.

Gendered Time and Space

I now try to draw together some more overarching conclusions regarding the theoretical implications of this feminist research on time and space in distance learning, focusing in particular upon issues of gender. These implications have relevance beyond the topic of distance learning, by highlighting some of the different ways in which time, space and gender intersect in social life more widely.

One aspect that particularly merits further discussion is the ways in which the learners' narratives and survey responses were similarly and differently gendered. As noted, I aimed to look at women's and men's times and spaces in a less binary way, recognising both similarities and differences. Indeed, it was notable that these women and men's narratives could be very similar. I now consider the implications of some of these commonalities and differences.

One time and space that was both central to learners' narratives, but also an area that particularly highlighted the similarities between women's and men's times and spaces, was the workplace. The times and spaces of the workplace were dominant narratives within this research, being a major focus of, and demand on, learners' time and space, and a key responsibility around which they aimed to fit in their studies. Moreover, since this was a professionally-oriented programme of learning, these individuals were often studying in order to meet the demands of paid work and in order to remain employable. Thus, paid work and the workplace were a central focus for all of my respondents, with learners' narratives of the greedy nature of the workplace being very similar for both women and men. This finding was quite different to other research, which found that women's key focus and/or demand on their time was the family, while men's was the workplace (e.g. von Prümmer, 2000; Lyall and Macnamara, 2000). This probably reflects the fact that the majority of learners were aged 40+, had older children or no children, and were more advanced in their career. Nevertheless, I also highlighted that, while work was most often seen as the primary demand on their time and space, narratives of care and domestic work were often interwoven within these stories about the demands of the workplace. Indeed, a feminist perspective both sensitises us to these interwoven narratives, and to the continued gendered division of labour around the home.

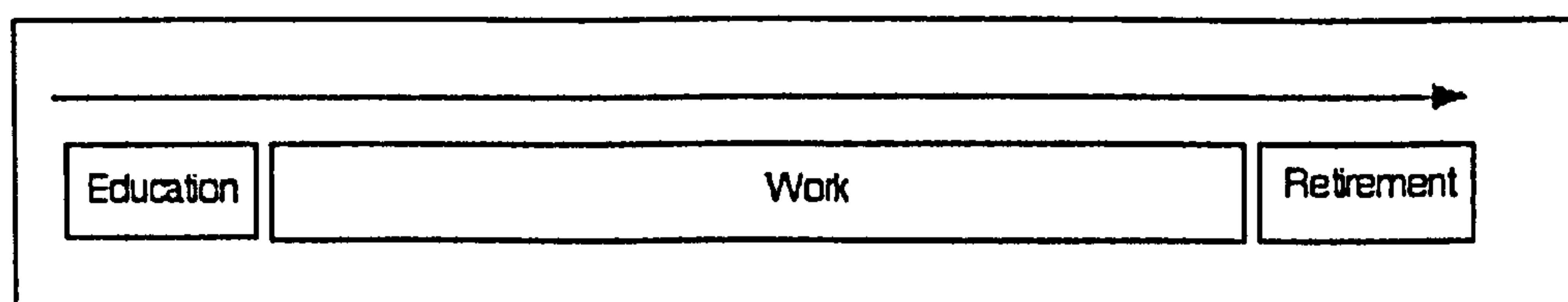
The discussion in Chapter 3 provides a good example of some of these commonalities and differences between women's and men's times and spaces. It was highlighted that discourses of flexibility and insecurity at work, and the need to study in order to ensure employability, impacted very similarly on women and men distance learners. Both women and men talked about the current social and historical timescape as one in which there is a drive for flexibility around: the times and spaces of productive paid work; the kinds of work that people can do; and the way in which careers are composed, with much more emphasis on short-term contracts and flexible working practices. Notably, emphasis was placed on fulfilling

the temporal and spatial demands of the workplace, and these overlapped considerably with the supposedly private times and spaces of the home.

It could be argued that the reason these discourses have a similar impact on these gendered professionals is because women are taking up dominant masculine ideals of productive work: with paid work taking precedence over the reproductive and caring work of the home. Indeed, I argued that while discourses of flexibility are seen as a means of enabling employees with caring responsibilities to find better work-life balance, they are in fact underpinned by gendered assumptions that the times and spaces of productive, paid employment are higher in the hierarchy than the times and spaces of reproductive and care work. Thus, flexibility enables workers to ensure their productivity by being flexible about when and where they work – with so-called public sphere work often taking up private sphere time and space – whilst minimising the impact of reproductive, caring and domestic work on this.

On the other hand, we might question whether this focus on work still supports the traditional masculine ideal of productive work. As illustrated in the following diagram, this masculine ideal is based on the assumption of a linear, full-time, permanent employment for which education prepares us. This ideal model of the masculine working life may not reflect any reality, past or present, but nevertheless represents a pervasive and influential discourse; underpinning fears such as the "end of work" (e.g. see: Beck, 1999; Bauman, 2000).

