

**THE IMPACT OF LIFELONG LEARNING ON THE WORK AND LIFE OF
WOMEN IN GREECE**

**Thesis submitted for the Degree of
Doctorate of Social Sciences
at the University of Leicester**

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2012

ABSTRACT

TITLE: THE IMPACT OF LIFELONG LEARNING ON THE WORK AND LIFE OF WOMEN IN GREECE

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The impact of lifelong learning on individuals' work and life is often discussed within the framework of a particular ideology. For supranational organizations and governments lifelong learning is emancipatory, democratic, and necessary for prosperity. For some critical theorists lifelong learning is re-skilling of adults in order to fit the neo-liberal interests of the employers; hence, a mechanism for exclusion and control. Despite the fervor this debate has been conducted, few studies have explored the effects of lifelong learning on individuals' work and life from their own perspective. Moreover, most discussions have ostensibly ignored women's experience. This thesis addresses the gap by examining women's understanding of, and motivations for lifelong learning, and its impact on their work and life.

The study is based on 23 semi-structured interviews with working women in Greece who have repeatedly participated in learning within the context of higher education.

Findings show that women understand lifelong learning as certified, structured and expensive. Personal need, caring and sharing with others, doing their jobs better and enhancing their social status are some of their key motivational factors. Women's private returns to lifelong learning are negligible and their career advancement is impeded mainly due to party patronage and patriarchy in the workplace. However, women appreciated the positive effects of lifelong learning on job performance and increased confidence for future career opportunities.

Despite the strain associated with their effort to combine work, life and studies, women acknowledged the wider non-monetary benefits for them and their family. The positive role of husbands and family, and the little support from the employer and academia especially for single and/or childless women were highlighted.

This thesis questions the validity of the Human Capital Theory in the case of women lifelong learners and suggests that the benefits are not necessarily related to employment and economic competitiveness.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Throughout the long period of my studies for this degree, I was fortunate to have the support and encouragement of people I knew and people I met in the process, to whom I am deeply grateful.

I am grateful to the women who participated in this study for trusting me with their stories. Talking with them was both enlightening for the purpose of this study and extremely rewarding on a personal level. Thank you all.

I am grateful to my supervisors, Dr. Catharine Venter for her detailed feedback and regular SKYPE meetings in the first stages of this thesis and Dr. John Goodwin for his succinct but valuable comments in its final part.

I am also grateful to my friend Sophia Protopapa who motivated me to start this programme, and who has, in many different ways, helped me during this adventure.

I would like also to say a great thank you to my friends Reggina and Elena for holding up to our friendship despite how much I neglected them during these years.

My sincere thanks to my colleagues Karolyn Andrews, and Kelley Galloway who read drafts of this thesis and made valuable comments, and to my friend Mary Leontsini for introducing me to a number of very interesting women.

In particular, I would like to thank my colleague and friend Akis Arapoglou for his perceptive and challenging comments on a number of drafts of this thesis, which spurred a great quality of controversy and provided me with insights on the subject matter that I would not have otherwise.

In my long and agonizing lifelong learning path I have always had the support of my husband. His influence on continuing and completing my studies has been significant throughout our shared life. Thank you once again.

Finally, I dedicate this piece of work to my father who passed away a few weeks before I was able to show him why I could not visit him more often during the last year of his illness.

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GLOSSARY

CEDEFOP: EUROPEAN CENTRE OF DEVELOPMENT FOR VOCATIONAL TRAINING

CMT: CAREER MOBILITY THEORY

CSF: COMMUNITY STRUCTURAL FUNDS

DL: DISTANCE LEARNING

EC: EUROPEAN COMMUNITY

EU: EUROPEAN UNION

HCT: HUMAN CAPITAL THEORY

HOU: HELLENIC OPEN UNIVERSITY

ILO: INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANISATION

LFS: LABOUR FORCE SURVEY

LLL: LIFELONG LEARNING

MNC: MULTI-NATIONAL CORPORATION

NGO: NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATION

OECD: ORGANISATION FOR ECONOMIC COOPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT

PEL: PAID EDUCATIONAL LEAVE

**UNESCO: UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL
ORGANIZATION**

VET: VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

WLB: WORK-LIFE BALANCE

CHAPTER ONE: THE THESIS IN CONTEXT

Introduction

Lifelong learning is an important contemporary theme in many western countries with a tremendous impact on education, training, work and life of people. It features on the top of national educational, economic and social agendas, and is promoted through national and international policies as a worldwide strategy for individual employability, social inclusion and national competitiveness in the twenty-first century globalised world. It is advocated as a means for individuals to adapt to constant uncertainty resulting from demographic changes, globalization tendencies and technological advances (Field, 2006; Field & Leicester, 2000; Green, 2002; Jarvis, 2009). It is further promoted as a means of survival in today's knowledge-based economy (Brine, 2006); and it is campaigned by supranational organizations and national governments as a solution to the contemporary global financial crisis. Furthermore, lifelong learning has been the focus of extensive research in national and international contexts (Field, 2006).

Nevertheless, studying women lifelong learners from their own perspectives has rarely been the case in the lifelong learning literature (Rogers, 2006), whilst there has not been a similar study in Greece. This Thesis aims to fill in this gap. In particular, it aims first, to explore women's understandings of the concept of lifelong learning and their motivation for participating in it, and secondly, to understand their perceptions of the impact this engagement has had on their work and life. The choice of subject has a personal significance to me too. I have been engaged in lifelong learning for 20 years in a variety of educational contexts and I have tried hard to juggle the responsibilities stemming from academia, work and non-work obligations. Also, choosing Greece is not simply a matter of convenience. Being a member of

the European Union (EU) since 1981, Greece has adopted a number of EU Directives and policies, such as lifelong learning, most often implemented via a top-down process (Kokosalakis, 2000). However, country-specific problems, such as the absence of a learning and training culture, the supremacy of higher education and the lack of recognition for professional and/or informal training (Kelpanidis & Vrinoti, 2004; Koutsampelas & Tsakloglou, 2012; Papastamis & Panitsidou, 2009) make any research on Greek women's lifelong learning experiences of paramount importance in providing a more lucid picture of the reality of lifelong learning and its effects in a country that is culturally different from other European countries and where such research has yet to be conducted. Bearing in mind that lifelong learning is propagated to national economic competitiveness it is equally interesting and necessary to explore what women have to say about their employment-related benefits -if any- in a country profoundly affected by the financial crisis.

This chapter will first provide an overview of the debates emerging from the literature of lifelong learning so that the significance of this research study is justified. Secondly, the research questions are outlined and the scope and delimitations of the Thesis are analysed. Thirdly, the contribution to knowledge of this study is presented. It concludes with an outline of the structure of this Thesis.

Current Debates on Lifelong Learning

Although on the surface lifelong learning seems to be a self-explanatory concept - learning throughout one's life course- in reality, it is a highly contestable concept with multiple, contradictory and overlapping meanings (Cotterill et.al., 2007; Rizvi, 2007). Historically, there have been two trends in defining lifelong learning: one that is supported by policymakers and their associated elites, which portrays lifelong

learning as the future way of living and learning, optimistic and utopian, inclusive and liberating, necessary for prosperity, citizenship, empowerment and self-fulfilment; and one argued by social scientists and educational theorists usually with leftist affiliations, which views lifelong learning as a neo-liberal ideology, enslaving and exclusionary, competitive and individualistic, focusing on skills formation rather than personal development, compliance than independence, imposing homogeneity than celebrating diversity (Jarvis, 2009; Quicke, 1997; Olssen, 2008).

Indeed, on the one hand, there is an apparent consensus among policymakers on the definition adopted by the European Commission in its Communication *Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality*, according to which:

“lifelong learning is all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competences within a personal, civic and/or employment-related perspective” (CEC, 2001:9).

Within the more recent *Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in Education and Training for the 2020* (“ET 2020”), the European Commission (EU) has emphasised the importance of lifelong learning in a rapidly changing world as the key to employment, economic success, and full participation in society (CEC, 2010a).

Although complex and multifaceted, lifelong learning is for both economic progress and personal fulfilment, providing “learning experiences, activities and enjoyment in the home, in the workplace, in universities and colleges...” (Aspin & Chapman, 2007:34). Furthermore, lifelong learning is necessary for the creation of the knowledge society –often used interchangeably with the ‘knowledge economy’-, where wealth is less dependent on control over natural resources but on the ability for

research and innovation both the result of the exercise of specialist knowledge and competencies of a highly-skilled labour force (Halliday, 2003; Jarvis, 2009; Peters, 2001). In this new economy/society there is a wealth of opportunities for learning (Green, 2002), which individuals are urged to exploit, not only for employment and economic advancement but also for the development of citizenship, social cohesion, and individual fulfilment (CEC,¹ 2000).

On the other hand, critical theorists attack lifelong learning for being “a truism” (Lambeir, 2005:349) as “it is not possible not to be a lifelong learner”, (Jackson, 2004:12); “elastic” (Dehmel, 2006:51); “empty of content” (Gustavsson in Field 2000 p.253), “a social ambiguity” (Jarvis, 2009); an “ideological construct” for the exploitation of the workers/learners in the greater interest of capital (Wilson, 2009:45); “a form of social control” (Coffield, 1999); “human resource development in drag” (Boshier, 1998:4); and a “boy’s own history” (Edwards, 2000:3), “whose gender-blind discourse” conceals obstacles to participation (Brine, 2006:31). Critics agree that lifelong learning policy is influenced by ‘neoliberal’ values, such as competition, individualism and the rule of the market (Borg & Mayo, 2006; Fejes, 2006; Gouthro, 2009; Wain, 2000). According to their views, lifelong learning policy is made to serve the economy rather than to produce personal or social benefits (Bagnall, 1990; Field, 2000a; Wain, 2007), “a policy vehicle for advancing the neoliberal human capital interests of developed countries and multinational corporations” (Wilson, 2009:512), and as such, it has narrowly focused on vocational education and training (Tight, 1998a; Quicke, 1997; Jackson, 2003). Furthermore, the knowledge economy is one populated by flexible, mobile and adaptable workers with

¹ According to the Presidency Conclusions of the Lisbon European Council in March 2000 the goal for the European Union set by the Member States was to become, by 2010, ‘the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion’ (CEC, 2001).

undergraduate and postgraduate degrees, whose professional security and advancement depend on their constant engagement in learning (Brine, 2006; Quicke, 1997; Rizvi 2007). Brine (2006) argues that the term has mistakenly been used interchangeably with the 'knowledge society' which refers to all those low-skilled, unemployed, and marginalised groups -women, immigrants, poor, racial minorities and others- who lack the human capital to compete in today's globalised marketplace and whose attitude towards learning must be changed (Field, 2000a) through state policy –“incentives, persuasion, veiled threat or even moral bullying” (Griffin, 2001:12)- in order to equally contribute to the economic growth of their nation (Cotterill et.al., 2007; Hughes & Tight, 1995; Rees et.al., 1997). Hence, rather than being an open field of opportunities, the knowledge economy differentiates people according to their economic value thus creating inequality and injustice (Coffield, 1999; Gouthro, 2002; Jackson, 2003; Rizvi, 2007).

Not only terms and objectives are confused, but also boundaries between the different kinds of learning are blurred with no clear demarcations between education and learning, lifelong learning and adult education, vocational and liberal, credentialised learning and leisure, work and home-based learning (Field & Leicester, 2000). In particular, the topic of the distinction between lifelong learning and lifelong education has been the subject of a lively debate by a number of theorists. Sometimes lifelong learning is understood as the same as, or something within lifelong education and at other times, as two terms with different socio-political connotations. It is often claimed that the shift from education to learning is not related to an acknowledgment of the value of all kinds of learning, non-formal and informal included, but to denote a re-distribution of responsibilities from the system -the state- to the learners themselves, who are responsible to make their own investment in the development of

their human capital in order to compete for jobs in the high-skill economy (Biesta, 2006; Boshier, 1998; Gouthro, 2009; Jackson, 2003; Jarvis, 2009; Olssen, 2008; Rivera, 2009; Tuijnman & Boström, 2002). Conversely, Field (2006:45) argues convincingly that there has been “a silent explosion” of learning, in view of how much informal learning individuals acquire, only partly driven by economic concerns, and often related to consumption and leisure. However, despite EU efforts to agree on a common framework of recognition of non-formal learning, non-vocational adult learning such as study tours, fitness centres or community volunteering continues to be labelled as leisure (Wain, 2000).

Moreover, commentators observe that lifelong learning is related predominantly to adults. Jarvis (2009) points out that the way the EU uses the term “would have been more accurate had it referred only to adult learning”. Cotterill et.al. (2007) in analysing the U.K. lifelong learning policy documents conclude that they are focused entirely on those aged 18-30. Field & Leicester (2000:xix) state that although policy has focused on both initial education and vocational training, “there is a strong risk that governments will treat lifelong learning as a form of re-schooling adults”. Indeed, lifelong learning participation is most often measured in terms of how many adults have attended training and/or certificated education (Dehmel, 2006; Rubenson, 2006; Toth, 2009). For example, Field (2006), in discussing trends in lifelong learning participation as presented in national statistics of many countries, refers to registrations on formal adult education and training programmes. Yet, adult education has received different definitions. For Knapper & Kropley (2000) what distinguishes adult education from lifelong learning is that the latter includes formal and non-formal settings of learning. Recent EU literature defines the adult learning as any kind of

learning taken by adults “who have left initial education and training, however far that process went” (CEC, 2006:2; CEC, 2012).

The next major debate in the literature emerges from the claim made in policy documents that lifelong learning increases people’s employment opportunities (CEC, 1993); employability²; and quality of jobs³. In the most recent EC Communication ‘Europe 2020’ it is envisaged that “by 2020, 16 million more jobs will require high qualifications, while the demand for low skills will drop by 12 million jobs” (CEC, 2010a). However, commentators argue that the increase of qualifications and skills does not correspond to an equal increase in knowledge-based elite jobs, thus, leading to an inflation of graduates and qualifications, and there is no concrete evidence that this will change in the future (Brown, 2003; Coffield, 1999; Cruikshank, 2002; Furlong & Cartmel, 2006; Gouthro, 2002; Livanos & Pouliakas, 2009a; Livingstone, 1999). On the contrary, the sector that seems to develop rapidly is ‘low-tier services’ which offer low-skilled, low-waged and part-time jobs (Furlong & Cartmel, 2006; Gouthro, 2002). The argument that investment in lifelong learning has a direct impact on growth (economic) is based on the Human Capital Theory (HCT), according to which investment in education brings higher future earnings and more employment opportunities (Blundell et.al., 1999; Livanos & Pouliakas, 2009b; Wilson & Briscoe, 2004). Although the theory has been proved valid in the case of linear educational trajectories, it has not been proved in the case of successive learning and when people

² “the capacity to be productive and to hold rewarding jobs over one's working life”, Phil McKenzie and Gregory Wurzburg. "Lifelong learning and employability" *The OECD Observer* Jan. 1997: 13-17.

³ “Improving access to lifelong learning, to help people move to high-value added sectors and expanding occupations such as those emerging from ‘sustainable growth’ policies, equal opportunities policy and legislation, and ‘white’ jobs” *An Agenda for new skills and jobs: A European contribution towards full employment* (CEC, 2010b).

do not have a continuing full-time career (Adnett & Coates, 2000; Egerton & Parry, 2001; Jenkins et.al., 2003).

I will now turn to one of the most important and recently developed debates raised by feminists about the almost total absence of gender issues within the policy and academic/research literature (Brine, 2006; Leathwood & Francis, 2006; Gouthro 2002; 2005; 2009; Jackson, 2003; Rogers, 2006). Feminists question the egalitarian vision of the society that lifelong learning rhetoric promises, and argue that there is a disjunction between the gender-neutral discourse of lifelong learning and the gender-specific work and lives of men and women (Preece, 2009). Feminist theorists argue that the knowledge society is deeply gendered (Brine, 2006). A variety of factors such as employers' discriminatory practices (Blackburn, et.al., 2002; England, 2005), men's patriarchal practices at home and work –reflected in women's lower salaries, less training opportunities, and less stable jobs (Francis & Leathwood, 2006)- and women's prioritizing of childcare over work (Hakim, 1998), reduce women's employment opportunities irrespective of the learning they accumulate (Blackmore, 2006; Gouthro, 2005). Indeed, Eurostat (2011b) reported that in 2010 more women than men participated in lifelong learning (measured as the percentage of the population aged between 25 to 64 participating in education and training), but women's proportion in employment in the same year, remained consistently lower than men's (Eurostat, 2011a). Furthermore, the certificated version of learning disadvantages women because skills and knowledge acquired in the home, such as nurturing children, caring for elderly, or coping with many roles are neglected (Gouthro, 2005; Preece, 2009). Women lifelong learners are further disadvantaged as a result of the complex variety of demands from home, workplace and academia, due to the unequal division of unpaid labour, job intensification and insecurity, and the

rigidity of the academia, respectively (Edwards, 1993; Home, 1998; Vrionides & Vitsilakis, 2008). Also, Gouthro (2009:158) argues that this gender-neutral type of lifelong learner escapes the attention of critical theorists too, who “are often guilty of perpetuating a masculine worldview” of lifelong learning. It should be stressed, though, that women are not a homogeneous group, with one identity; other identities may equally contribute to the situation of disadvantage (Yuval-Davis, 2006).

Finally, the identity of the ‘lifelong learner’ remains inconclusive within the literature of lifelong learning. Is it someone who attends education at a mature age, because financial and social circumstances did not allow him/her to complete all stages of compulsory and/or higher education at an early age? Can someone with limited or no educational background be a lifelong learner? Is it someone who is eager to take advantage of all possible opportunities for learning either for work or leisure or self-fulfilment? Or is it the individual who participates in recognised forms of learning again and again –“a learner whose learning is never complete”, (Fejes, 2006:74) because s/he is afraid of the depreciation of the market value of his/her knowledge and skills in a rapidly changing and unpredictably risky global economy? These are not rhetorical questions. They deserve an answer in order to justify my choice of research focus, methodology and participants. However, defining the lifelong learner cannot be done without reference to historical, philosophical and empirical information. Who is a lifelong learner today is neither the same as the one 30 years ago, and probably nor as the one in the future. If lifelong learner is mainly configured according to the prevailing discourses of each historical time (Fejes, 2006) then contemporary definitions must be analysed with reference to the current political and philosophical framework. But even this analysis is not enough without listening to

the voices of those who currently participate in lifelong learning, and more so, if these voices have, to a large extent, been silenced.

How these learners define themselves, how they evaluate the importance of learning for their work, family and self-fulfillment, how they benefit from the learning economy, and how their work and life realities are influenced by and change through their engagement in lifelong learning are valid questions to be asked if someone wants to re-examine the assumptions on which current lifelong learning definitions, discourses and policies are based. It is even more imperative to listen to what women lifelong learners have to say because first, their experiences are the least researched; secondly, their participation is not analogous to return on earnings and employment opportunities; and thirdly, their family and caring commitments disadvantage them in a system of learning that celebrates individuality, independence and flexibility.

It is equally interesting and important to study women lifelong learners in Greece. Greece is currently experiencing one of the worst financial crises in its recent history. The global downturn of 2008 revealed the Greek economic, political and structural weaknesses, which made the country vulnerable to the speculative pressures of the financial markets. The consequent austerity measures imposed by its lenders, in particular the International Monetary Fund and the EU has resulted in massive job losses, in addition to dramatic cutbacks in welfare provision, including education and training. Three years after its bailout, Greek economy looks even worse, with more cost cutting measures ahead (Featherstone, 2011; Katsimi & Moutos, 2010; Meghir et.al., 2010). Amidst this socio-economic situation, advice for investment in education is heard in abundance by all sorts of national, international and intergovernmental experts. For example, the Greek Ministry of Education has

symbolically changed its name to include “Lifelong Learning” and with a variety of regulatory initiatives aims to persuade citizens to participate. Irina Bokova, the director-general of UNESCO claims that “Investing in education is investing out of crisis” (Bokova, 2012). Similarly, Angel Gurría (2009) OECD Secretary-General, highlighted the importance of investing in human capital, both for individuals and for society as a whole as a solution to the many challenges created by the financial crisis. The Communiqué issued after the Meeting of the European Ministers for Vocational Education and Training in 2010 drew attention to the imperative need for flexible, high quality education and training in order for Europe to respond to the challenges posed by the economic crisis. In trying to circumvent unemployment, which has hit women more severely, Greeks have indeed increased their participation in education and lifelong learning (Eurostat, 2011b). However, in Greece vocational education has never attained the status it has in other North European countries. Instead, higher education has always been the ultimate educational goal for families and their children for better jobs and higher social status (Kelpaidis & Vrionitis, 2004; Liagouras et.al., 2003; Psacharopoulos, 2003). Consequently, lifelong learning policies, imposed as a top-down process and via European funds, has not found much appeal (Greece has the lowest participation in the EU15) except for boosting the demand for higher education.

Research Questions

The overarching aim of this study is to explore the invisible spaces of work and life of women lifelong learners, in order to assess the impact of lifelong learning on the work and life of women who are faced with the competing demands of work, private life and academia.

In order to answer the research question the specific research objectives are:

1. To explore women's understandings of the meaning of lifelong learning;
2. To identify their key motivations for participating in lifelong learning;
3. To determine the importance of lifelong learning on women's work;
4. To identify enablers and barriers that women lifelong learners experience in accommodating the demands of work, private life and academia.

Thesis Scope and Delimitations

Even if one is politically and socially affiliated with anti-neoliberal ideologies, as well as sensitive to gender inequality, one cannot ignore the fact that lifelong learning is a choice for many. Youth, adults, elderly, women and minorities, participate in organised education and training either by choice, or by obligation, in the hope of acquiring qualifications, developing their employment opportunities, and increasing their salaries. They may also participate for enjoyment, self-fulfilment and self-actualisation. Instead of relying on ideology, rather than analysis, I have chosen to explore how women themselves in Greece understand lifelong learning and what effects they perceive that it has on their professional and personal lives. Instead of discussing a generic type of learner, I chose to concentrate on the working woman 'lifelong learner'. Although the rhetoric celebrates all kinds of learning⁴, the lifelong

⁴ "Formal learning is always organised and structured, and has learning objectives. Informal learning is never organised, has no set objective in terms of learning outcomes and is never intentional from the learner's standpoint. Often it is referred to as learning by experience or just as experience. Mid-way between the first two, non-formal learning is the concept on which there is the least consensus, which is not to say that there is consensus on the other two, simply that the wide variety of approaches in this case makes consensus even more difficult. Nevertheless, for the majority of authors, it seems clear that non-formal learning is rather organised and can have learning objectives" (OECD, available at http://www.oecd.org/document/25/0,3343,en_2649_39263238_37136921_1_1_1_37455,00.html, accessed on 20/5/2011).

learning literature shows that it is only intentional, institutional and, to a large extent, certificated learning undertaken by adults that is considered as lifelong learning (Blackmore, 2006; Cotterill et.al., 2007). In the knowledge economy the workers who can add value through innovation are expected to be those who have acquired graduate and postgraduate degrees (Brine, 2006; Toth, 2009), which are also properly audited and quality assured to be portable and recognizable in any similar context (Green, 2002). Therefore, I have focused this study on women who have pursued lifelong learning within the context of tertiary education. The hegemony of higher education over any other form of learning, and the little state and employers' recognition of informal/non-formal learning in Greece, constitutes an additional reason for studying women lifelong learners in higher education rather than in any other informal and/or informal learning.

Consequently, in terms of participants, this study is delimited to adult working women living in Greece who have repeatedly participated in higher education during their working life. In terms of scope, the study focuses on exploring women's personal experiences from ongoing education whether regarding employment, career advancement, personal development or well-being. The study does not cover the debates arising from the blurring of boundaries between learning and education, adult and lifelong learner, and formal and informal learning neither does it consider issues of participation. Also, this study has been based on the evaluation of the theoretical frameworks and practical work of researchers writing in English, who have adopted a critical view of lifelong learning (e.g., Coffield, Boshier, Gourtho, Edwards, Brine, and others). The work of writers who have adopted an uncritical celebratory and descriptive approach has not been considered in this study.

Although the critique against lifelong learning has been articulated through the lens of a number of theoretical paradigms (Field, 2003), such as, but not limited to, the neo-Marxist (e.g., Boshier, 1998), Marxist-Feminist (e.g., Mojab, 2009), Critical Social Theory (Coffield, 1999), and Social Capital Theory (e.g. Field, 2005), I have engaged in a careful analysis of lifelong learning by using the critical tools provided by postmodern theorists who claim that lifelong learning is a technology of performativity, a form of neoliberal governmentality and an expression of consumerism all of which are associated with practices of social exclusion, social control and inequality. My choice was based partly on my familiarization with discourse analysis as a linguist, and partly on my preference for an interpretivist epistemology.

Contribution of the Study

Lifelong learning discourse, policy and practices have raised a number of debates most of which are related to a criticism against the market orientation of the concept.

Today, one of the major debates within the literature of lifelong learning is still related to its definition. On the one hand, policymakers define lifelong learning as all learning activity undertaken throughout life with the aim to increase employment, economic success and people's full participation in society (CEC, 2010a). In Greece, the concept is propagated by the Ministry of Education as a panacea for the country's most severe economic crisis in its recent history (Diamantopoulou, 2011). On the other hand, critical theorists with leftist (often implied than stated) and/or feminist affiliations argue that lifelong learning is an ideological construct invented by the neoliberal human capital interests for the exploitation of the learners in the greatest interest of the capital, which through its gender-neutral discourse conceals barriers to

participation (Brine, 2006; Jackson, 2004; Wain, 2007; Wilson, 2009). However, I am concerned by how little attention has been paid to the lifelong learners themselves, in particular working women, by both critical theorists and policymakers. Furthermore, despite the emphasis on the lifelong nature of learning –as a never ending process- few researchers have indeed chosen as subjects of their studies the lifelong learner; most of the times the focus is on the adult learner. How these women understand lifelong learning is one of the key contributions of this study is to address this gap.

Furthermore, a number of surveys have explored the reasons why individuals undertake lifelong learning. By relying on pre-determined sets of factors, these surveys fail to capture the individual experience. For example, Jenkins et.al. (2003) admit that their statistical model cannot capture the variation in individuals' motivations for lifelong learning and suggests further empirical work. The contribution of this study is thus to allow women's views on this matter to unfold through discussion and at the same time provide an analysis within the theoretical framework of postmodern thinking and in particular, by referring to the notions of performativity, governmentality and consumerism.

Moreover, the impact of lifelong learning on economic competitiveness has been fervently debated between policy-makers and critical theorists. Policy discourse has been based on the HCT, which is proven only in the case of linear education of an individual whose age, gender, type of qualification, field of study and country are not taken into account (Cohn & Addison, 1998; Jenkins et.al., 2003). The contribution of this study is that it foreshadows women's understandings of the ways that their lifelong learning -defined as repeated episodes of structured and certified education

on a tertiary level- has impacted upon their work, while it has revealed the structural impediments that they face in the workplace.

Although reconciling work and family, and work and studies has been the concern of both governments and employers, and has spurred considerable research, women's challenges for balancing responsibilities stemming from all three institutions, have been sparsely explored. Furthermore, the effects of education on women's life have been explored mainly from the economic point of view. Few studies have allowed room for women to express their views on sources of stress and conflict or self-fulfillment, self-esteem and happiness. Therefore, a further contribution of this study is to allow women to voice the positive and negative aspects of lifelong learning, aids and barriers, sources of support and conflict, and to alert decision-makers on how they can assist women to accomplish their learning goals.

The Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is organised into seven chapters. Chapter One is an introduction to the major debates in the literature of lifelong learning, with an emphasis on the absence of gender issues in these discussions and the presentation of the research question, research objectives as well as setting the parameters of what this study covers and what areas it does .

Chapter Two critically analyses the assumptions embedded in the lifelong learning rhetoric and policy. It does that by a critical evaluation of the development of the concept from its inception until today in Europe and in Greece, and the political and social inscriptions lifelong learning carried throughout the years. The second section

offers an analysis of these messages using the conceptual framework provided by postmodern thinkers.

Chapter Three reviews the importance of lifelong learning in relation to women's employment. Prior research is discussed in relation to structural and agential factors contributing to women's professional realities. The second section analyses the impact of lifelong learning on the life of women who are required to juggle a variety of roles and demands from work, private life and academia.

Chapter Four is divided in two parts. The first one provides a theoretical and methodological framework of this study. In this section the interpretive constructivism methodology informed by the feminist research tradition is presented and its choice for this study is justified. The second part provides an overview of the procedures used to select participants, the data collection and analysis techniques and the ethical considerations implicated in this research. The study was based on a sample of 23 working women living in Athens, Greece who have had several spells of formal education leading to qualifications, in a variety of fields and study modes.

Chapter Five is one of the two chapters on results. In this first one, women's understandings of lifelong learning and their motivations are presented and discussed vis-à-vis the existing literature.

Chapter Six continues the presentation and discussion of the findings on the effects of lifelong learning on women's work and life. Key findings such as the insignificance impact of lifelong learning on women's private returns and the structural barriers they experience in their professional life are critically analysed. Furthermore, sources of

conflict and sources of support are presented and analysed with reference to the employer, family, wider social environment and academia.

Chapter Seven provides an overview of the main findings of this study and concludes with the implications of this study for policy and academia, as well as with recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER TWO: AN HISTORICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS OF LIFELONG LEARNING: MEANINGS, GOALS AND GENDER

Introduction

The aim of this study is to explore the impact of lifelong learning on the work and life of women in Greece. In order to locate the research question within the context of the existing body of literature in lifelong learning, this chapter intends to provide an historical and philosophical analysis of the meanings and goals of lifelong learning. The chapter is divided in two sections. In the first section the concept of lifelong learning is analysed in light of its transformations in policy rhetoric from the 1970s until today, including the development of the concept in Greece, whilst the gender constructions of lifelong learning are revealed. The section concludes with questioning a number of assumptions upon which the lifelong learning project has won global consensus.

The second section provides a counter-argument to the policy discourses through the critique articulated by theorists who work within the postmodern framework of thought. Deriving from the work of Lyotard, Foucault and Baudrillard, these postmodern commentators link lifelong learning discourses with performativity, governmentality and consumerism. Seen from this angle, lifelong learning is a mechanism in the hands of the neoliberal state for serving the dominant economic interests, rather than a progressive emancipatory project based upon social inclusion and justice. However, again the missing element in the construction of their critique is the linkage of gender issues with lifelong learning.

The chapter concludes by summarizing the key issues in the policy and rhetoric of lifelong learning and reveals the areas that further research is required. Lifelong

learning is propagated as a panacea to a number of problems including economic crisis and social exclusion. Given the lack of clarity on what lifelong learning is, for whom and for what purposes, and the little attention on gender equity within the lifelong learning project, this study is expected to raise awareness of the lived realities of women's lifelong learners.

The Rhetoric of Lifelong Learning: Vision and Reality

Instead of offering a simple historical narrative, this section aims at linking the emergence and development of lifelong learning with its broader socioeconomic background, and, thus, explore its differing approaches to it: pragmatist, humanistic, social democratic, and neo-liberal (Aspin & Chapman, 2007), in order to highlight the fluidity of the concept (Dehmel, 2006); the gendered nature of its construction (Brine, 2006; Edwards, 2007); and the inconsistency between the theoretical approaches and the application of the concept in real life (Edwards, 2007; Jarvis, 2009). The section concludes with a critical overview of the major assumptions embedded in the lifelong learning rhetoric and policy.

Lifelong Learning Policy: An Historical Overview

It is suggested that the concept of lifelong learning originated in the 1920s in the work of the American philosopher John Dewey (Cross-Durrant, 2001). In his book *“Democracy and Education”* Dewey (2001) explains the need for learning throughout life by linking education to human growth. Schooling is just one among a wide variety of learning activities the individual will be engaged in, hence “the aim of education is to enable individuals to continue their education” (2001:105). The first half of the interwar period, and prior to the Great Depression of 1929, was one of

considerable prosperity in New York and other major European cities, culturally expressed through jazz and Art Deco. Women had entered the labour market, strengthening their position especially after the ratification of their suffrage rights in the United States. Although Dewey is generally considered as supportive of women's rights, he does not make a direct reference to women as learners, nor does he explore barriers to their participation (Siegfried, 1998; Sullivan, 2000). In Europe the idea of lifelong education was most visibly expressed by Basil Yeaxlee (1929) in his book *"Lifelong Education"* which is the first attempt to articulate a vision of education as encompassing all experiences, personal, social and work-related (Cross-Durrant, 2001). Yeaxlee, as Dewey, did not explore the issue of women's participation in education in any detail, despite the tensions reported in national surveys. Coles (2000), for instance, in studying a British report on adult education for British women in 1922 highlights the barriers to participation as a result of male attitudes within home, the classroom and society. Both Dewey's and Yeaxlee's ideas on education as a lifelong process are rooted in an era of healing from the wounds of World War I and hope for reconciliation and spiritual life; thus education was viewed as conducive to personal and economic growth, (Dewey) and a compass for returning to Christian values (Yeaxlee). Their thought was informed by the grand narratives of modernity, in which "the hero of knowledge works towards a good ethico-political end" (Lyotard, 2005:xxiv), that is to say religion and universal growth and peace. Adult learning, both vocational and community-based, became the focus of attention for decision-makers in the following years up until the seventies (Field, 2006).