The masculine ideal of working life



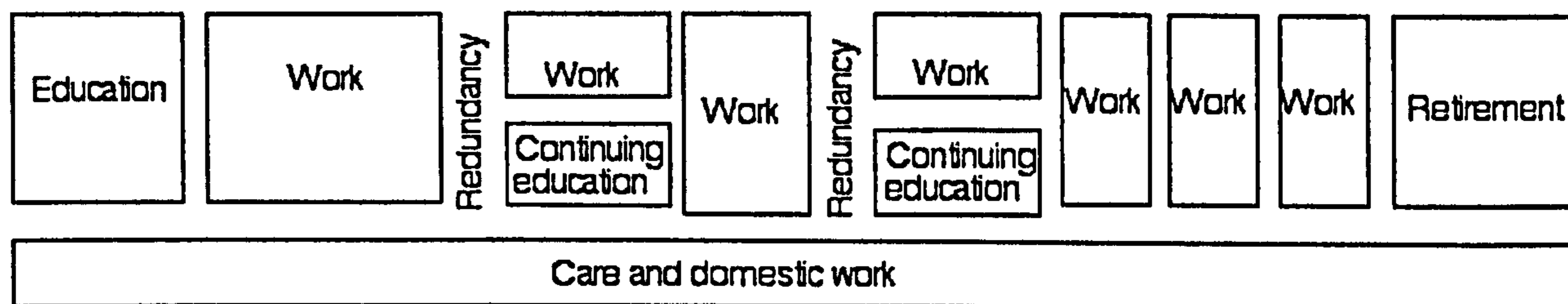
As discussed in Chapter 3, however, the kinds of working practices highlighted in these learners' narratives were flexible and often insecure, reflecting wider debates

about the demise of this linear and permanent working life. Women such as Rose, Jane and Rachel talked, as highlighted throughout this research, about this flexibility of times and spaces, and of multi-tasking, as a long-running feature of their lives: both at work and at home. Not only had they built careers within professional cultures that demanded flexibility and which often offered insecure prospects, but they saw this as enabling them to combine their paid work with their care and domestic work. Flexibility was, in effect, seen as the norm for these women. Indeed, Rose noted that multi-tasking and flexibility in dealing with multiple responsibilities is socially expected of women, both by others and themselves, and seen as one of women's strengths. Interestingly, it was men respondents who talked about the shock of redundancy, flexibility and insecurity of work. Having secured permanent employment that seemed, at one point, to be for life, Ian and Jim found themselves facing or experiencing redundancy and a need to increase their flexibility in order to ensure their future employability.

Thus, rather than highlighting the ways in which women are taking up masculine discourses of employment, this demand for flexibility of times, spaces and work contract seems to closer reflect what has long been expected of women as workers (with a prevalence of part-time and contract work) and carers (with the need to multi-task and shift between times and spaces of paid work and care and domestic work). Perhaps, instead of seeing women as taking up the dominant masculine ideal of work, we could argue that this reflects the way in which supposedly feminine discourses about time, space and work (paid and unpaid), have been taken up by the workplace, and far more widely in society. Paradoxically, while caring and domestic work are positioned, as explored in Chapter 3, as hindering productive paid work, it seems that the gendered discourses related to these unpaid forms of work are being taken up in order to increase productivity. Indeed, appears to be confirmed by the growing use in management research and practice of the seemingly feminine "soft" skills, and notions of "emotional intelligence". These are areas that were not explored in this research, but which I would certainly like to pursue.

Thus, as opposed to the linear model of working life, this more flexible and changing working life, interspersed by different periods of continuing education, redundancy, unemployment – and caring – might look more like the following seemingly feminised model:

A feminised model of working life?



Nevertheless, such models are inevitably simplified and perhaps replicate the false division between the different aspects of public and private times and spaces.

Another aspect of my research which is worth considering further is my approach of focusing on broad areas of learners' experiences and a range of power relations, rather than focusing in specifically on areas, or times and spaces, where gender differences were most apparent. As noted in Chapter 1, feminist research is often seen as focusing on women's experiences and specific needs. Thus, my focus on women and men, and on the broader context of their stories rather than gender-specific elements, could be criticised for not centring women's experiences; although, in fact, there were cases, such as when exploring the opportunity of absence as claiming time and space to study in the home, when I focused on narratives that I found only among women. Indeed, researching from a feminist perspective not only gave me a sensitivity to these narratives, but also provided me with a set of theories with which to analyse and make sense of them. Moreover, I would argue that women's stories were certainly not silenced within this research and they made up the majority of my survey and interview sample.