Half a century later the idea of lifelong education came to prominence once again, but this time not as a popular notion among education specialists and socialist reformers

but as an idea appealing to international agencies, the UNESCO, OECD, and the EC (Field, 2000a; Rizvi, 2007).

The Faure et.al. report “*Learning to Be*”, published by UNESCO in 1972 was the turning point in that it initiated a global debate concerning what was variously called ‘lifelong education’, ‘recurrent education’, ‘adult education’, and ‘formation permanente’ (Green, 2002; Schuetze, 2007). The report was launched against a background of student rioting, opposition to the Vietnam War, environmental concerns and a crisis in French politics (Boshier, 1998; Field, 2006). It expressed a humanistic, democratic and emancipatory system of learning for all (Field, 2006; Gouthro, 2002; Hughes & Tight, 1995), applied life-wide, overhauling educational systems and extending to formal, non-formal and informal settings until “we reach the stage of a learning society” (Faure et.al., 1972:xxxiii). Written by a predominantly male team of Commissioners, apparently unaffected by the fervour of the second wave feminism underway, the Faure report is not concerned with gender issues in education, as it allocates only one short paragraph to differences in participation in education between the sexes. The modernist -i.e., learning as a universal truth (Lyotard, 2005) - and gendered notion of learning is sustained throughout the report (Edwards, 2000), given that social structural barriers to women’s equal participation in education remained unchallenged.

The oil crisis of the 1970s and rising unemployment led governments to invest in human capital and to concentrate on vocational education, with the aim of creating a more flexible workforce for the demands of the emerging global economy (Jordan & Strathdee, 2001; Edwards, 2000). Gradually neoliberal economic practices, leading to increased privatisation of public services and institutions were adopted by western

governments (Cort, 2009). The Faure humanistic approach to education, with its emphasis on education for all for equality and self-fulfilment, became primarily a vocationalist one, couched more in terms of human capital thinking, and was promoted through reports such as “Recurrent Education Strategy” by OECD, and “Education permanente” by the EC. The opening of the Swedish higher education to admitting adults with work experience, the convention on paid educational leave in 1974 by the International Labour Organization (ILO), the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) (1975) and the establishment of the Open University in Britain, are some practical consequences of the new vocationalist turn of lifelong learning (Jallade & Mora, 2001; Schuetze, 2007).

Following a period of gestation through the 1980s, in the early 1990s interest in lifelong education revived, and a new round of reports were issued by conservative think tanks and policy fora as business and industry required a more knowledgeable workforce, necessitated by the growth of a hyper-competitive global market (Jarvis, 2009; Rizvi, 2007; Usher, 2007). However, what was dramatically different in the new discourse was that the emphasis was now placed on ‘learning’ rather than ‘education’, thus, indicating its shift from a normative and prescriptive educational process to learner demands and individual choice (Quane, 2009). Field (2000) argues that ‘*education*’ is understood as state-funded and formal, whereas ‘*learning*’ suggests a privately-funded and more informal system of provision. Starting in the early 1990s the emanating ‘neo-liberal inspired set of guidelines’ (Borg & Mayo, 2005:272) for creating an educated workforce changed completely the philosophy and practices of adult education in ways eloquently summarised by Boshier (1998:5): “If lifelong education was an instrument for democracy, lifelong learning is almost entirely preoccupied with the cash register”. The new discourse employed by OECD, the EU

and the World Bank drew its force from neo-liberal assumptions about the self-maximising self-interested individual who is not gendered, raced or classed (Blackmore, 2006). UNESCO's report '*Learning to Be: The Treasure Within*' by Jacques Delors (1996) retained most of Faure's humanistic and transformative approach to education, but it also focused on the need for learning within the new socio-economic context of globalization, technology and knowledge-based economies. It also emphasised the economic aspect of learning for all including women because "educating women is probably one of the most rewarding investments a nation can make" (UNESCO, 1996:33). Critics have pointed out that the Delors report was a text of generalities and platitudes thus proving UNESCO's inability to respond with a concrete educational policy to the World Bank's and OECD's neoliberal agendas (Mundy, 1999; Watson, 1999).

The European Union and the Lifelong Learning Discourse

The EU actively embraced the concept of lifelong learning in 1995, and developed a "rootless, location-less, international discourse... dressed in an impressive moral conformity" (Novoa & Dejong-Lambert, 2003:43). Before that, the EC was primarily concerned with the construction of a vocational training system to be used as an inclusion mechanism for youth at risk of unemployment (Cort, 2009). Consequently, a number of VET initiatives were taken and learning for work, based on curricula which emphasised skills and competency outcomes and leading to certified national qualifications, became almost an imperative for universities and other education providers (Edwards & Usher, 1998). But while it took member states almost forty years to agree on transferability of vocational qualifications, adopting a lifelong learning agenda since the 1990s has occurred speedily. The driving forces behind this

development were of a political, economic and social nature. The fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of Communism in the Eastern Bloc, at the beginning of the 1990s consolidated the hegemony of neo-liberal capitalism, featuring increased privatisation of public services and changes in managerial practices of public enterprises in order to make them competitive in international markets (Cort, 2009; Jarvis 2009). Europe, in addition to participating in the global race for economic competitiveness along with China, Japan and the U.S., had to solve the problem of European citizenship, that is to say, to persuade EU member citizens that they belong to a coherent and united whole; and the decision to create a monetary union made this goal even more imperative, as did the threat of the rising unemployment (Brine, 2006; Ertl, 2003; Jarvis, 2009). All three aims, i.e., economic growth, political and social stability, are depicted in the White Paper in 1995 on *‘Teaching and Learning-Towards the Learning Society’* (CEC, 1995) which emphasised the relation between learning, training and employment, as well as economic competitiveness and European integration (Wain, 2007). In this paper, the EU policymakers stress the risk of a dual society as a result of differing degrees of knowledge among European citizens. However, while previous policy documents were addressed to the member-states since the 1990s the EU discourse is focused on the individual, reflecting a more neo-liberal discourse which emphasised individualised responsibility and/or failure (Cort, 2009). In 2000 the Lisbon Strategy adopted by the European Council set the strategic goal for the EU to become a knowledge-based economy and a cohesive society. In 2001 the Communication *“Making European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality”* (CEC 2001:3), set out the Lisbon Agenda (2000-2010) in which the definition of lifelong learning became broader to include formal, non-formal and informal learning for “active citizenship, personal fulfillment and social inclusion, as

well as employment-related aspects”. In the Lisbon Agenda the notion of ‘knowledge-based society’ is introduced along with that of the ‘knowledge-based economy’, the former being used with reference to low-skilled learners and the latter with the high-skilled learners (Brine, 2006). In this new context, the rhetoric implied that individuals, endowed with a newly-found consumer power, must become more adaptive to change, and be convinced that lifelong learning will provide them with the knowledge and skills to be able to produce and utilize new opportunities as they arise (Edwards, 2000; Levin, 1998). However, the discourse of empowerment overshadows differences in social, cultural and other forms of capital as well as gender inequality in access and consumption of educational opportunities (Brine, 2006; Edwards, 2007). Rubery (2002:513) contends that “there has been a relatively limited development of an equal opportunities dimension to lifelong learning initiatives with many schemes still focused on those in full time employment”. Although the Lisbon Strategy set specific targets for women’s participation in employment (60% by 2010), the facilitation of their participation to lifelong learning was still not discussed. Neither was it discussed in the following grand European strategy “ET 2020”, launched in June 2010, in the midst of a global economic crisis. In this current discourse lifelong learning continues to play a key role in achieving Europe’s strategic priorities which are now ‘smart growth’, ‘sustainable growth’ and ‘inclusive growth’. Once again, women are overlooked within the official discourse of lifelong learning.

Lifelong Learning in Greece

Adult education was introduced in Greece in 1929 aiming at culturally and linguistically integrating Greek refugees from the 1922 ethnic cleansing in Asia

Minor, and subsequently for ideological conversion by the occupation forces (1941-1944), the Greek communist party (Civil War, 1946-1949) and the Greek military junta (1967-1974). But it was not until 1981 with Greece's accession to the EEC that a series of important developments in the name of lifelong learning were made (Kelpanidis & Vrinoti, 2004). These changes were triggered by the influx of European funds through the Community Structural Funds (CSF) from 1981 until today (Karalis & Vergidis, 2004). The Lisbon Strategy of 2000 was a turning point in the Greek public policy. The Ministry of Education, in response to the Lisbon Agenda, undertook a leading role in the design and implementation of a national strategy, through a prolific legislation in 2001, 2005 (Giannakopoulou, 2006; Panitsidou & Papastamis, 2009), and the latest one in 2010 when the name of the Ministry of Education symbolically changed to include the term 'lifelong learning'. Throughout these years major developments include the establishment of a wide number of centres for vocational training; the Hellenic Open University; and the Institutes of Lifelong Education in higher education institutions (Karalis & Vergidis, 2004).

Nevertheless, the Greeks have among the lowest participation rate with women having just 2.9 in 2010 compared to the EU-27 average of 10.0 (Table 1). Despite better coordination and a comprehensive legislative framework, lifelong learning provision in Greece remains highly centralized, bureaucratic, and under-researched (Karalis & Vergidis, 2004; Papastamis & Panitsidou, 2009; Kelpanidis & Vrinoti, 2004; Zarifis, 2008). The problems of the Greek lifelong learning policy are summarized in the absence of a lifelong learning culture; the persistent overestimation of university education at the expense of non-formal and/informal learning; lack of coordination and sustainability, and gender inequality.

Firstly, Greece exemplifies how a top-down approach regarding European policies can fail when they are indisputably incorporated into national policy, irrespectively of

	Total		Male		Female	
	2005	2010	2005	2010	2005	2010
EU-27	9.8	9.1	9.0	8.3	10.5	10.0
Euro area	8.1	7.9	7.9	7.5	8.4	8.3
Belgium	8.3	7.2	8.2	7.0	8.5	7.4
Bulgaria	1.3	1.2	1.3	1.1	1.2	1.3
Czech Republic	5.6	7.5	5.2	7.3	5.9	7.7
Denmark	27.4	32.8	23.6	26.3	31.2	39.3
Germany	7.7	7.7	8.0	7.7	7.4	7.6
Estonia (2)	5.9	10.9	4.3	8.6	7.3	13.0
Ireland	7.4	6.7	6.2	6.3	8.6	7.2
Greece	1.9	3.0	1.9	3.1	1.8	2.9
Spain (3)	10.5	10.8	9.7	10.0	11.4	11.6
France	7.1	5.0	7.0	4.6	7.2	5.4
Italy	5.8	6.2	5.4	5.9	6.2	6.5
Cyprus (3)	5.9	7.7	5.4	7.5	6.3	7.9
Latvia	7.9	5.0	5.0	3.4	10.6	6.5
Lithuania	6.0	4.0	4.2	3.2	7.7	4.8
Luxembourg (3)	8.5	13.4	8.5	12.8	8.5	14.0
Hungary	3.9	2.8	3.2	2.6	4.6	2.9
Malta	5.3	5.7	6.1	5.2	4.5	6.1
Netherlands (3)	15.9	16.5	15.6	15.9	16.1	17.1
Austria	12.9	13.7	12.3	12.7	13.5	14.7
Poland	4.9	5.3	4.3	4.8	5.4	5.9
Portugal	4.1	5.8	4.0	5.8	4.2	5.7
Romania	1.6	1.3	1.5	1.2	1.6	1.4
Slovenia	15.3	16.2	13.6	14.1	17.2	18.3
Slovakia	4.6	2.8	4.3	2.2	5.0	3.3
Finland	22.5	23.0	19.0	18.9	26.1	27.1
Sweden (3)	17.4	24.5	13.0	18.0	21.9	31.1
United Kingdom (3)	27.6	19.4	23.1	16.4	32.0	22.4
Iceland	25.7	25.2	21.6	21.1	29.8	29.4
Norway	17.8	17.8	16.3	16.4	19.3	19.2
Switzerland (3)	27.0	30.6	27.4	31.6	26.5	29.6
Croatia (4)	2.1	2.0	2.0	2.2	2.1	1.8
FYR of Macedonia	.	3.2	.	3.1	.	3.4
Turkey	.	2.5	.	2.6	.	2.4

TABLE 1: Source: Eurostat: Lifelong Learning Statistics, Data from September 2011

national needs and constraints (Jallade & Mora, 2001; Kokosalakis, 2001; Panitsidou & Papastamis, 2009; Schuetze, 2006). With the influx of European funds from 1988 onwards a variety of organizations, NGOs, governmental agencies and private institutions have been established, in addition to already existing ones, such as chambers, trade unions and adult vocational and industry centres which all competed to secure funding in order to provide adult education and training, in several cases, for their own interests rather than to meet specific local needs (Papadopoulos, in Schuetze 2006; Zarifis, 2008). However, in the absence of previous appropriate structures and central planning and supervision, provision was alien to the Greek labour market

needs, fragmentary and inadequate both in terms of infrastructure and trained teaching staff. For example, Papastamis & Panitsidou (2009) conducted a study of Adult Learning Centres in North of Greece and found that classes were held in schools and public libraries, affecting thus flexibility in scheduling, and teaching was provided by schoolteachers with no training in adult education. Curricula are also designed according to the EU mandates about improvement of basic skills, irrespectively of local restrictions and/or demand. For example, ICT, business, and languages are offered by almost all providers, often via e-learning, but access to ICT in Greece is the second lowest in the EU⁵ (Eurostat, 2011c).

A second problem is that the Greek society continues to place a high value on university education, not because there is a deeply-rooted tradition for learning, but due to the fact that a university degree is expected to provide the means for social mobility (Kelpanidis & Vrinoti, 2004; Liagouras et.al., 2003; Psacharopoulos, 2003). Moreover, state higher education is provided free, according to the Greek Constitution, and the degrees issued are the only ones recognized by the state (Liagouras et.al., 2003). Vocational education is considered to be good for students who did not pass the exams for the state universities; hence it is viewed as the unpleasant alternative for “failures” of secondary education (Ammerman, 2008; Koutsampelas & Tsakloglou, 2012; Patiniotis & Stavroulakis, 1997). Finally lack of recognition of any learning taken outside the formal education system, by both the state and the employers is a major barrier for participation in non-formal and informal lifelong learning in Greece. However, given that the demand for university-level recognized education, including the Hellenic Open University, is higher than the available places it is evident that Greeks cannot study what they want at the time they

⁵ Internet connection was 50% in Greece when the EU27 average was 73% (Eurostat, 2011c).

want (Karalis & Vergidis, 2004). On the other hand, any provision of learning outside universities bears less prestige and is rarely recognized for employment purposes.

Thirdly, sustainability in the long-run of structures and provision is under serious threat not only because they do not respond to local needs, but also due to their dependence on external funding. As soon as the Community funds finish, and until alternative sources are found, the function and provision of programmes is either suspended or terminated (Zarifis, 2008). For example, Papastamis & Panitsidou (2009) found that language courses in the Adult Education Centres of North Greece were taught within 50 hours, as there was not additional funding for continuing the programmes so that the participants could really learn the language.

Finally, despite a number of lifelong learning policies for gender equality⁶, the results remain poor, mainly because structural inequalities have not been solved. Further to the above-mentioned problems of the Greek lifelong learning policy, Greek women's higher participation is also impeded by the lack of childcare facilities, the persistence of the breadwinner model, and the gender gap in employment (EAEA, 2007). Recently, the Greek Ministry of Education sponsored a survey on lifelong learning in Greece (Public Issue, 2011). The results revealed that 71% of Greeks, mainly housewives and people in rural areas, are not informed about lifelong learning options; nevertheless 93% consider it important. Although formal learning is not included as an option of lifelong learning in the survey, it was found that women participate more in other types of learning than men and mainly for personal satisfaction than professional reasons. However, the survey does not include tertiary

⁶ The Greek Manpower Organisation has established a quota of at least 60% women in all training programmes provisioned in the revised Constitution of 2001 for positive measures for women (UN, 2005).

education as a lifelong learning option, whilst it only occasionally reports on gender differences.

The Assumptions of the Lifelong Learning Rhetoric

In discussing the emergence of lifelong learning since the 1920s to the present, in this section, I have suggested that the differing variations of that one concept reflect the range of the interests of supranational organisations, as those were shaped by social, economic and political changes from one period to the other. The history of the development of the lifelong learning project shows that the dominance of an economic rationale, in the context of globalised capitalism, and in response to unemployment and other economic problems since the 1970s, presents a departure from the emancipatory and egalitarian discourse articulated in the first UNESCO reports. Hence, the earlier notion of mass schooling has now lost its centrality in favour of the ‘knowledge society’, which is envisioned as an open democratic and forward looking society, where there are recognized opportunities for learning for the individual at any stage of life (Green, 2002; Quicke, 1997; Tight, 1998b). The discourse of lifelong learning draws its force from a number of embedded assumptions, as the historical overview above reveals.

First, lifelong learning discourse assumes that education and learning contribute to individual and national economic competitiveness. The principal argument is that as a result of globalisation, competition transcends the national borders, and with the development of technology and communication, the developed countries cannot hope to compete with the developing world in labour-intensive sectors in which developing countries, being labour-abundant, have comparative advantage. Hence, they are required to produce higher added-value products and services, ‘high-tech’ based on

innovation and skilled labour (Brown, et.al., 2003; Jordan & Strathdee, 2001). This shift puts pressure on education and training systems to raise and constantly develop the output of a workforce with these higher level skills (Rees, et.al., 1997; Tight, 1999). The HCT on the basis of which lifelong learning becomes an imperative, therefore, assumes that investment in education and training and its resultant rewards in paid work are a corollary of individual choice and meritocracy unmediated by race, gender and class (Brine, 2006). Commentators argue that in ‘knowledge-economy’ of the neo-liberal states, there is a core labour market of managers and professionals, and a peripheral workforce, “the servile class” (Foley,1994:5), immigrants, female and ethnic minorities as well as young people on part-time jobs who have very little access to training benefits from both the employer and the state (Gouthro, 2002).

Also, based on the above assumption, the discourse endorses a utilitarian view of lifelong learning, emphasising vocationally-oriented education and training, which contradicts the other aspects of the concept, namely that learning is life-wide, embedded in all life contexts, school, workplace, the home and the community, and should be recognized and made visible. For example, Blaxter et.al., (1996) in interviewing working class older women documented the vast amount of non-formal learning these women were doing while combining family, work and education. However, lifelong learning policies concentrate on predefined measurable outcomes of learning, attainment targets, and occupational competencies, all of which are related to formal education and applicable to certain age-groups (Edwards & Usher, 1998). Furthermore, with the vocationalisation of the curricula, the state became increasingly concerned with audit, inspection and quality assurance, and not with provision (Ecclestone, 1999; Edwards, 2002).

Thirdly, commentators agree that in almost all policy documents, of international organizations and notably of EU there has been reference to the importance of lifelong learning for combating social exclusion (Aspin & Chapman, 2007; Hake, 1999a; Jarvis, 2009). However, it seems that no society has achieved the degree of educational provision advocated in the 1970s as a large fraction of population remains excluded or under-involved (OECD in Burke 2000; Wain, 2000). Even in Norway, where the education model has been successful, the participation of low qualified workers in learning is still limited (Payne, 2006). The individuals' social-economic background, their cultural and social capital, the quality of their early childhood and of primary education experience, as well as lack of financial and other support, interest or motivation, and personal characteristics such as age, gender, and ethnicity affect participation in adult education (Hughes & Tight 1995; Schuetze, 2007; Tight, 1998c). According to Quicke (1997:146) the market mechanism in education provision "has systematically disadvantaged certain groups, and reinforced the class divided society". OECD (2004:514) draws attention to the risk of "digital divide" and asserts that expansion of learning opportunities does not necessarily mean that socio-economic factors as determinants of individuals' participation are cancelled. Coffield (1999:483) in studying performance indicators in school league tables speaks of an "educational apartheid" for students in schools in deprived areas of Newcastle. Wain (2000:43) presents the social divide in the most eloquent way by placing on the one hand the "enterprising, educated, well-resourced, and ambitious individuals" who possess the resources and the technological knowledge to purchase further education and learning, and on the other, the "dependent, poor, exceedingly low-resourced underclass alienated and disorientated", who most probably will not receive the support to overcome their state. In between, (quoting Baudrillard) there are the

masses, who being addicted to the spectacle, have denounced education altogether in favour of leisure and constant entertainment (Wain, 2000).

Fourthly, lifelong learning is assumed to be inherently good (Brine, 2006; Wain 2007). The historical development of the concept reveals that the political agenda may be directing it in ways that can be oppressive rather than emancipatory. Edwards (2002) contends that life is becoming schooling, a constant striving for becoming, as people are transformed into compulsive learners, what Tight (1998b:261) calls ‘learning junkies’ during their entire life. Blaxter & Tight (1994), in a survey of adult part-time students, report the extreme strain exercised in these people’s lives, as they tried to combine effectively different roles, and the feelings of guilt when they did not live up to expectations in any one of them. While none can disagree with the people’s need to learn for personal fulfilment, economic advancement and social development, it is hard to accept the compulsory aspect of learning, supported by governments’ rhetoric about individuals’ responsibility for learning, and reinforced by the implied threat and urgency as a result of an overall crisis.

Finally, lifelong learning discourse assumes that gender is ‘resolved’ (Brine, 2006; Fenwick, 2004; Jackson, 2003; Rogers, 2006). As Edwards (2000) admits lifelong is a concept fabricated by male educators and policy makers within the contexts of the westernised world, whose gender-blind discourse does not succeed in hiding barriers to participation (Brine, 2006). Rogers (2006:204) in reviewing a vast range of lifelong learning literature, concludes that “Gender is the missing element in the discourse of lifelong learning, to our shame”, given that those who write about lifelong learning are influenced by the patriarchal culture in which they are embedded. Research, albeit limited, reveals that in certain contexts girls and women

are doing more lifelong learning successfully but without the rewards (Fenwick, (2004) and that the knowledge-economy in the EU is populated by twice as many men as women (Walby, 2005).

The purpose of this section has been to trace the development of the concept of lifelong learning historically with the aim of exposing the gradual transformations it has undergone since 1970s, and how these have informed transnational discourse so that it becomes responsive to the changing political and economic environment associated with globalization and neo-liberalism. The EU actively embraced the concept of lifelong learning in 1995 when it became a central strategy in the EU's policies for education and training. Although emphasis was placed on social inclusion as much as on economic competitiveness a more careful reading of the policy reveals the absence of gender issues. In Greece lifelong learning policy has been adopted as a top-down process and has been inadequate to tackle problems of implementation, sustainability of provision and gender equality. In the final part of this section the critical discussion of the assumptions incorporated in the lifelong learning discourse has highlighted the importance of this study in which the validity of these assumptions will be tested against the realities of women lifelong learners, the tensions and contradictions they encounter in work and life.

Lifelong Learning Through a Postmodern Lens

In order to understand the impact of lifelong learning on the work and life of women, one must adopt a more critical attitude towards the assumptions of mainstream analysis. By locating lifelong learning within the theoretical framings provided by postmodernism one may better understand its positioning within contemporary social practices (Edwards & Usher, 2001; Edwards et.al. 2002; Leicester, 2000; Usher,

2007; Wain, 2000). Postmodernism as a form of analysis is associated with deconstruction “is at one and the same time an aspect of the contemporary world and a way of understanding it” (Usher, 2001:165). In this section I draw on postmodernist thinking in order to deconstruct the dominant policy discourses about lifelong learning as a means of individual and social emancipation and to understand in what way it may be a mechanism of social exclusion social control and inequality in particular with reference to women. However, drawing on ideas of thinkers and theorists as challenging, relational and controversial as Lyotard, Foucault and Baudrillard, in order to construct a criticism on lifelong learning, I take the risk of simplifying their ideas. Still, though, the fruitfulness of such an attempt is worth taking the risk.

Lifelong Learning as a Strategy for Performativity

Lyotard (2005) defines “postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives” (2005:xxiv). Postmodernism is not a unified movement but a condition, “a particular state of the modern world, not an escape from it” (2005:79); a point where the metanarratives of modernity, particularly those of the Enlightenment such as universal reason, a belief in the ability of rational scientific thought to discover truth, individual freedom, and emancipation, although not totally rejected are increasingly discredited (Edwards & Usher, 1994; Fraser & Nicholson, 1988; McLaren, 2002; Usher, 2001; Wain, 2000) because they have proven unsuccessful in fulfilling their promises such as, mastering poverty, inequality, ecological degradation and disease (Best & Kellner, 1991; Usher, 2001). For example, the previous section referred to the Faure’s (1972) grand-narrative on learning as a means for emancipation and equality. However,

Faure's proposals have now been proved inadequate to fulfill the goal of inclusion (Wain, 2007).

Similarly, the central role of education –the transmission of knowledge- by which modernity's grand narratives are substantiated (Edwards & Usher, 1994), although still resistant, is under attack along with the authority for providing education vested on institutions such as the university, government, research councils and professional bodies (Edwards & Usher, 2001; Usher, 2001; Usher & Edwards, 2007). Indeed, the central role of mass schooling is eroded, in favour of a 'learning society' where, a variety of activities beyond the formal systems, for example, home, the neighborhood, the workplace, and every other social space, can be educational in that they provide contexts of learning (Wain, 2007). Hence, formal demarcations in education are erased as learning replaces education and becomes lifelong (Wain, 2007). Ironically, the postmodern condition of knowledge resembles in certain ways the intergovernmental visionary discourse for lifelong, life-wide learning (CEC, 2000). Why is this not emancipatory then?

Lyotard takes a critical stance rather than being celebratory about the changing signification of knowledge under the impact of technology and capitalism. He argues that in the postmodern condition the emphasis of learning is placed on *performativity*, "the optimization of the global relationship between input and output" (2005:11), thus producing a performativist culture which celebrates learning for its value in increasing effectiveness and efficiency, skills and competences (Wain, 2007). In this culture lifelong learning is a strategy for attaining and maintaining the flexibility required by neoliberal economies and market competitiveness in a globalised world (Edwards & Usher, 2001). In the postmodern condition the point is to provide the system with

what it needs. “Those who possess this kind of knowledge will be the object of offers or even seduction policies”, and, “the advantage will be with the player who has knowledge and can obtain information” (Lyotard, 2005:51). Knowledge is not an end in itself, and the possibilities for mastering anyone discipline, are minimized (Edwards & Usher, 2001).

What does this line of argument tell us about the impact of lifelong learning on women’s work and life?

One could claim that the postmodern questioning of the possibility for mastery through knowledge, is liberating for women in that mastery as inscribed in modernist educational discourse, is gendered and oppressive (Edwards & Usher, 2001; Edwards, 2000). The academic discourse, what Lacan called “the discourse of the master”, is a phallographic preoccupation to master a subject, to possess it, by erecting systems of answers (Jackson, 2004). Moreover, acknowledging home as a site of learning may be considered as celebrating women’s role in the family. However, the emphasis on performativity recognizes only certain kinds of knowledge the ones that are “tied in with the culture of business and profitability” (Wain, 2007:47), and consists of the effective accumulation of qualifications (Usher & Edwards, 2007). Furthermore, as knowledge never is complete, the quest for mastery becomes an endless pursuit (Edwards & Usher, 2001). Indeed, “the very notion of lifelong learning encourages the idea that there is no fixed body of knowledge, which can be attained, or mastered by a particular point, say the end of schooling, in one’s life” (Leicester, 2000:80).

In this quest for knowledge not all people are on equal footing, nor do they face the same risks. For example, women as well as other marginalized groups are faced with structural inequalities which impede their participation in education, training or

advanced technology (Blackmore, 2006; Cotterill et.al., 2007; Leathwood, 2006). For example, aged workers, women on part-time contracts, young people on 'stage' agreements, and racial minorities due to their limited access to the labour market are discriminated in the amount of investment made in their education and training (Hake, 1999b). Interestingly, White (2012) found that whatever positive measures were taken between 2000 and 2010 in the UK were not enough to cancel these structural determinants of one's participation in lifelong learning. Moreover, given that the overwhelming majority of women do not enjoy an economically and professionally secure life many women are excluded from the benefits of the learning society (Beck, 1992). Furthermore, differences in access to learning opportunities, social and cultural resources and material conditions raise the prospect of the unequal distribution of risks –economic, social or psychological (Beck, 1992). According to Beck "the history of risk distribution shows that, like wealth, risks adhere to the class pattern, only inversely: wealth accumulates at the top, risks at the bottom" (1992:35). Hake (1999b) explains how learning exclusionary mechanisms in the workplace contribute to the development of risk situations for different groups of workers.

The argument here is that in this race for performativity some women may be left behind. Lifelong learning policy discourse treats citizens as a unified total, what it calls 'the learning society', an ideal or a 'myth' (Hughes & Tight, 1995), propagated across the globe, in order to improve economic competitiveness by the attainment of increasing levels of performativity (Wain, 2000). It is exactly this discourse that Lyotard rejects. Postmodernist thinking holds that any attempt to impose some form of unity, by suppressing difference, "has a totalizing intent and hence, is a priori terroristic" (Wain, 2000:48).

Lifelong Learning as a Mechanism of Governmentality

Foucault is considered a major postmodern thinker, although not wholly assimilated within this tradition (Dean, 2010). In his writings, like Lyotard, he problematised modern forms of knowledge and power as being forms of domination (Best & Kellner, 1991; Wain, 2000). Nicoll & Fejes (2008) in their collection of 15 papers from a symposium on Foucault and lifelong learning, draw on Foucault to understand the varied ways lifelong learning is entwined in relations of power, especially those of neoliberalism. In doing so, they explore how Foucault's ideas, notably his notion of governmentality can deepen our understanding of the discourses of lifelong learning, by revealing how lifelong learning becomes "a mechanism of power whereby the individual governs themselves within relations of power" (Nicoll & Fejes 2008:6).

According to Foucault power is not only negative, repressive, and limiting (McLaren, 2002); it is relational, hence, it is not the property of a person or object; it exists only through actions that modify other actions within relationships between individuals or groups (Nicoll & Fejes, 2008). This power does not entail the abolition of the other's freedom, although this may be possible; on the contrary, the exercise of power depends on the availability of the 'other' to remain active, and free to act (Foucault, in Nicoll & Fejes, 2008). The exercise of power, then, presupposes freedom (Edwards, 2008). Apart from disciplinary power, which regulates the behaviour of individuals in the social body, there is also the sovereign power- the exercise of authority by the state, e.g., levying taxes- and governmentality, which retains the techniques and institutions characteristic of both sovereignty and discipline, and is designed to govern the conduct of both individuals and populations at every level not just the administrative or political level, "in order to regulate populations as resources to be

fostered, to be used, to be optimized” (Dean, 2010:29; Olssen, 2008). Governmentality includes both the act of government and the way people govern themselves. It has dual power, individualizing and totalizing and includes techniques and procedures for directing human behavior (Foucault in Olssen, 2008). It is about the conduct of the conduct (Dean, 2010). For example, the European Union strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth through lifelong learning aims at integrating 25 populations in a ‘growth’ trajectory, by fostering individual learning (CEC, 2010a). Governmentality is legitimized by its capacity to exercise power in a non-coercive manner, through infiltrating regulation in practices of self care (Olssen, 2008; Usher & Edwards, 2007). Governmentality does not operate through the law; unlike state power, which imposes control from above, governmentality aims to manage populations from within, by shaping the interests, needs, aspirations, and consciousness of individuals, as well as of the population as a whole (McLaren, 2002).

The question is how this analysis of relational power and governmentality relate to lifelong learning discourses and in particular, to women learners. Usher & Edwards (2007) claim that neoliberal governmentality provides the analytical tools for critically evaluating the lifelong learning discourse. Commentators agree that lifelong learning policy discourses can be seen as power technologies which aim, in various ways, at disciplining the individual and at the same time, as part of a larger governmentality, to regulate populations as a resource to be exploited for achieving the neoliberal learning society of flexible employees (Nicoll & Fejes, 2008). As explained above, power can be exercised only over free people, able to act, whose conduct may be led or directed. This presumes a set of standards or an ideal, for example, the learning society, towards which individuals should strive and this may

be achieved through agents – the state, intergovernmental organizations, the academia and companies- whose responsibility is to direct human conduct (Dean, 2010). Through lifelong learning policy discourses individuals are regulated in their becoming active learners. In doing so they are empowered to take care of themselves, but at the same time assume responsibility to learn in order to meet their own needs, and since their needs constantly change, this learning becomes perpetual (Olssen, 2008; Simons & Masschelein, 2008). For Foucault self-knowledge is a strategy and effect of power whereby one internalizes social control (Best & Kellner, 1991). This is how learning becomes an “internalized educational aspiration” (Tuschling & Engemann, 2006:458) something inherently good. Individuals guided by their own self-interest and acting in an independent, autonomous, self-interested and self-responsible manner (Bagnall, 2000) are expected to “become managers of their own learning” (Westhoff, in Simons & Masschelein, 2008:51). Within this framework, individuals must keep acquiring and maintaining the currency of their knowledge not only for their own welfare, but they are morally obliged to do so for the benefit of the society in general (Ecclestone, 1999; Green, 2002; Tuschling & Engemann, 2006). Poverty, female unemployment and other forms of exclusion, for example, may be considered as irresponsibility towards one’s learning capacity (Simons & Masschelein, 2008; Blackmore, 2006). Thus, it is suggested that it is the individuals’ fault for missing the employment opportunities that the knowledge-based economy has to offer when they do not take advantage of the variety of learning opportunities and do not participate in learning (Cotterill et.al., 2007; Tight, 1998b).