As explored in Chapter 1 and expanded in Chapter 2, my aim, drawing on a more feminist poststructuralist perspective, was to consider multiplicity and both the

differences and the commonalities between and among women's and men's experiences, avoiding a binary of women's and men's time and space. As noted in Chapter 1, feminist poststructuralist theory raises, for example, questions around the idea of the standard and the other (male and female), but also the non-fixed nature of these hierarchies, with different and pervasive power relations running through all aspects of social life. Thus, in my reading of times and spaces in distance learning, I not only highlighted the gendered relations around the times and spaces of the home, but also aspects such as the hierarchical nature of ideas of presence and absence.

Moreover, I would argue that, in looking more widely at learners' stories about their lives as distance learners, it is both possible to see the complexity and fluidity of gender relations, but equally the pervasiveness and the very embeddedness of gendered practices in everyday life. For example, not only were the continued expectations around women's responsibility for caring and domestic work highlighted, but also the ways in which the time-space demands of paid work are so dominant in learners' narratives. This dominance could potentially mask the demands of care and domestic work: narratives of which were often interwoven between the dominant stories of the workplace and within both women and men's stories. Starting from a feminist perspective sensitises us to the importance of drawing these out. However, starting from a feminist time-space literate position also sensitises us to hierarchies of power more widely, and can be applied, as has been the case here, to the relations of power that underpin time and space in social life more widely. Thus, power relations between the workplace and workers were a constant theme within this research. Likewise, a range of power relations were highlighted around the university as a metaphorical and knowledge space.

Had I chosen to focus specifically on those areas where gendered differences were more apparent, I would not have explored this important aspect of learners' experience. While not necessarily foregrounded by the learners themselves, their stories about becoming distance learners and engaging as practitioner-learners in

the academic space, highlighted not only the physical idea of a university, but the metaphorical space of the university as a privileged and power-laden knowledge space. Thus, I explored the ways in which learners both value and resist the privileged knowledge space of the university, but also the ways in which class and gender were evident within their professional and educational biographies. Rather than detracting from the importance of this feminist perspective on times and spaces in distance learning, I feel that focusing on the broader context of times and spaces in distance learners' lives has added to the understanding of multiplicity and power relations. Equally, I would argue that it demonstrates the usefulness of this feminist time and space literacy – and feminist perspectives more widely – to the exploration time and space in social life more generally.

Overall, while there are inevitably some shortcomings with any perspective, and while it can be hard to work with such complex concepts, I would argue that this feminist time and space literacy has added substantially to the research knowledge in this area, particularly when combined with methods that followed learners through the course of their studies, as well as gathering other forms of quantitative and qualitative data. This is not only in terms of bringing feminist theoretical perspectives on time and space to the area of distance learning, but, in doing so, by adding many new layers to the stories about the multiplicity of times and spaces in distance learners' lives and the ways in which gendered and other power relations shape these. Moreover, I would argue that this study has contributed to the wider body of feminist knowledge in seeking to explore a multiplicity of times and spaces in women and men's lives – as opposed to a binary of women's time and space and men's time and space – and in seeking to focus on time and space simultaneously.

Conclusions

This final, concluding chapter has discussed both the aims and some of the achievements of this research. I briefly revisited the literature around times and spaces in distance learning, noting some of the gaps in the research knowledge, and

how I proposed to address these through a feminist perspective on time and space. I then considered to what extent I had achieved my aims by briefly reviewing the different times, spaces and power relations that were highlighted within this study. This led to a reflection on some of the difficulties, but also the strengths, of trying to maintain a focus on both time and space as simultaneous and interlinked. In order to further demonstrate the contribution of this research, I asked what this approach has told us about times and spaces in distance learning that another approach might not, focusing on the example of re-reading absence through these distance learners' narratives.

Finally, some overarching and wider-reaching conclusions were drawn about the implications of this exploration of time and space in distance learning. I considered two aspects. Firstly, the implications of the similarly and differently gendered narratives around time and space, with paid work highlighted as a particular area of commonality but also difference. And secondly, the potential criticism, but also the strengths, of my focus on broad areas within these women and men's lives, rather than a specific focus on areas in which gendered power relations were most acutely evident, or on women's specific needs and experiences.

Overall, it was argued that this feminist time and space literacy, which seeks to hold time and space constant, and to focus on the multiplicity of times and spaces, and the power relations underpinning them, combined with data collected over time and space, has made an important contribution to the research knowledge on times and spaces in distance learning, but also to the wider body of feminist knowledge and perspectives on time and space.