On the other hand, anyone would agree that encouraging individuals in developing their own capacities by stressing their autonomy and freedom to learn are worthy goals (Lambeir, 2005; Tuschling & Engemann, 2006). However, according to

Foucault, autonomy in choice to learn is illusionary, rather than emancipatory; because individuals are faced with normalizing mechanisms which, in a non-coercive manner, dictate the regulation of their own conduct, - their learning choices- in the era of neoliberal capitalism (Crowther, 2004; Lambeir, 2005; Marshall, 1995; Usher & Edwards, 2007). Marshall (1995:322) has introduced the term “busno-power” a new form of power, which “is directed at the subjectivity of the person, not through the body but through the mind, through forms of educational practice and pedagogy which, through choices in education, shape the subjectivities of autonomous choosers”. Hence, busno-power is imbedded in educational institutions, curricula, teaching practices and so on, which incorporate notions of efficiency, competitiveness and customer satisfaction as these are exemplified by the world of business (Marshall, 1995). The learners are encouraged, thus, to see themselves as autonomous choosers, but their choices must conform to specific economic needs and vocational imperatives, and embody the ethos of enterprise (Lambeir, 2005; Marshall, 1995; Rose, 1999). In other words, their autonomy is penetrated by economic individualistic needs and interests. Rose (1999:161) paints a depressing picture in saying that “the new citizen is required to engage in a ceaseless work of training and retraining, skilling and reskilling, enhancement of credentials and preparation for a life of ceaseless job seeking: life is to become a continuous economic capitalization of the self”. In accomplishing this project, the learners have to become managers of their own learning, and acquire an entrepreneurial spirit able to spot learning opportunities in a competitive environment in which they have to invest in order to gain a return (Simons & Masschelein, 2008). An example of this normalizing mechanism is the ‘Europass’, a European passport for citizens which records all learning, knowledge and skills, along the lines of highly prescribed qualifications, as

for example, university degrees, ECDL, and language diplomas (Cedefop, 2012). Therefore, in order to gain recognition and advantages European citizens have to become “secretaries of their own being” in their obligation to constantly document their life course (Tuschling & Engemann, 2006). This kind of supervised autonomy in learning leads to greater responsabilization of individuals and their families, including the financial aspects of learning activities (Olssen, 2005). Leathwood (2006) and Brine (2006) argue that the EU presentation of the lifelong learner as autonomous and independent disadvantages women whose lives are more constrained by traditionally a greater responsibility for the children and the elderly. Furthermore, the emphasis on autonomy and independence assumes “a self unencumbered by domestic and caring responsibilities with sufficient material and other resources and capitals to maintain the myth of independence, therefore, the autonomous learner is a masculine subject” (Leathwood, 2006:48). Tett (1996) argues that the emphasis of the lifelong learning policy on individual success or failure masks the female family circumstances that make learning easy or difficult. Beck (1992:116) claims that the “the market subject is ultimately the single, ‘unhindered’ by a relationship, marriage or family”.

Lifelong Learning as an Act of Consumerism

In Baudrillard’s version of postmodernity the grand narrative of progress and rationalism are replaced by simulation and consumerism and the postmodern world is one that the proliferation of signs has colonized reality. Whereas in the previous eras, the image was a counterfeit of the real, and later, with the industrial revolution of the nineteenth century, the image was difficult to be distinguished from the real, because of mass production and the proliferation of copies, in the postmodern world, there is

no blurring between reality and the image; rather there is a detachment from both because the model precedes the real and produces a 'hyperreal' or *simulacrum* that means, the generation of a real without origin or reality, a signifier without a corresponding signified (Kellner 1995; Levin, 1996; Usher 2007). Society is so much permeated by such simulacra that we have lost contact with the real world, and the hyperreal becomes a kind of virtual reality of what we want reality to be (Levin, 1996). Baudrillard uses the example of the Disneyland amusement parks and the shopping malls to illustrate his notion of simulacrum. Disneyland is the image of a world, or a land, that does not exist as such anywhere in the world. Furthermore, the hyperreal world is not measured against notions of good and evil, because the implicit morality by which society operates is based on concepts which have no real basis, are devoid of concrete referential; "the hyperreal is measured only in terms of its performativity; how well does it work or operate?" (Levin, 1996:86). For example, the learning society may be conceived as a simulacrum, a model of a society that has preceded the real one, and in which, social, economic, vocational, racial and gender differences are devoid of a real basis, hence, no one is really concerned about these, as far as it works with the maximum performativity. Baudrillard does not reject the existence of reality in the sense that everything is an illusion, but he points out that the hyperreal signifies a cultural code. For example, the realizing of the world through science and technology presents the world or the real in its own way and thereby fashions the world over in its image (Usher, 2007).

Baudrillard explains this loss of distinctions between reality and simulacrum with reference to the consumer society. We now live in a hyperreality of simulations in which people are caught up in the images created through consumption (Usher, 2007). He points out that "In order to become an object of consumption, the object must

become a sign” (Baudrillard in Poster, 2001:25). Through the transformation of the commodity (whether an object or an idea) into a sign, the sign is able to proliferate in an endless stream of signs completing a cycle of creation of images (simulacra) that bears no relevance or relation to any reality (Kellner, 1995; Norris, 2006; Usher, 2007). Eventually, it is not commodities but signs that people consume, and through these they create their identities (Norris, 2006). What Baudrillard calls sign-value is the expression and mark of style, prestige, luxury and power (Baudrillard in Poster, 2001), which is conveyed to individuals through each act of consumption (Usher, 2007). Consuming thus, is a meaning-bearing activity, it denotes difference or solidarity within society (Usher & Edwards, 2007). In particular in the neoliberal version of capitalism competition among individuals involves a competition of desires, but whose fulfillment is never achieved (Usher, 2007).

Viewed within this framework of thought, lifelong learning may thus be considered as a simulacrum divorced from reality, in that the learning society, that the rhetoric assumes lifelong learning creates, is a virtual reality of what decision-makers want to be. The learning society is a signifier without a corresponding signified. In this sense, lifelong learning ceases to be about knowledge, or skills and competencies, or self-advancement; it reduces itself to a value-sign. Following Baudrillard, as soon as learning becomes a sign it renders itself available for consumption. In other words, it becomes a commodity which “can be energized by desire” (Usher, 2007:220). The desire to learn is not limited to learning traditionally associated with educational institutions. It may include many other forms, such as entertainment, leisure, short courses, fitness classes, self-help manuals, management gurus, alternative therapies, oriental philosophies and all sorts of everyday practices (Field, 2006; Usher, 2007). Thus, the argument that learning is all about economic competitiveness, serving the

interests of the governments and the employers for increasing skills and competencies is incomplete (Wain, 2000). Field argues “the learning society is driven by changes in the wider context of individual values, social relationships and living patterns, rather than by economic factors alone” (2006:77). But in Baudrillard’s understanding, learning is related to lifestyle and consumption is an important deciding factor (Field, 2006; Edwards & Usher, 2001). Since learning activities become consumer goods, they can be purchased in the marketplace on the basis of the economic or social value (competitive advantage, or prestige and status) they transfer to the learners-consumers (Usher, 2007). The argument here is that the infiltration of a market orientation in lifelong learning, its identification with prestige, status and power, and its recoding as an expression of lifestyle transform it from liberating and emancipatory to exclusionary and unfair. Indeed, lifelong learning based on a marketplace agenda perpetuates rather than eradicates inequalities (Cotterill et.al., 2007; Gouthro, 2002). As Blackmore points out “markets do not deliver equity” (2006:12). There are at least three reasons in support of this argument.

First, as learning becomes consumption there is an increasing diversity and multiplicity of non-institutional sources of learning. As a result, the state ceases to be accountable for providing the resources for the lifelong learning of its citizens, and state funding for lifelong learning becomes thinner, since much of the financial cost is transferred to the individual learner-consumer. In reality, unlike schooling and conventional higher education, adult education, formal and non-formal has rarely been recognised as welfare right in the political discourse (Field, 2000a; Green, 2000; Wain, 2000). Less financially privileged groups, unemployed, single parents, the young, and immigrants are threatened with marginalisation.

Secondly, the fact that learning is acquired outside the formal educational system and is geared to the needs of the market, what is learnt is shaped by mass media and mass consumption and those who control them. In the learning market pricing and promotion guides the production and provision of knowledge (Usher, 2007; Wain, 2000). Elliott (1986) points out that information is not controlled by those who contribute to its production -the intellectuals- as much as the working class did not control labour through their control of production; instead, those who extract its surplus value have the resources to exercise power over the course of its development. The implication is that what counts as knowledge, what we learn, how, and possibly when, reflect the interests of the dominant political and economic structures (Jackson, 2004). For example, knowledge women acquire in the homeplace for home maintenance, childcare and elder care is often overlooked in the lifelong learning discussions (Gouthro, 2005). “For the elite to maintain existing power relations not everyone must have advanced knowledge” (Gouthro, 2002:340). For example, Tuijnman’s (1996) survey of trends in adult learning in advanced European economies concluded that women’s participation in occupational adult learning is much less than men, and often restricted to programmes of short duration. Women, who are more often excluded from occupational learning, will also be excluded from higher-level power-related job positions.

Finally, even if it is considered as consumption one might convincingly argue that there are more options for flexible learning, for all tastes and interests, readily available through the widespread and continuing impact of electronic media. However, this is not a simple matter. Statistics in adult participation in lifelong learning activities tend to hide the fact that the participants come from a limited age group and socio-economic background. Older people, ethnic minorities, long-term

unemployed, those living in rural areas and women with dependent children are under-represented (Fitzgerald, et.al., 2003; Tett, 1996; Gorard & Selwyn, 2005). Media resources and computer technologies are not sufficient learning resources, since they exclude those who have neither the education nor the financial resources to benefit from them (Wain, 2000). For example, in the EU the population with high formal education used the internet for learning purposes more than twice as much as the population with low formal education (Eurostat, 2011c); thus the assumption that access to technology alone can solve the learning divide remains unfounded (White, 2012).

In conclusion, in this section, I have critically discussed in what ways lifelong learning can be seen as a technology of performativity, a form of a neoliberal governmentality and an expression of consumerism, all of which embed practices of social exclusion, social control and inequalities, especially with reference to women. It is worth reminding, though, that women do not form a homogeneous group.

Lyotard's notion of performativity, and the associated concept of mastery, based on the premise that knowledge is now the principal force of production, when applied to lifelong learning discourse contradicts the grand narrative of the visionary discourse about lifelong, life-wide learning for an active, inclusive and prosperous learning society. Lyotard's thinking reveals that lifelong learning is basically concerned with only certain kinds of knowledge, those which optimize input and output, and consists of the accumulation of qualifications. In the race for mastering knowledge in order to increase one's performativity, structural inequalities of gender –access to learning opportunities and the associated risks- are hidden.

Similarly Foucault's concept of governmentality when discussed in relation to lifelong learning allows new perspectives, inasmuch as the relevant policy discourse may be interpreted as a power technology aiming at disciplining and regulating individuals in a non-coercive manner in the direction of finding, financing and consuming learning opportunities. Discourses of individualization, independence and responsibility ignore structural inequalities and disadvantaged women who traditionally bear most of the domestic and caring duties while, when employed, are financially less strong.

Baudrillard's notions of hyperreality and consumerism are important in highlighting the fact that participation in lifelong learning cannot be understood without reference to consumerism. As such, lifelong learning transcends the boundaries of formal educational institutions and consists of many forms of learning, such as entertainment and leisure, energized by desire -to be exploited by commercial interests- and associated with lifestyle sensitive to trends and fashion. The implications are that limited state funding for learning becomes legitimate; the range and availability of learning options are shaped by those who control mass media and mass consumption; and that not everyone is capable of consuming these options due to structural impediments. Hence, lifelong learning reinforces exclusion and inequalities since opportunities are denied on the basis of gender, social class, educational background and other differences.

Postmodernism is not accepted without criticism. For example, radical feminists criticize postmodern approaches as being too theoretical and far removed from the real struggles of women (McLaren, 2002). Specifically, regarding Lyotard's claim that there can be no objective grounds of truth, it follows for feminism that it is no

longer legitimate to speak about unitary notions of 'woman' and 'feminine gender identity', not even in the name of emancipation (Waugh, 1998). Also, Foucault's almost total absence of gender in his work makes his relevance to women issues dubious (McLaren, 2002). His conception of power as a network, a relationship not a thing possessed by any one individual or groups of individuals has been fiercely criticized by feminists on the grounds that it does not allow room for distinguishing the difference in power between the dominators and the dominated (Hartsock, 1990). However, the fact that power is not hierarchical does not mean that it is distributed or exercised equally. Furthermore, the above analysis ignores understandings of lifelong learning as an enjoyable experience. Even when understood as an imposed obligation (Griffin, 2001), and options are selective and hierarchical (Cotterill et.al., 2007), lifelong learning may still enrich women's life, improve their self-confidence, contribute to their career opportunities, help with life-course transitions and benefit themselves and their families.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined the important features and emphases of the policy discourses of lifelong learning, as they emerged at different times within international organizations, in particular within the European Union, and Greece, and the policy orientations from humanist, to strong economic and soft economic (Rubenson, 2004). The main assumptions on which these discourses have been based are that lifelong learning as a universal truth is assumed to contribute to economic development mainly through vocationally-orientated education; is a solution to the social exclusion; is inherently good; and promotes gender equality.

Conversely, postmodern commentators have criticized the view that lifelong learning has succeeded in combating the social exclusion, particularly of women. By employing the conceptual tools provided by the writings of Lyotard, Foucault and Baudrillard, lifelong learning may be seen as a technology of performativity, a form of neoliberal governmentality, and an expression of consumerism. Viewed within this framework, lifelong learning is stripped from its social, emancipatory and humanistic cloak, and can be interpreted not as a means for social cohesion, but rather as a tool for social control by corporations, the state and the media.

The impact of lifelong learning on one's work and life, which constitutes the research question of this study, is to a large extent determined by what one thinks lifelong learning is and by why one participates. It is evident from the literature discussed in this section that, first, the definition, role and goals of lifelong learning are contingent to the specific historical moment they are articulated and the interests they serve; and secondly, they remain inconclusive, as opposing ideologies have failed to capture the individual experience. These two major conclusions from the critical evaluation of lifelong learning policy and discourse have shaped two of the objectives of this study. Indeed, the above-mentioned conclusions corroborate the significance of exploring women's understandings of the lifelong learning concept and their perceived motivations and goals in today's Greece. Furthermore, the lack of a qualitative approach to these aspects of lifelong learning is evident. For example, in the most recent survey in the EU conducted by Cedefop in 2003, and repeated in 2005 for the new member-states the question "what citizens think about lifelong learning" was related to importance rather than meaning, whilst results are not analysed by gender (Cedefop, 2004:5).

CHAPTER THREE: WORK AND LIFE OF WOMEN LIFELONG LEARNERS

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to assess the impact of lifelong learning on women's employment; and to evaluate how and in what ways women's lives are influenced by their lifelong learning engagement within a higher education context. Although, the title of this chapter specifically refers to women, it should be stressed that literature has sparsely linked the discussion of lifelong learning with gender issues, and even less in the Greek context. Therefore, in the absence of specific information on some of the issues addressed in this chapter, I must look for evidence in a much broader literature of the gender-neutral, location-less adult learner.

The first section of this chapter considers the policy argument in favour of lifelong learning, namely that lifelong learning is vital to creating and maintaining employment and contributes to a nation's overall economic growth (CEC, 2010a). Assumptions derived from the HCT about the linear relationship between education and work, are questioned in light of structural barriers to female workers. Patriarchy, the persistence of the male breadwinner model, the unequal division of household and employers' discriminatory practices, as opposed to personal preferences and choices regarding employment are analysed in order to assess why women fare worse than men in the labour market despite their higher investment to lifelong learning.

The second section takes a closer look at the rather neglected private life of women lifelong learners and evaluates how the competing demands of work, family and academia affect their life. Reconciliation policies for work-life-balance and study leaves are evaluated for their effectiveness in helping women lifelong learners to

balance their multiple roles while they continue to appreciate learning for self-fulfillment and personal development.

The Chapter concludes with the important messages derived from the literature review whilst their relation to the main argument of this study is highlighted.

Women, Lifelong Learning and Employment

As the historical overview in the previous chapter has shown, from 1970s until today, supranational organizations and westernized governments have propagated the concept of lifelong learning, and despite the different meanings assigned to it over the years, there seems that two models have emerged: the idealistic social cohesion one, which adopts a maximalist view of the concept as being lifewide, all-inclusive learning; and the utilitarian human capital-based model, which takes a narrower perspective emphasising vocational education and training (Schuetze, 2006; Tight, 1998b). In this section, first, I provide a review of the HCT with reference to lifelong learning and women and secondly, an analysis of the structural and agential factors that interfere with women's employment. I conclude that the validity of the policy discourse for lifelong learning as a means for employment and national economic competitiveness is doubtful, given that the literature does not give much evidence about individuals' financial and employment benefits. As most research is based on national surveys, I suggest that more qualitative research is required in order to explore in depth the employment realities of women lifelong learners in Greece.

Human Capital Theory: Are There Returns To Women Lifelong Learners?

New forms of globalised competition, deregulated markets and the rapid technological changes after the 1970s have produced an environment where more lifelong learning, formal and non-formal, leads to better jobs and higher rewards for

individuals, while employers' investment in innovation and creativity contributes to enhanced national competitiveness and growth (Bouchard, 1998; Brown, 2003; Cochinaux and de Woot, 1995; Coffield, 1999; Field, 2006). This is a view based on HCT.

In the seminal work by Becker (1964) and Mincer (1974) investment in human capital (knowledge, skills and aptitudes) is said to be similar to investment in other forms of physical capital, such as factories and machines. Such investment will only be undertaken by the individual if its expected return exceeds the cost. In other words, wealth-maximising individuals, (just as profit-maximising firms), are prepared to incur the cost of additional education and/or training (e.g., tuition payment, lost wages) given their expectation of higher future earnings and increased employment opportunities. Similarly, firms may choose to invest in increasing their stock of human capital by investing in the training of their workforce in the hope that better trained workers will be more productive. These private benefits may spill over to the economy and society in general, in the form of reduced dependence on welfare, better health, less crime, increased participation in democratic institutions and social cohesion so that the social rate of return could exceed the return to the individual (Blundell et.al., 1999; Livanos & Pouliakas, 2009b; Wilson & Briscoe, 2004).

Reviews of empirical results confirm the HCT, and show that there is an increase in the return for an additional year of education while the impact of individuals' innate ability is insignificant (Cohn & Addison, 1998; Krueger & Lindahl, 2001; Wilson & Briscoe, 2004). However, the rate of return to education varies in response to many exogenous factors, such as age, country, type of qualification obtained, field of study and gender. For example, wage returns for studies such as Law, Engineering and

Business are higher than those of Arts, Education and Humanities (Livanos & Pouliakas, 2009b; Woodley & Simpson, 2001). Moreover, in view of the finiteness of human life, investment in (typically continuous) education at an early than a later age is a better strategy for reaping the maximum return (Green, 1993; Psacharopoulos, 1994). Furthermore, research shows that women have a higher annual return on their investment in education than men, although their preference for studies in arts, education and humanities results in lower lifetime earnings (Blundell et.al., 1999; Livanos & Pouliakas, 2009b).

Does lifelong learning yield similar economic benefits? Most of the studies available concentrate on the economic returns to years of continuous education at an early age, rather than adult learning; consequently we know little on the impact of lifelong learning on private returns (Adnett & Coates, 2000; Egerton & Parry, 2001; Jenkins et.al., 2003). Those studies which have focused on lifelong learning provide inconclusive results. Blundell et al. (1999) in reviewing past measurements conclude that successive investments in education does not increase the individual's monetary benefit to an extent that such an investment could be justified. Jenkins et.al. (2003) in assessing the impact of lifelong learning -defined as qualification-oriented learning taken between age 33 to 42- in the UK, found limited evidence of associations between lifelong learning and higher earnings obtained between 1991 to 2000. On the other hand, based on the same data, Blanden's et.al. (2010) findings suggest that for both women and men lifelong learning (measured as accredited work-related training) has a positive effect on their hourly earnings with women benefiting of this increase earlier than men. However, most surveys cannot capture individual differences. Adnett & Coates (2000) claim that the prevailing methodology cannot

account for inequalities in the labour market that mature women encounter, resulting from penalties for career interruption or sex discrimination in the labour market.

In the absence of concrete data critics have structured their arguments against policy-makers' claim for the positive impact of lifelong learning on earnings on the basis of labour market observations and analyses. They note that while the knowledge-based economy benefits from workers' higher levels of education, is not necessary for everyone constantly to accumulate credentials, and increased lifelong learning participation does not necessarily translate into employment success (Brown, 2003; Coffield, 1999; Furlong & Cartmel, 2006; Gouthro, 2002; Livingstone, 1999). According to Brown et.al., (2003:122) "it is possible to be employable but not in employment". This does not entail that educational qualifications have no market value at all. As Brown et.al., (2003:116) suggest, "The acquisition of suitable qualifications may not ensure access to employment but without them one is not in the game". Employers' preference to recruit university graduates even for less sophisticated jobs leads to qualification inflation, which in turn allows them to pay degree-holders lower wages, while benefiting from employees' increased knowledge and skills (Felstead et.al., 2004; Livingstone, 1999). Livingstone (1999) distinguishes between the credential gap, whereby educational attainments outstrip the entry requirements for current jobs; and the performance gap which results in underemployment as workers have more education than their jobs require. In many countries skill supply is greater than skill demand. In most EU countries the majority of university graduates occupy roles for which they are over-qualified (Eurydice 2012). This tendency is more pronounced for female graduates who accept jobs that require no university qualification (as clerks, sales and service workers) on average twice as often as men (Eurydice, 2009:35). Moreover, as the number of credentialed

candidates increases, the value of degrees declines and employers use them as a screening device. Degrees, (a commitment of some credibility because of their costly nature) provide a signal to the employer about the kind of employee one will make (Blanden et.al., 2010). In Greece, the percentage of school graduates who went to university rose from 15% in 1995 to 49% in 2006, resulting in an unprecedented excess of supply of graduates in professions not linked with the local labour market demands, as there is no corresponding increase in knowledge-based elite jobs (Livanos & Pouliakas, 2009a). Indeed, unlike the international trend, Greece has the highest unemployment indicator of university graduates among OECD countries (Liagouras et.al., 2003; OECD, 2009a). Therefore, an increasingly skilled workforce suffers from under-utilisation of their skills, while, for a number of jobs overqualified workers are seen as counterproductive, for being too academic or specialised (Brown, 2003). Furthermore, in Greece, powerful professional groups such as engineers, doctors, and academicians have developed market rigging practices (Brown et.al., 2003). By restricting access to their profession through increasing the entry requirements, these professional groups structure competition in favour of those with the appropriate cultural or social capital, while at the same time safeguarding a high private rate of return (Mitsopoulos & Pelagidis, 2011).

Although overqualification and the shortage of adequate knowledge-based jobs affect both women and men lifelong learners, it is mainly women who are most likely to have fewer opportunities for secure and well-paid employment commensurate to their learning. Despite that women have surpassed men in terms of educational formal qualifications, and of participation in lifelong learning⁷ their participation in labour

⁷ In 2010, women's participation in lifelong learning activities was 10.0 % and men's 8.3 % (Eurostat, 2011b).

market is still 12% less than men's⁸ (Eurostat, 2011a; 2011b). In Greece women have traditionally achieved higher educational qualifications compared to men, with an increase from 32.4% in 2000 to 42.3% in 2008 (Petraki-Kottis & Ventura-Neokosmidi, 2011). However, the unemployment rate of women is almost three times higher than men's (Petraki-Kottis & Ventura-Neokosmidi, 2011). Moreover, statistics report that in many European countries women are still disproportionately employed in sectors where wages/earnings are lower, non-unionized, and with less bargaining power and less possibility to improve their economic situation (ILO, 2008). In the UK, for example, 60% of women workers are found in ten occupations, with the majority concentrated in "the five Cs": caring, cashiering, catering, cleaning and clerical (Corley et.al., 2005:17). The EU admits that even though its employment strategy for increasing the proportion of women in employment by 2010 was successful in quantity of jobs, it has rather failed in terms of quality (Eurostat, 2011a).

If the human capital thesis is right, and lifelong learning is the best strategy for employment why women cannot reap the employment benefits of their investment in it as much as men? Answering this question is essential for understanding the impact of lifelong learning on women's employment, which is one of the objectives of this thesis. Following in this section I will analyse structural inequalities and women's preferences which limit women's ability to participate in labour in equal terms as men, despite their investment in lifelong learning.

⁸ In 2010, the employment rate for men reached 70.1 % in the EU-27, as compared with 58.2 % for women (Eurostat, 2011a).

Lifelong Learning for Economic Competitiveness: A Matter of Structure or Agency?

With the rise of interest in sociology of work and gender, greatly influenced by the second wave feminism of the 1960s, there has been an abundance of research in the gender-based nature of work and employment. A wide range of theoretical perspectives have been adopted such as structural functionalism, human capital and rational choice, statistical discrimination, dual labour market, socio-biology, and patriarchy, the majority of which are located within the debate between ‘structure’ and ‘agency’. According to the ‘structure’ tradition women’s employment is determined by structural barriers, while scholars of the ‘agency’ tradition attribute sex differences in employment participation to personal choices (Anker, 1997; Blackburn, et.al. 2002; Crompton & Harris, 1998a; England, 1982; Hakim, 1998; 1991; 1995; Hartmann, 1976; Polachek, 1981).

Commentators of the ‘structure’ tradition suggest that barriers such as patriarchy, the male breadwinner model, unequal division of household and employers’ sex discrimination adversely affect women’s employment; hence, structural barriers may be rendered responsible for women’s inability to benefit from lifelong learning as much as men do. According to the feminist theory, women’s labour-market position is the result of men’s systematic exclusion practices from better-paying work, through patriarchy, “the system of social structures in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women (Walby in Crompton, 1997:10). Capitalism developed out of a previously hierarchical organisation of society, and preserved patriarchy as part of the system of control (Hartmann, 1976). Therefore, although capitalism would favour the equal participation of both genders in production, men wanted to maintain control over labour and secure higher wage for themselves. They utilized the mechanisms of

traditional division of labour between the sexes and the techniques of hierarchical organization and control and fought against women's participation in the labour market and thus for women's continued dependence on men. In this struggle they were assisted by predominantly male structures such as the state and the trade unions. Women were encouraged to marry and remain out of the labour market, thus, men benefited from both higher wages and the domestic work performed by the wives (Hartmann, 1976). This arrangement was consistent with the religious and new bourgeoisie morality and ethos of the 'good' and refined woman (Crompton, 1997; Pfau-Effinger, 2004). Some commentators (e.g., Blackburn et.al., 2002; Collinson & Hearn, 1996; Crompton 1998), have questioned the explanatory power of patriarchy for women's employment situation for a number of reasons, most importantly for that the concept assumes that women are passive victims in their relationship with men.

Another structural barrier to women's equal participation in employment, as a result of men's effort to dominate the labour market is related to the emergence of the male 'breadwinner' model, which is based on the assumption that men have the primary responsibility to earn and women to care for the young and the old (Crompton, 1998; Lewis, 2001; McDowell, 2005; Yeandle, 1999). Feminist commentators argue that the model sustains female dependence (Hartmann, 1976), although, the male dependence, albeit of a different sort, is equally inscribed in it. But how does men's role as breadwinners affect women's employment opportunities? It is claimed that the model provided the foundation upon which major public institutions, including welfare regimes, education systems, and social security schemes were built (Crompton & Harris, 1998a; Yeandle, 1999). Therefore, a role originally chosen by men in their effort to secure the best and most well-paid jobs for themselves, was incorporated in, and consolidated by the policies of established structures, such as the

state, trade unions, education, and church, and was inscribed into people's minds as a vital constituent of gender identity. Most importantly, the breadwinner model has shaped social assumptions about masculinity and femininity and of the 'proper' role of men and women in society and reflects some of the arguments contained in the patriarchy debates (Crompton & Harris, 1998a; Pfau-Effinger, 2004). Although, the model has substantially eroded by economic and welfare policies for labour participation for all (Lewis, 2001; McDowell, 2005; Pfau-Effinger, 2004), it has still an enduring effect on gendered beliefs whereby, work in the public sphere becomes a central source of masculine identity, status and power, and motherhood, care and domestic labour are identified with femininity (Collinson & Hearn, 1996; England, 2005; Goodwin, 1999; Smithson et.al., 2004). Reeves (2002) points out that despite the erosion of traditional gender roles, structural, cultural and social factors contribute to the sustainability of men's breadwinner role, and Hatter et.al., (2002) state that in many studies men are happy to consider the breadwinner role as their main family commitment.

A related issue is men's limited participation in childcare and household, thus restricting women's full and equal participation in the labour market. But why has men's involvement in care and household been so slow to change although women's labour participation has increased? Collinson & Hearn (1996) attribute men's unwillingness to contribute equally with their partners to childcare and household to their views about the centrality of paid work in their masculine identity, status and power. Even when men participate, they engage in tasks which reinforce their masculinity, as for example, doing sports with children, household repairs and do-it-yourself (Gupta, 1999; Greenstein, 2009; Nordenmark & Nyman, 2003). Economists share this view by claiming that "a redivision of family labour would fundamentally

threaten the value of costly investments in gender identity” (McCrate, 1988:237). McFarlane et.al., (2000) explain that according to the relative resources theory, being more involved in paid work, men typically bring more resources at home which they exchange with a lower participation in undesirable household tasks. They analysed data on the involvement in housework of men and women in dual-earner families in Canada and concluded that the relative resources perspective is partly validated. Indeed women do less housework when they earn more than half of the total family income, but there is a gender asymmetry in that men’s amount of housework is not affected by their wives’ increased workload. Men’s involvement in care varies. In Greece the traditional division of household has not substantially changed even though women’s participation in education and labour has dramatically increased over the last thirty years (Alipranti-Maratou & Nikolaou, 2008; Vryonides & Vitsilakis, 2008). One reason is that the welfare state is still underdeveloped; hence, women tend to undertake responsibilities which in other European countries are performed by the state (Alipranti-Maratou & Nikolaou, 2008; Symeonidou 1996). When financially possible, lack of welfare provision is made up with paid help from migrant women who are usually not insured and illegal (Lyberaki, 2011; Matsaganis & Petroglou, 2001). Mencarini & Sironi (2010) used the European Social Survey Data for 26 countries in order to assess gender equality and happiness. Data revealed that 81% of Greek women do more than 75% of household, the highest of all the European countries examined. Maridaki-Kassotaki’s (2000) study of 80 men in rural areas and 80 in cities with low and high educational status, respectively, revealed that the rural men spent less time with their children and assumed a breadwinner role as their main responsibility. But, although city men had a greater involvement in childcare, they also considered this activity as not particularly ‘male’.

Another strand of thought in relation to women's fewer employment opportunities than men's, despite comparable amounts of investment in education, focuses on the demand side, namely, on the employers' choice to treat male and female applicants and employees differently, irrespectively of their amount of investment in lifelong learning (Anker, 1997; Blackburn, et.al., 2002; England, 2005; Estevez-Abe, 2005; Reskins, 1993). One may argue that in capitalist economies employers prefer the cheapest qualified workers available; therefore, women should be ideal candidates for both male and female jobs, due to their lower wages (Reskins, 1993). In reality, this is not the case. Economists have hypothesized that employers being under pressure to maximize profits often revert to what is called statistical discrimination. This theory is based on the assumption that there are differences on average, in the productivity -as a result of different levels of education, skills, and experience- of men and women. Due to high search and information costs associated with recruitment, employers rely on average data, in order to make hiring and promotion decisions; thus all men are treated like the average men, and all women like the average woman (Anker, 1997; Reskins, 1993). Employer's beliefs about women's productivity may be based on assumptions about high turnover, breaks from work, and absenteeism, as a result of their childrearing role, or about strength, tolerance and ability in certain working conditions (Reskins, 1993). For example, employers have tended to segregate men from women by placing the former into jobs with physical demand and the latter into jobs demanding social skills. So, despite women's increase in educational qualifications and lifelong learning employers continue to discriminate possibly due to the pervasiveness of stereotypes (Elmslie & Tebaldi 2007; Fuller et.al., 2005). Fuller et.al., (2005), in investigating gender segregation in sex-typical occupations, found that the majority of the employers would not take non-traditional gender

recruits and did not want gender targets to be set, despite the incentive of extra state funding⁹. Employers' discriminatory practices are exercised mostly in small entrepreneurial firms, which are either exempt from certain regulations, or do not draw the attention of the enforcement agencies as much as large firms do, or because employees there are relatively powerless to take legal action (Reskins, 1993).

Employers' discrimination is also exercised through the unequal provision of non-formal lifelong learning opportunities, thus limiting women's employment opportunities and career advancement (Estevez-Abe, 2005; Grönlund, 2011; Tuijnman, 1996). Green's (1993:112) study concurs with other British studies in that women receive less training than men and concludes that "females would have had 26.4 percent greater training participation if they had all been treated as or acted as males; the average female would have had been 45 percent more likely to participate in training if she had been treated like a male". Evertsson (2004) found that women in Sweden are less likely than men to receive formal on-the-job training. Similarly, Grönlund (2011) based on a sample of Swedish employees found that women receive less on-the job training than men in the same occupation as a result of occupational segregation. The case of Sweden is revealing about this issue, because on-the-job training in Sweden is provided within the normal working hours and is paid by the employers. Therefore, women's non-participation cannot be attributed to their unwillingness to take part in training (Evertsson, 2004).