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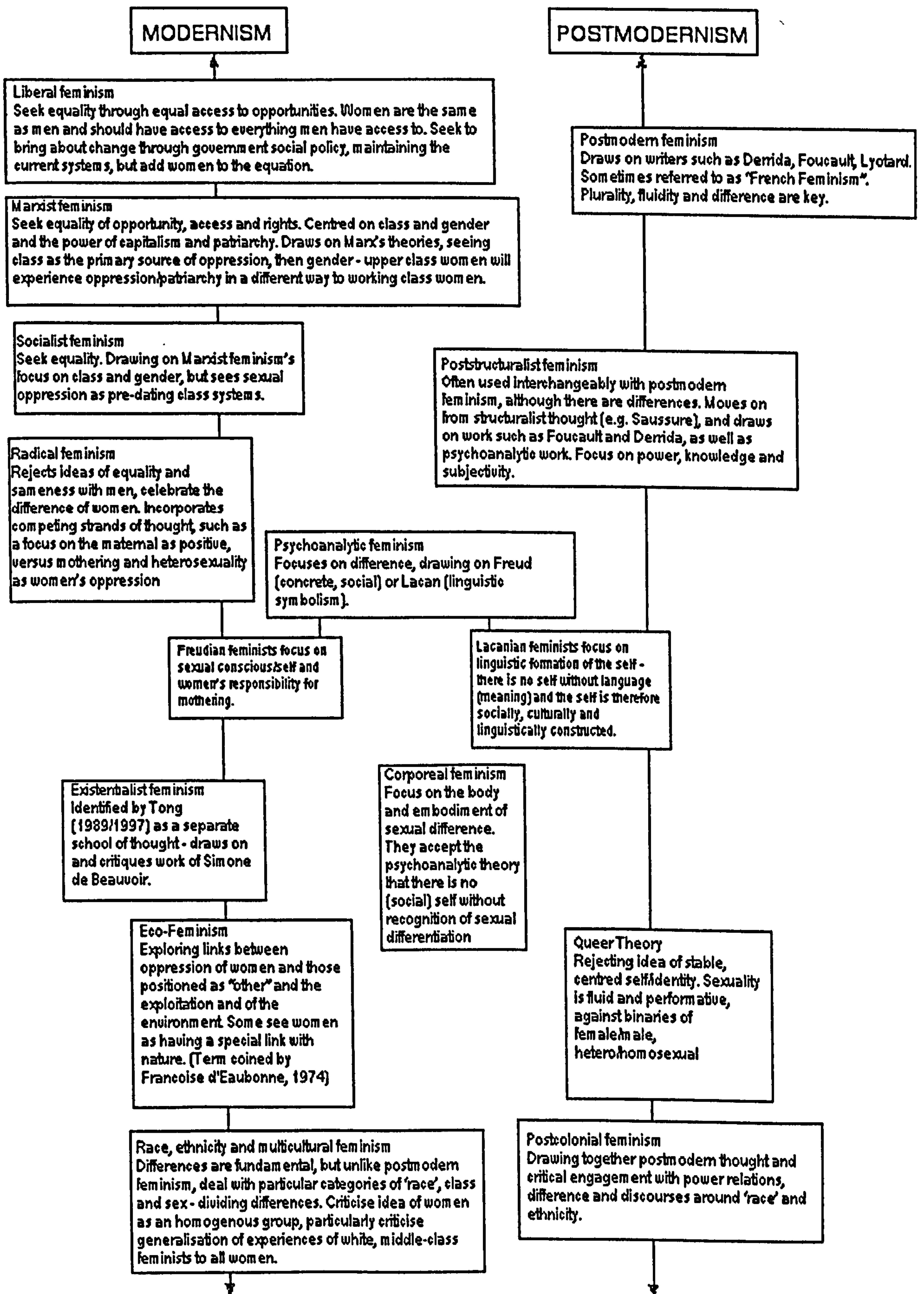
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