On the other hand, Hakim, informed by the HCT and contrary to victim feminism, argues that women's employment patterns are shaped by their commitment to work or

⁹ Employers interviewed were from five sectors: construction; engineering; plumbing; information technology; and childcare (Fuller et.al., 2005).

marriage, assuming that they have a choice. Working part-time, in the public rather than private sector, with breaks, at lower-level positions, or not working at all are some of the strategies women have in coping with their care obligations. The extent to which they use each of these strategies may depend on how much career- or home-centred they are. Hakim's (1998) influential and heavily criticised 'preference theory' emphasizes women's commitment to work as a determining factor of their participation and development in the labour force, and distinguishes among career-centred women, who invest in training and qualifications; home-centred, who do not invest in human capital, and choose part-time jobs that fit their household obligations; and the adaptive women who combine work and family according to financial and/or family demands, and have unplanned careers. Hakim (1995) develops her argument based mainly on three findings: first, women in part-time jobs score high in job satisfaction indices; secondly, childcare obligations are not necessarily a determinant of female employment; and thirdly, women, especially in part-time jobs are unstable workers, with high absenteeism, turnover and labour mobility.

Although there are arguments both in support and against all three of the above claims, I will concentrate on the main criticism against Hakim's theory, namely that it underestimates the significance of social constraints on women's employment opportunities, most importantly, childcare (Blackburn et.al, 2002; Bruegel, 1996; Crompton & Harris, 1998b; Ginn et.al., 1996; Walsh, 1999; Walters, 2005). Hakim's critics argue that in countries where childcare provision is inadequate, women have no option other than not to work at all, or to work part-time, regardless of their original plans for work and investment in human capital. Walsh (1999) in a study of part-time employees in a large banking and financial organisation in Australia concluded that the most common motivation for more than half of the female employees for working

part-time was to spend more time with dependent children. Walters (2005) in interviewing female part-time workers in retail business found that their orientations to work are not homogenous as Hakim's model assumes. Their childcare responsibilities in addition to caring for elderly relatives have a role to play in their choices concerning work. For instance, in Greece part-time employment is low; yet, this does not mean that Greek women are more career-centred, but rather, results from low wages that induce women to work full-time, supported by a long tradition of childcare provision by grandparents (Lewis et.al., 2008). European Social Survey data -ESS: 2004-2005- show that the presence of children continues to be an important factor for women's exit from employment (Lewis et.al. 2008). Even in Nordic countries, where many women can choose both motherhood and employment (Ellingsaeter & Rønsen, 1996), gender continues to structure their opportunities. Women are still mainly responsible for childcare therefore tend to crowd part-time low-salary jobs in the public sector for its family-friendly policies (Gupta et.al., 2006).

Although there is overwhelming evidence of how childcare duties might restrict women's choices, one must not forget that a large proportion of women would highly value care giving even if good-quality and affordable childcare is available (Lewis, 2001). This lends support to Hakim's argument that when women have the choice they would prefer unpaid care work, part-time jobs or jobs that allow childcare responsibilities to be met. The analysis of the ESS data¹⁰ for the EU-15 show that, with the exception of Portugal, France and Spain, mothers in the other countries would not support publicly-provided childcare (Lewis, et.al., 2008).

¹⁰ Italy and Luxembourg are not included as the data on preferences were not robust (Lewis et.al., 2008:26).

Moreover, individual beliefs about good motherhood have a role to play in women's preference (Ginn et.al. 1996). Indeed, the neoliberal discourse for employment participation for all underestimates what is collectively termed as 'an ethic of care', i.e., mother care and love and the associated feelings of duty, desire and obligation which underlie women's choices between professional and financial success and good mothering (McDowell, 2005). In Switzerland, for example, due to a strong ideology of domestic motherhood, the majority of mothers take care of their children themselves (Charles, et.al. 2001). Boyd's (2002) interviews with mothers in Perth, Australia reveal the importance mothers place on "being there" for their children. In discussing the strategies of female civil engineers for coping with childcare, Watts (2009) refers to several interviewees' conscious choice not to pursue a senior management pathway, thus partially explaining why management in this profession is controlled mainly by men. A Greek study of female principals in secondary schools showed that many female teachers are not interested in career advancement because they prioritise their family over work, and they want to avoid the heavy demands of management (Kaparou & Bush, 2007). EU policy assumes that more commodification of childcare will increase female participation in the labour market; yet the results might be negatively affected by women's and men's "culturally determined sense of 'ought'" with respect to childcare (Lewis et.al., 2008:33). Therefore, some caution is required because women's preferences may be shaped by much more widely and deep rooted societal assumptions.

In this section I have considered the economic benefits of lifelong learning, and in particular, of learning that leads to degree qualifications, in conjunction with women's employment opportunities and barriers. The underlying concept is that under the new state of affairs individuals can earn more, get better jobs, and raise the overall

productivity of the economy only if they continue to upgrade their knowledge and skills. This is an idea embodied in the HCT, according to which education is an investment of foregone earnings justified by the prospect of higher rates of return in the future. Extensive cross-country quantitative research shows a considerable degree of consensus about the validity of the theory, when other relevant factors such as age, gender, country, level of education and field of study are controlled for. Estimates of rates of return for women show that they gain more from additional schooling than men. However, there are problems of measurement considering that such analyses “make assumptions which do not fit the typical pattern of women’s careers” (Egerton & Parry, 2001:10), which typically are characterized by career interruptions or part-time work (Adnett & Coates, 2000). Moreover, these studies are concerned with additional years of schooling, rather than successive engagement in learning. Evidence for the benefits of lifelong learning on earnings is sparse and tends to support that mature graduates earn less than conventional graduates.

Moreover, previous research shows that individuals’ participation in lifelong learning is not directly linked to their employability for at least two reasons: first, there is no evidence that the increase of qualifications, through lifelong learning is matched with a corresponding increase in the jobs requiring such levels of education, thus leading to credential inflation; and secondly, in relation to women, certain structural and agential factors impact upon employment opportunities irrespectively of the amounts of lifelong learning they have accumulated. Men’s exclusionary practices, adherence to their breadwinning role, and commitment to paid work as a source of masculine identity; employers’ discriminatory practices; and some women’s choice for a home-centred life and prioritizing of childcare over work create barriers to female employment and their equal participation in the labour market. The importance that

policymakers ascribe to lifelong learning as the individuals' survival mechanism in the competitive job market is most often based on large-scale national and cross-national surveys (Field, 2000b). Cedefop's (2004) *Lifelong Learning: Citizen's Views* is one such example. These surveys tend to aggregate the views of individuals in constructing a 'grand narrative' on the economic, employment or other usefulness of lifelong learning. I suggest that more in-depth, qualitative research will offer new perspectives in the relationship between lifelong learning and economic competitiveness, and will explore the less easily quantifiable causes of gender issues in this field.

Women Lifelong Learners: Balancing Multiple Roles

While there is abundant research on the importance of education on individual earnings, productivity and national competitiveness, it seems that literature has paid less attention to the effects of educational activities on mature students' life beyond work (Butler, 2007; Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002; Edwards, 1993; Gouthro, 2005; Home, 1998). In particular, women lifelong learners in higher education are required to reconcile the demands of three "greedy institutions" work, family and academia. According to Coser (1974:4) "greedy institutions demand exclusive and undivided loyalty... Their demands on the person are omnivorous... They exercise pressures on component individuals to weaken their ties or not to form any ties with other institutions or persons that might make claims that conflict with their own demands". One of the most apparent challenges for lifelong learners with family and work commitments is to deal with role strain resulting in stress, anxiety and depression. Home (1998:86) refers to three dimensions of role strain: role conflict resulting from simultaneous and incompatible demands; role overload, resulting from lack of time to meet all demands; and role contagion which is preoccupation with one role while

performing another. Research has sparsely linked the discussion of role strain with new labour market trends, the unequal division of housework and caregiving, and the demands of academia (Arthur & Tait, 2004; Moss, 2004). Moreover, the majority of research studies have not concentrated on lifelong learners who, contrary to the adult learners, are expected to engage in updating their skills and knowledge several times in their life, in order to retain their labour market value.

Governments have introduced reconciliation policies, such as work-life balance (WLB) and paid educational leave (PEL) for a variety of reasons. For westernised capitalist governments WLB is promoted in order to facilitate women's roles as mothers and workers, while at the same time serving the interests of the employers for a more flexible workforce (Ackers, 2003; Hogarth et.al., 2000; Hyman & Summers, 2007; Kvande, 2009; MacInnes, 2006). Similarly, reconciling work and studies was the concern of intergovernmental organisations in the 1970s, leading to the Convention on PEL in 1974 by the ILO which aimed at facilitating workers to participate in vocational and general education.

In this section, first I discuss how new labour trends, women's unequal participation in the household and care, and the academic demands affect women lifelong learners. Secondly, I critically evaluate the success of the existing reconciliation policies in assisting women lifelong learners to achieve work-life-education balance. I conclude that there is little evidence for their importance in the life of the female working lifelong learner. I suggest that unless there is a more in-depth analysis of the challenges women experience in trying to balance their roles as students, housewives, caregivers, and employees, their struggle will remain invisible, and women will

continue to earn personal growth, and possibly career advancement that lifelong learning may offer, at a much higher psychological cost than men and young learners.

Competing Demands from Work, Family and Academia for Women Lifelong Learners

Technological and organizational changes such as delayering and downsizing, and an increased demand to drive costs down, in an era of globalized competition, has induced firms to assign more work to fewer employees (Gambles et.al., 2006; McInnes, 2006). Green (2001) refers to EU evidence¹¹ that high-speed work and work under tight deadlines increased between 1991 and 1996 in all EU member-states. van der Lippe & ten Brummelhuis (2010) in researching life satisfaction in eight European countries¹², found that the adoption of the EU Working Time Directive is often not accompanied by any reduction in workload. Indeed, Fagnani & Letablier (2004) note that the French 35-hour working week was not accompanied by new hirings, thus, making the work for many, more intensive than before.

Increasing work pressure is also associated with time spent at work, the “extensive effort” (Green, 2001:56). Despite the decline of average working hours in Europe during the post-war period, many groups of workers experience excessive long hours of work (Bonney, 2005; Cousins & Tang, 2004; Crompton & Lyonette, 2006; McInnes, 2006; White et.al., 2003). Greeks work the second longest¹³ of the OECD member-countries (OECD, 2010). The development of service sectors in which mostly women work, such as banking and retailing, accompanied with a 24/7 service

¹¹ Surveys performed under the auspices of the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Green, 2001).

¹² «Quality» is a research project that examines how, in an era of major change, European citizens living in UK, Finland, Sweden, Germany, the Netherlands, Portugal, Hungary and Bulgaria, which represent different national welfare state regimes evaluate the quality of their lives (van der Lippe & ten Brummelhuis, 2010) .

¹³ Annual average working hours in 2009 was 2.119 (OECD, 2010).

period, mediated by ICTs, allows workers to deviate from the 9 to 5 work day, responding to a new work ethic of constant availability for the global client (Brannen, 2005; Hyman et.al., 2003; Lewis, 2003).

Presenteeism is also associated with job insecurity, which has intensified as a corollary of the global economic integration and the need of the new economy to remain competitive (Felstead et.al., 1998; Perrons et.al., 2005). Beck (2000) painted a bleak future for the West where, “the work society is coming to an end, ...all paid work is subject to the threat of replacement” and flexible labour “à la brésilienne” will become dominant (Beck, 2000:2). However, commentators have disputed these theorists’ predictions, on the basis of statistical evidence. For example, Doogan (2005) by using data from the European LFS for the period 1992–2000 for the EU12 shows that long-term employment increased. Burchell (2011) claims that statistical measures cannot reveal the subjective fear for job loss which, in times of recession, becomes a chronic risk for job loss.

Work intensification, and job insecurity whether actual or subjective, lead to work intrusion into people’s lives, often manifested through exhaustion, sleepiness and stress, thus affecting health, psychological well-being and family life (Felstead et.al., 2002; Hyman et.al., 2003). However, the effects of the changing labour market trends on the life of lifelong learners, and particularly on women are less well documented (Gouthro, 2005; Fenwick, 2004). For example, Butler (2007) in studying the relationship between employment and academic performance examined 253 employed full-time undergraduate students and found that more work hours and greater job demands lead to increased role conflict and decreased school performance. However, he does not specify the amount of family responsibilities their respondents

had, if any. Arthur & Tait (2004) interviewed employees and employers in nine British organizations all of whom were pursuing higher education courses, and found that the most striking reason why these people struggled to cope with conflicting demands was their excessively long working hours, which for some reached 80 hours a week in times of crisis. Furthermore, although the vast majority of the respondents were financially supported by their employer, none of them were allowed to reduce their workload for time to study. On the other hand, employers considered lifelong learning activities as an individual responsibility for self-development, and an indication of commitment and motivation for those who succeeded despite the “massive pressure” they experienced (Arthur & Tait, 2004:230). This comment echoes the argument that lifelong learning is used by the employers as an additional screening device for job applicants, rather than as a necessary requirement to perform the particular job (Brown et.al., 2003; Livingstone, 1999). Arthur & Tait (2004) do not consider gender issues, socioeconomic background or family structure. Giancola et.al. (2009) conducted a comprehensive test model in 159 adult learners in higher education, of whom 68% were women, and found that greater stress resulted from the workplace due to long work hours and their inability to reduce workload or negotiate demands. Again, the authors do not provide information about the family structure of the participants. The authors conclude that a qualitative study is necessary to provide more depth to the experiences of the participants. Raddon (2007) examined working students on distance-learning programmes and although her focus was not on interrole conflict, she comments on the greedy nature of the workplace for most of the respondents with substantially less women than men receiving support from their employer. Moss (2004) examined temporal/spatial concerns of adult female students who worked in temporal and transitional jobs, mainly in the public and private care

sector, and reported the relentless pressure they felt as a result of employer's demands for more productivity, cut-costing practices and unsocial hours of work. A group of lifelong learners who seems to have escaped the attention of the above-mentioned writers is the single and/or childless women. Casper et.al. (2007) examined single employees' perceptions on how their organisations support their work-life balance and found that their non-work roles were considered as unimportant, and they faced greater work expectations from their employers. Hamilton et.al. (2006) found that unmarried women without children experience similar levels of work-life conflict to other groups of working women, and the WLB policies offered at their workplace are less important and are used less frequently by them than by other working women. Similarly, UK statistics show that single women work more overtime than married with children women and more than single men (TUC, 2008). If this is the case, and these employees are expected to work longer, then it follows that their lifelong learning pursuits may be felt equally oppressive as those of the employees with familial responsibilities.

Changes in labour trends have not been accompanied with equally dramatic changes in the household division (Gouthro, 2005; Mencarini & Sironi, 2010; Raddon, 2007). Men's unequal participation in childcare and household not only restricts women's full and equal participation in the labour market, as discussed in the previous section, but it also increases women's role strain (Edwards, 1993; Home, 1998). Hochschild (1989) introduced the metaphor of a "second shift" to describe household and childcare duties that working women are required to perform in addition to their work at the factory or office. Kramarae (2001) adds education to the equation as a third shift for these men and women who juggle work, family and the demands of a lifelong education. However, for women their studying might be the fifth shift, in addition to a

“third shift” of emotional labour that women perform in their effort to maintain harmony and conform for children and spouse (Hochschild, 2001), and a “fourth shift” of nighttime caregiving that is unequally performed by mothers (Venn et.al., 2008). Family requires time, energy and commitment which in combination with the demands of the academia can create role conflict, role overload and contagion in particular for female learners who typically bear most of the household and childcare (Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002; Edwards, 1993; Gouthro, 2005; Vaccaro & Lovell, 2010). As a result, many women learners frequently drop-out or delay their studies (Gouthro, 2005). For instance, Vaccaro & Lovell (2010) conducted a qualitative study of undergraduate mature women at a U.S. college and reported that motherhood and the gendered division of housework negatively affected their respondents’ engagement in education. These women tried to cope by taking time out of their studies, thus prolonging the completion of their degrees. Zosky et.al., (2004) collected data through focus groups with adult undergraduate students in the U.S. and found that mothers suffered from increased stress and feelings of guilt in trying to balance university and parenting demands. The authors do not provide information on the working conditions of these students. Taplin & Jegede (2001) conducted a mixed-methods study of the Open University of Hong Kong students and found that high-achieving female students tended to study at work or the library, compared with the low achieving ones who studied mainly at home, possibly due to their fulfilling other roles at the same time as studying. Men’s studying at home did not have the same effect on their academic performance.