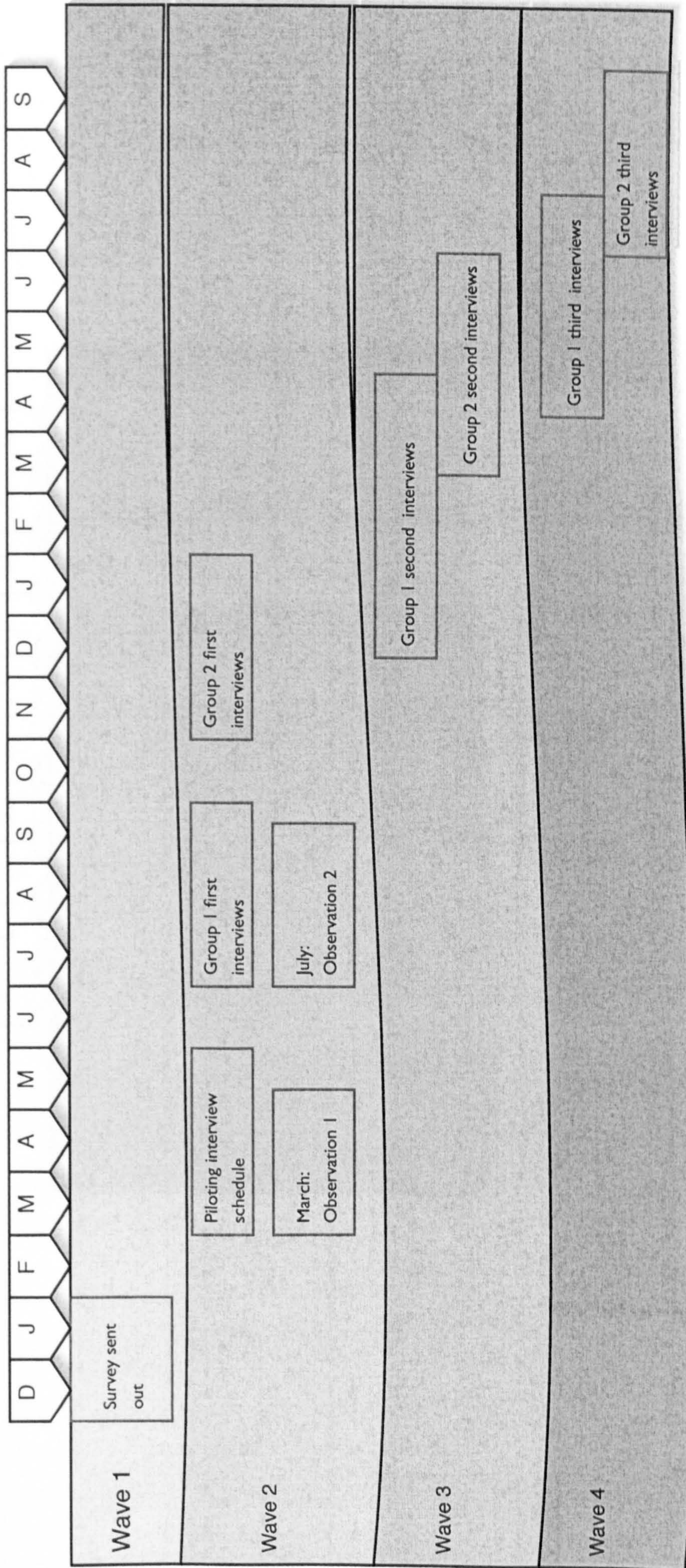
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Appendix 1: Map of Feminisms

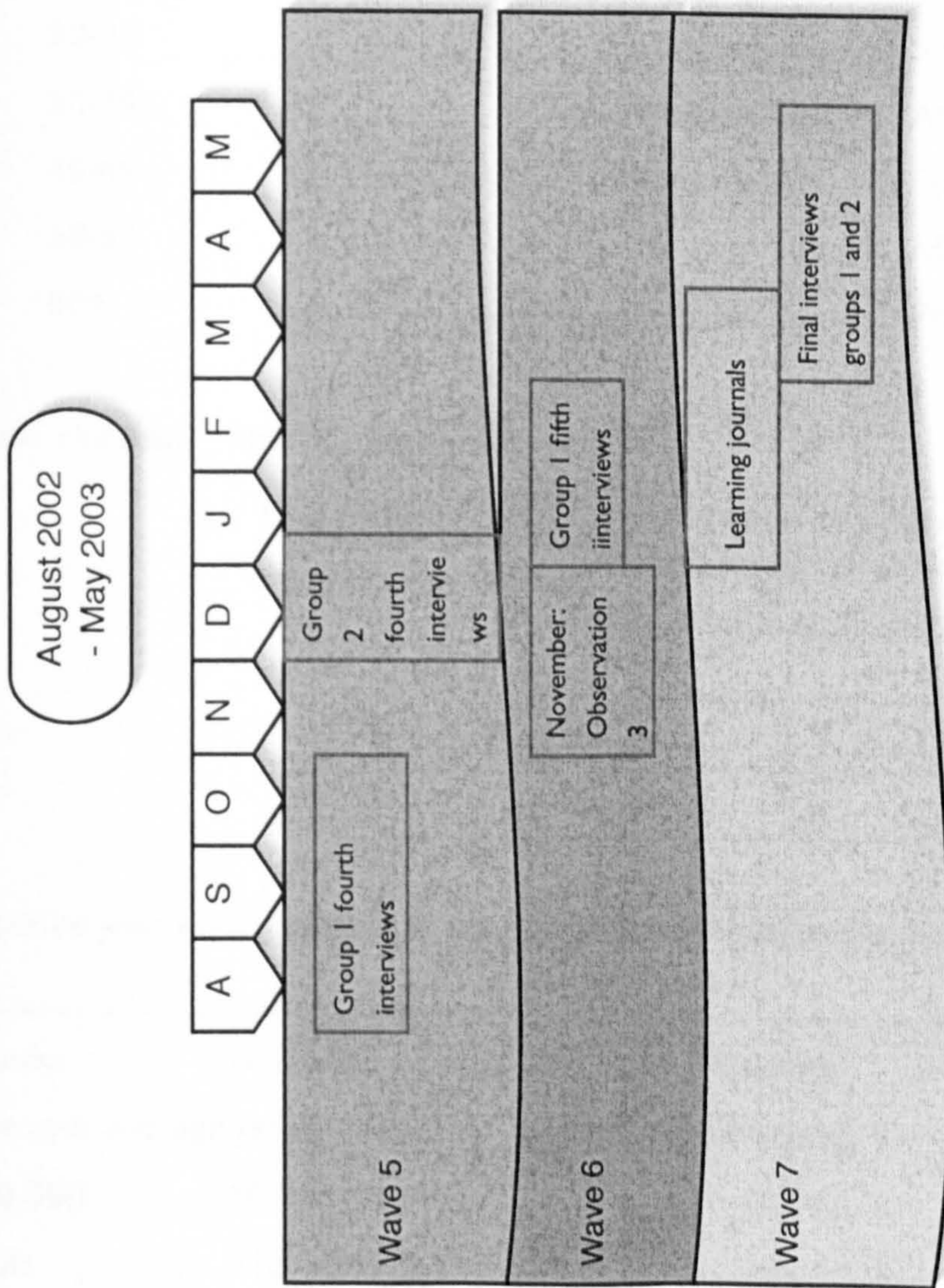


Appendix 2a: Waves of Research

December 2000 - September 2002



Appendix 2b: Waves of Research



Appendix 3: Questionnaire

12) Looking back, what were your expectations of studying at a distance?

13) Has your experience so far of studying at a distance met your expectations? Please explain below:

14) What were your main reasons for deciding to do this course? Please rate the following in terms of how far you agree or disagree, and feel free to add any additional reasons under 'Other':

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
As a hobby				
To get a promotion				
To enhance my understanding of my profession				
For general interest				
My workplace has encouraged me to get a professional qualification				
Academic interest				
Change of career				
For the qualification				
Other, please specify:				

Section 2: Time management

15) On average, how many hours per week do you spend studying your course materials? (please tick):

Less than 1 hour [] 1-5 hours [] 6-10 hours [] 11-15 hours [] 16-20 hours []
 21-25 hours [] 26-30 hours [] 31-35 hours [] 36+ []

16a) Are you *generally* able to study for the same amount of hours per week throughout the year? (please tick):

Yes [] please go straight to question 17
 No [] please answer the following question:

16b) What do you feel are the main reasons you are not able to maintain the same number of study hours per week? Please outline below:

17) How do you feel about the amount of time you are able to dedicate to your MSc studies, please tick:

Too much [] Just right [] Adequate []
 Not quite enough [] Definitely not enough []

Appendix 3: Questionnaire

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I need regular motivation from others to complete my work				
I prefer to 'dip into' the course materials as and when I feel the need				
I find unusual ideas stimulating				
I tend to relate the reading in the course materials to things I have read previously				
I learn the most useful facts and figures off by heart				
I am not very organised in my approach to my studies, I just do some when I can				
I find it hard to relate academic theories to my everyday life				
I tend to consider all the issues before making up my mind				
I find complex ideas easier to understand and to present through diagrams and pictures				
I do not review my progress on the course				
I often read widely outside of the course materials				
I find it easy to put time aside for my studies				
I like to reflect on the work I have done on the course				
I do not tend to question the theories that are presented in the course materials				
I always approach my studies in the same way, regardless of deadlines or disruptions				
I like to be told what are the "correct" theories and issues within the course materials				
I try to apply what I have learned through my studies to my everyday life				
I learn better on my own than in groups or pairs				
I like to read other people's work and then form my own opinions				
I find it easier to read about complex ideas in words only				
I always meet my deadlines				
When applying new ideas or theories, I always consider the context				
I am always willing to try anything new				

Section 5: Communication

21) How do you usually contact the [Learning Provider]?

	Every time	Regularly	Quite often	Occasionally	Never
Post					
Telephone					
E-mail					
Hotline					
In person					

22a) Are you in contact with other course members? No Please go straight to question 23a

Yes Please answer the following questions:

22b) Please describe the form this contact with other students takes (e.g. conferencing on hotline; study group):

Appendix 3: Questionnaire

29) Have you had to make any sacrifices in order to be able do the course? (e.g. giving up a leisure activity)

30) What has been most beneficial to you in terms of supporting you through the duration of your studies?
(e.g. tutor; family; workplace; e-mail contact)

31) What is most important to you in your life?

Thank you for completing this questionnaire!

Please feel free in the space below to add any additional comments which you would like to make, including comments on how user-friendly you found this questionnaire, and whether you felt there were any additional, or different questions you would like to have been asked, bearing in mind the purpose of the study:

--

Thank you for completing this questionnaire, I am very grateful for your help. Please return it to Arwen Raddon, c/o [Learning Provider].

Appendix 4: Covering Letter

8th January 2001

Dear Course Member

With the support of the [Name of the learning provider], I am writing to invite you to participate in a study which is researching approaches to learning in distance learning programmes and the impact, if any, of gender upon individual experiences of studying. This questionnaire, which is being sent out to all UK-based MSc course members, forms the first part of a longitudinal study that I am conducting for my MPhil/PhD. This will be followed by open-ended interviews which will seek, over time, to explore some of the major issues in more depth. I worked at [the Learning Provider] full-time between 1997-1999 as a Production Assistant, working on the proofing, design and copyright of the course materials, and for 6 months in 2000 as Research Officer on a project on workplace learning and training in small and medium-sized enterprises.

I would be very grateful if you could complete the enclosed questionnaire. According to the course members who very kindly participated in the pilot for this questionnaire, it should take you only between 15-20 minutes to complete. There will be the opportunity at the end of the questionnaire to make any additional comments, and to comment on the user-friendliness of the questionnaire. Confidentiality will be maintained at all times. As a token of my appreciation for the time given to complete this questionnaire, on receipt of your response, you will be entered into a draw to win a £20 book token. The winner of this book token will be announced in the [Learning Provider's] newsletter.

The findings of this part of the research will be discussed in an article in the [Learning provider's] newsletter, as well as focusing on issues which have been highlighted as of particular importance to course members. Furthermore, relevant findings may well impact on the design of the course materials and the support systems that are offered for [Learning provider's] students.

Thank you very much for your help in this research, I am sure that the findings will of great interest to us all.

Yours Sincerely



Miss Arwen Raddon

Appendix 5: Cross-Analysis Example

File.No.	Sex	Marital	Kids	Q25WStud	Q26Confl	Q27Cope	Q28Def	Q29Sacr
001	M	Married	Yes	Home/ on planes/ hotels	Time allocation - the course comes after family and work	Not sure - CLMS are very understanding, so is my wife, children, workplace, etc.	No	Yes - less time for other things - work and family especially
002	F	Married	Yes	Home	Domesticity take up a lot of time. Family are quite demanding (including partner). I have to "steal" time from work as I like to be ahead of deadlines.	- Moan (!) - feel resentful sometimes. Put 'study days' in when I shouldn't and make time for work later. Work most evenings (on work and study).	No yet! - Unlikely unless a "significant life event" happened.	Yes - Less aerobics. Weekends MSc a priority.
003	M	Married	Yes	Work - I work away from home Mon-Fri and use time in AM and eve.	Work is very busy and I often have to prioritise between work and study.	Yes - just about!	No	Yes - I sacrificed approx £5000 of my own income over 2 years - I guess that's 2 family holidays or a better car!
004	F	Divorced	No	Combination of work and home	Work pressures can impact on the course schedule I set myself, but there are no home pressures.	Just get on with it, the course is mostly for my own benefit at the end of the day.	No.	Studying at weekends, but no real sacrifices.
005	F	Other	No	Mixture of home and work.	- Work long hours and find it difficult to motivate myself to study when I return home. - Very supportive partner who does most domestic chores, but feel I have little time for him.	Try to motivate myself to study weekday evenings so free time at weekends can be devoted to personal life.	No.	Yes - given up all forms of exercise! Probably could continue if better time management, but all more pressure on limited time available.
006	M	Single	-8	Home	Single person, plenty of free time!	N/A	Yes, change of job - thought I would give myself chance to settle in with no other pressures.	N/A

Appendix 6: Follow-up Letter

Arwen Raddon
[Home Address]

6th June 2001

Dear Course member

PLEASE HELP!

You will recently have received a letter inviting you to participate in my PhD research on approaches to distance learning. A small number of course members have agreed to take part. However, I would really like to be able to speak to enough course members to form a representative sample for the April 2001 intake.

So why should you take part? I would like this to be a two-way research process, and I hope that you will gain something from participating. Evidently the success of this research is important to my own studies, however, as a little-researched area, this will add to the current knowledge on distance learning in general, and issues such as juggling home/work/study more specifically. It is my hope that in the duration of this research, you will also have the opportunity to reflect on your own experiences (as people commented was the case with the questionnaire element of this research) and that you will benefit from the findings in terms of the information it will add to the research community as a whole, the [learning provider] and to yourselves about how distance learners go about their studies.

As such, an important element of my research is the dissemination of findings. For example, I have already begun writing a series of short articles for the [learning provider's] newsletter, which will discuss methodology and findings. I hope that these will be interesting and informative, and will give you a chance to reflect on your own and others' experiences, and to respond if you feel that's appropriate. They may even be of interest in terms of beginning to think about your own dissertation. Another possibility could be a seminar at one of the residentials. I am happy to consider any further suggestions you may have regarding information sharing.

I would be very grateful for your cooperation in this research. If you would be at all able to participate, please contact me by telephone on [Phone Number] or e-mail [Email Address] If you would like to discuss the research first, please do contact me, alternatively I will be around for some of the forthcoming residential.

Best wishes

Arwen Raddon

Appendix 7: Interview Schedule 1

Interview 1

- 1) How did you come to be studying on this course, were there any specific factors which influenced your decision to do this course?
- 2) What do you expect to gain from doing this course?
- 3) How do you feel about your progress so far in your studies?
- 4) Where do you study? (e.g. home 60%, work 10%, hotels 30% etc.)
- 5) How do you organise your study time? (e.g. fit it in as and when; disciplined approach with the same hours each week; block of time just before the assignment is due)
- 6) When you sit down and open your course materials, what happens next; how do you go about studying?
(e.g. read through from cover to cover; take lots of notes; link current reading with what you read before; highlight the key issues; pick out the areas you find of most interest to your work; plan how you will answer the assignment questions etc.)
- 7) Do you think the fact that you are a woman/man has affected your experience of studying by distance learning?
 - in the way that you handled the experience?
 - in what was expected of you?
- 8) What would you say has most helped you so far in undertaking your studies? (e.g. understanding relatives; self-motivation; workplace funding etc.)
- 9) Do you experience any barriers to study, or conflicts due to undertaking your studies?
- 10) Do you expect to change as a person in undertaking your studies?

Appendix 8: Interview Schedule 2

Interview 2

- 1) How have things been going since we last met?
- 2) How were things over Easter, did you manage/ want to do any study?
- 3) Completing and receiving feedback on draft assignment and Module 1
- 4) Has the course changed your perspectives on anything? E.g. the way you think about or do things? Which ideas have you made use of, if any?
- 5) Was there anything that surprised you or shocked you about what you have been learning?
- 6) What do you think you have gained so far from your studies?
- 7) Do you feel that there was a need for you to do a course, would it have been possible for you NOT to return to studying?
- 8) How do you organise your studies – still same as before?
- 9) Can you still do all the things that you did before you started studying, or have you put some things aside?
- 10) Do you feel that you will change in any way, or that you have already changed, because of your studies?
- 11) Is it generally hard work to do your studies, or do you generally enjoy it?

Appendix 9: Interview Schedule 3

Interview 3 with Beth

How have things been going?

What have you gained from doing the course?

Views about assignments, dissertation ideas

Do you still organise your study time in the same way? (Get to work early, weekends, annual leave, study leave)

Contact and communications - tutors, course members, residentials?

What are the most important things you have learned so far? Do you think you've learned anything about yourself?

What are your priorities in life? What is most important to you?

Do you feel that your studies have had any impact on your home life/ work life/ relationships?

What advice would you have for someone thinking about starting this course? Would you recommend distance learning?

Appendix 10: Interview Schedule 4

Interview 4 with Jane

- 1) How have things been going? How are you feeling overall about your studies?
- 2) How have you benefited from studies so far? – any down sides?
- 3) How has it been fitting your studies in with everything else?
- 4) What is it like to study at home for you?
 - Do other things cause interruptions or need doing?
 - Are you able to study straight through?
 - Do you still organise your time in the same way? (fitting in some hours whilst travelling and at work, writing mostly at home etc.)
- 5) Has anything radically changed since you started? Or is there anything you know now, that you wish you'd known at the beginning?
 - Do you feel any different in yourself?
- 6) How do you feel in relation to the university – does it matter to you that you feel a part of things, part of the student/ university community?
- 7) Have you had any communication with other course members, tutors or support staff? Have you talked to friends and family about your studies?
- 8) What has been important for you about doing this distance learning course? Any problems?

Appendix 11: Themes for Interview 5

Key Themes for Interview 5 (7th interview with Mark)

How have things been going?

General reflections on: progress, problems, grades, changes etc.

What have you gained from studying on this programme?

Reflections on/views of distance learning: benefits, downsides, comparison with experiences of education generally.

Appendix 12: Learning Journal Information

Learning Journal (Example)

Dear Beth

I hope all is well with you and you had a good break.

Thanks for agreeing to keep this learning journal. As discussed, the aim is to get an idea of your working patterns in terms of times, places, interaction between your studies and the other areas of your life, and your general reflections on your learning.

If you could keep the journal for between 3-5 days as you suggested, that would great.

Here is an idea of the things I was thinking about, you can add to these as you see necessary. Indeed, you might also want to write something about a day when you wanted to study, but weren't able to for whatever reason.

1) Date

2) Time (studying from... till...)

3) Location (e.g. in the study at home; at the kitchen table; desk at work during lunchtime)

4) Brief description of the task/activity you're engaged in

5) Any target for what you will achieve? (e.g. in terms of work targets or set times for study)

6) Were you able to study straight through, or were there interruptions or other things to do during that time?

7) What resources did you use? (e.g. distance materials, other texts, computer, internet)

8) Any reflections on what you have learned (e.g. positive aspects, negative aspects, questions raised, something that really fired you up, something you want to follow up elsewhere)

You could either print these out on paper, fill them in by hand and post them back to me, or fill them out in a word file and email them back to me.

Thanks again!

Arwen