Academia is another ‘greedy institution’ (Edwards, 1993). Nevertheless, little research is available on how the academic demands impact on the well-being of working female students with family and/or caring responsibilities from their

perspective (Vaccaro & Lovell, 2010; Vrionides & Vitsilakis, 2008). It is often claimed that universities have not been organized to serve the needs of mature students (Fairchild, 2003; Giancola et al. 2009; Home, 1998; Zosky et.al., 2004). Scheduling, coursework, course requirements, rules and regulations, and student services, have been designed especially for undergraduate programmes, having in mind the 18-year old male learner (Edwards, 1993; Home, 1998). Askham (2008) refers to the inertia of academia to respond to the needs of a different clientele, to whom the traditional academic culture is alien even hostile. For example, Davies & Williams (2001) in examining the decision-making process of mature candidate and new entrants in UK universities found the different understandings of what is convenient for students between the respondents and the universities themselves. In Moss' (2004:290) study one of her respondents complained about the "rigid temporal rationales and practice informing contemporary higher education". Vaccaro & Lovell (2010) describes the struggle women made in order to carve out time to fit academic requirements, such as inflexible assignment deadlines, and class attendance into their busy daily lives, by studying long hours, over lunch time or on the bus, giving up sleep, and sacrificing social contacts and leisure. Public tertiary education in Greece is the least flexible by international comparison both in terms of entry procedure and organizational structure (OECD, 2007; 2009b). For example, undergraduate students cannot opt for part-time studies. They are obliged to enroll in all courses in a given year. Nevertheless, absenteeism is not punished. Progression is measured only via final exams (Katsikas, 2010). In private institutions, however, attendance is mandatory, and whenever studies are subsidized by the state even short absences can lead to termination of funding. Furthermore, the infiltration of an individualistic and entrepreneurial spirit in higher education, followed by generous budget cuts, has

affected adult learners in many ways, as for example, in the availability of personalized advice (Moss, 2004). Home (1998) conducted a survey examining the role strain and perceived support in 443 women students with work and family responsibilities. Criteria of university support included distance education, recognition of past learning, university day care, assignment flexibility, study skills workshops, instructors accessibility and part-time study. Only 13% of her sample said that they received high levels of such support. It is also interesting that flexibility in coursework deadlines increased rather than decreased their stress. Distance and e-learning education has often been suggested as a development within academia for facilitating adult learners in combining their different roles, while it addresses issues of marginalization and exclusion (Arthur & Tait, 2004; Raddon, 2007; Vryonides & Vitsilakis, 2008). For example, in Home's (1998) survey distance education was reported to reduce role strain. However, Vryonides & Vitsilakis' (2008) interviews with eight female teachers in Greece attending an e-learning postgraduate programme, comment on how much disillusioned women felt when they realized that studying from home was not a convenient way to accommodate studies with their professional and familial responsibilities. Also, distance education has been accused of limiting opportunities for cooperation and sharing. Edwards (1993) noted that the women she interviewed emphasised the importance of friendships with other mature students for support and assistance in handling difficulties with studies. Indeed, gender research has shown that female students learn better when there are opportunities of cooperation and sharing with others, such as seeking help from peers, which is less available in distance education (Taplin & Jegede, 2001).

Most of the literature examines the demands of academia in relation to the level of support female students receive from their partners, and the effects of such support on

their ability to study. There is a focus on the conflict created among couples, due to male partners' attitudes ranging from discomfort and resentment to jealousy and outright hostility (Gouthro, 2005; Stalker, 2001; Vaccaro & Lovell, 2010; Zosky et.al., 2004). Stalker (2001) interviewed 18 female adult learners and explored ways that their partners hindered their participation in tertiary education. For example, men expected their partners to be available on demand, provide home comforts and maintain the long established patterns of behavior within the family. However, there is no information on whether such demands were satisfied before women's engagement in studying, in which case, conflict might have resulted from a change in the status quo of the relationship. Furthermore, the view that husbands must be unconditionally supportive to the study obligations of their lifelong learning spouses, which will be repeated over their life-course, is in line with the view that lifelong learning is undisputedly good or necessary for the benefit of all; and that traditional university practices, are reasonable and necessary although they do not accommodate the different needs of mature students (Vryonidis & Vitsilakis 2008; Zosky et.al, 2004).

Role Reconciliation Policies: Can they be effective for women lifelong learners?

Reconciling work with family obligations, and to a lesser extent, work with studies has not escaped the attention of state policy making. In the former case reconciliation is considered within the work-life balance (WLB) agenda; and in the latter, policies are mainly related to paid or unpaid educational leave. It must be stressed though, that these reconciliation policies are extremely uneven across the European countries, as they are constrained or favoured by a number of welfare-regime, cultural, economic and political factors (Bessa, et.al., 2009; Milner, 2010; Tomlinson 2007). For example, part-time work was introduced in Greece in 1990, and it still remains

low, while other more modern types are almost non-existent (EuroBalance Guide, 2010). Policies also may vary within one country depending on the sector an employee belongs to. In Greece, for example, WLB policies, such as maternity and paid study leaves are substantially more generous in the public sector (European Alliance for Families, 2010).

WLB policies include hours of work, part-time work, flexi-time, and job sharing, leave entitlements and financial assistance in the form of childcare and maternity pay (Milner, 2010; Scheibl & Dex, 1998). Despite its intention to be inclusive, WLB is considered a narrow term (McDonald et.al., 2007; MacInnes, 2006; Ransome, 2007). It is questionable the extent to which WLB discourse and policies fit with the needs of singles (Casper et.al., 2007), childless couples (Wood & Newton, 2006), blue-collar workers (Fleetwood, 2007; Roberts, 2007; Smithson & Stokoe, 2005) and working lifelong learners (Eikhof et.al., 2007). Furthermore, it relies on the assumption that there is no 'life' other than family; childcare and caring are female responsibilities; and the contemporary worker is a full-time uninterrupted, unencumbered, male one (Eikhof et.al., 2007; Fleetwood, 2007; Halrynjo 2009; Lewis, 2003; MacInnes, 2006; Ransome, 2007).

In particular, WLB discourse is gendered because it ignores the unequal division of labour in the household. Indeed, despite the fact that WLB is discussed within the EU equal opportunity agenda, their success in gender equality is little (CEC, 2008b). Mescher et.al., (2010) in analysing WLB texts in 24 corporate websites, found that they implicitly promoted the concept of the full-time, mobile, and fully-committed male worker and portrayed women as the family carers. Fagnani & Letablier (2004) based on a representative sample of working parents found that 60% stated that the

French 35-hour laws had not affected the gender division of domestic labour and childcare. Cousin & Tang (2004) found that despite the equality and WLB policies in Sweden, women still experienced work-life conflict as parenthood and care are still predominantly female matters. In Greece policies are primarily concerned with increasing low birth rates, through legislation for pregnancy protection, maternity leaves, and daylong schools. Gender equality is not of much concern, due to persisting stereotypes of women as homemakers and men as breadwinners (Alipranti-Maratou & Nikolaou, 2008). Although WLB policies have succeeded in enabling many women to enter the labour market, they have not resolved issues of work-life conflict for full-time working women as they do not provide incentives for men to change their balance of paid and unpaid work, and do not assist a more equal sharing of all forms of work in society (Eikhof et.al., 2007; Hardy & Adnett, 2002; Lewis & Campbell, 2008). Consequently, working women lifelong learners do not benefit from WLB policies (if any) to the extent that men may do.

Moreover, WLB policies do not challenge workplace structures and cultures such as job intensification and job insecurity and are provided at the discretion of the employers. Moore (2007) in her ethnographic study of an Anglo-German MNC, found that although there were a number of policies in place, managers, refrained from using them, due to their expected self-sacrificing loyalty to the organization, manifested through long hours. Halrynjo (2009) argues that even in Norway the take-up of family-friendly entitlements depends on to the extent that the workplace culture punishes the users by limiting their career opportunities. Indeed, although fatherhood is recognised by the Norwegian state, very few fathers use the flexible leave because this might be interpreted by their employers as an indication that their job and career is not central in their life, and therefore be professionally marginalized (Brandth &

Kvande, 2001). Data from EU countries show that family-related leaves impact on pay and promotion, or may even invite dismissal, as they are often perceived as insufficient investment in and commitment to work (Eurofound, 2006). Furthermore, in many instances the exercise of employees' entitlements for WLB depends on the initiative and discretion of the managers (Ackers, 2003; Fagnani & Letablier, 2004; Hyman & Summers, 2007; Mescher et.al., 2010). For example, Hyman & Summers (2007) revealed that even in the firms with unions, the tendency was for WLB policies to be determined by the management. Fagnani & Letablier (2004) found that the employees working in family-friendly sectors benefit most from WLB policies. Given that the availability of WLB policies depends on the culture of the workplace and the employer, it is evident that not all working women lifelong learners can equally benefit from these policies.

Paid and unpaid educational leave has been recognised as a means for facilitating workers' reconciliation of work and studies since the 1970s, at a time when the OECD, the World Bank, and the Council of Europe became fervent proponents of recurrent education in response to economic global pressures. PEL gives the right to employees to training or general, social and civic education within working hours and with financial entitlements (ILO, 1974). As a consequence a number of industrialized countries have developed laws on paid and unpaid educational leaves, more recently linked to the wider strategy for motivating and improving access to lifelong adult learning (Cedefop, 2001a¹⁴). Regulations establishing entitlements to educational

¹⁴Cedefop (2001a) conducted a comprehensive survey in all EU member-states, Norway and Iceland on paid educational leave policies, following a Socrates project undertaken in Germany and partners in Belgium, France and Italy. Results became available in full in the Cedefop Library and Documentation Network.

leave vary among European countries but typically involve degree of job relevance, programme duration, and type of educational institution, whether it is state accredited or not (Morrissey & McNamara, 2005). Greece has not ratified the ILO Convention; nevertheless there are a number of policies covering a range of programmes, from university-level and research to seminars and vocational education. Again, there is a remarkable difference between public and private sector with civil servants being able to receive up to 5 years paid leave for postgraduate studies when private-sector employees can take only up to 20 days unpaid leave annually, unless the employer agrees to a different arrangement (Law 3528/2007). Cedefop (2001a) survey showed low participation rates in all countries. Jarvis (2004) noted that prior research has shown that PELs are unevenly distributed with low-paid and female employees being less benefited than other more advantaged groups. Brennan et.al. (2000) in studying the employment of part-time students in the UK, concluded that employers support mostly young white male lifelong learners, either in terms of time-off or subsidizing fees. Although employers recognize the need for lifelong learning as a strategy to respond to economic pressures, they expect their employees to study within their private time and beyond their paid time (Arthur & Tait, 2004). A recent Irish study revealed that educational leaves are administered in an ad hoc way within work organizations and many employees were expected to take time out of their holiday leave to study (Morrissey & McNamara, 2005). This employers' practice matches with the discourse of individualization, independence and personal responsibility adopted by the lifelong learning rhetoric.

Despite the pressure experienced by working women lifelong learners there are few studies that refer, even in passing, to their positive experiences (Vaccaro & Lovell, 2010). It is suggested that the focus on the economic benefits of lifelong learning has

overshadowed other personal ones (Blanden et.al., 2010; Wolf et. al., 2006). When personal benefits are mentioned in the policy discourse it is done in order to justify why individual should assume the cost of their learning as opposed to state funding (Biesta, 2006). Nevertheless, women lifelong learners often report that lifelong learning has improved their self-worth and self-perception and resulted in empowerment and agency (Francis & Leathwood, 2006). For example, Vaccaro & Lovell (2010) use the term 'self-investment' to describe that women in their study endured the cost of their sacrifices not for career or monetary reasons but for personal growth and fulfillment. However, none of the studies can explain why those who continue their education will be more personally fulfilled than non-lifelong learners (Barrow & Keeney, 2001).

In summary, I have argued in this section that new labour trends, unequal division of unpaid labour and the academia's inertia to respond to the needs of a mature-learner clientele, contribute to a massive pressure on women lifelong learners, thus, jeopardizing their well-being. Work-life balance policies and paid/unpaid educational leaves fail to a large extent to alleviate the stress from work-life, and work-education tensions, respectively. WLB policies do not challenge the unequal distribution of household tasks and care between men and women; they sustain work practices and cultures; and in many cases their provision is at the discretion of the employers. In reality, WLB agenda is concerned with the facilitation of women's, and especially mothers' participation in the labour market, in order to reduce welfare costs, increase the tax base and to satisfy employers' needs for labour flexibility. Similarly, paid and unpaid educational leaves, a powerful impetus for employee training in the 1970s, has lost much of its appeal to the state and employers as lifelong learning has become primarily one's own responsibility, therefore it is expected to be accommodated

within one's own private and unpaid time. On the other hand, support from family and academia is not guaranteed in view of unsupportive and even hostile partners and inflexible and impersonalised academic rationales.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have considered previous literature on lifelong learning with reference to its impact on women's work and life. Lifelong learning remains a widely-propagated concept. Decision-makers, drawing from the HCT emphasize that within the context of globalised economy, education is an investment leading to more and better jobs. However surveys have produced contradictory results when other factors such as overeducation, gender choice of discipline and age are taken into consideration. Especially in the case of women, commentators claim that whether out of choice for a home-centred life or due to structural barriers, such as interrupted careers, patriarchy, and sex discrimination women do not benefit from the knowledge society as much as men do, neither in terms of employment opportunities nor in economic rewards. Yet, previous empirical studies have concentrated on statistical data for the adult learner whose gender is rarely considered in the analysis. None of the studies researched have explored women lifelong learners and their employment opportunities and career benefits, nor have they examined in depth the impact of structural barriers on this particular group of learners' work.

As policy-led demand for lifelong learning becomes more and more pressing, in response to relentless competition for finding and maintaining employment in today's economic crisis-ridden Greece, role strain for lifelong adult learners, and in particular women with work, familial or other commitments becomes more acute. Although much is said about the benefits of lifelong learning on people's employment and

nations' competitiveness, less is known about the impact of lifelong learning on the life of women with work and/or caring responsibilities. Previous studies have shown that while women adult learners pursue learning for enjoyment and self-fulfillment, or career-related aspirations, pressure from work, non-work obligations and academia jeopardize their well-being. Reconciliation policies, such as WLB and study leaves, are proved by a number of studies to do little to alleviate interrole conflict as they remain deeply gendered. How difficult it is for women to respond to multiple role demands is common sense to understand. Therefore, far from being another statement of cynical fatalism, the purpose of this study is to approach the impact of lifelong learning on women's lives vis-à-vis a complex array of demands from home, workplace and academia which women themselves bear a disproportionate burden of responsibility to meet. Considered from this perspective, it is required to explore further whether lifelong learning is felt as a source of empowerment or a source of distress, "a form of colonization over people's lives" (Ecclestone, 1999:344). I suggest that a qualitative approach focused on lifelong learning instead of adult learning; in women instead of a generic adult learner; and from their own perspective, rather than from critical theorist's viewpoint, will capture not easily quantifiable aspects of women's lifelong learning experiences related to their work and life.

The next chapter provides a rationale for and a description of the methodological approach and data collection techniques for this study.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCHING WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVES ON LIFELONG LEARNING

Introduction

This chapter is divided into two parts. The first part presents a theoretical and methodological framework of this study, generated from the literature review, and the second, gives an overview of the procedures used to select participants, the techniques employed to collect and analyze data and the ethical considerations implicated in this research. The chapter ends with a discussion of the limitations to this study.

Burr (2003) criticizes the vast range of terms that writers and researchers use to describe in detail their theoretical positions, and whose meanings may be overlapping or contradictory (Griffiths, 1995). Therefore, instead of identifying with a particular school of thought, I have adopted a methodology of research that can be broadly labelled as interpretive constructivism informed by the feminist research tradition. I suggest that such an approach was ideal to uncover the different selves of my participants and expose their points of view on how they define themselves, what their motivations are, how they evaluate the importance of learning for their work and how their life realities are influenced by their engagement in lifelong learning. As I wanted to understand, rather than to quantify the experiences of women lifelong learners with respect to work and life I chose semi-structured interviews to access women's experiences and to listen to their stories as they were told from their own perspectives. As shown in Chapter Two and Three, quantitative research cannot adequately reflect the nuances and multi-dimensionality of such an experience, nor can quantitative research techniques capture the nature of outcomes on work and life. I am also aware that qualitative research does not oblige me to be a silent objective observer (Harding, 1987); instead it allows me, the researcher, to reveal my cultural

prejudices and theoretical allegiances, and in doing so to remain ever transparent about how these influence my interpretation of my participants' experiences (Usher, 1997).

My participants were found through my social network and by using snowballing techniques, and were selected to fit the criteria of gender, employment, and past and/or present engagement in lifelong learning at a higher institution. Based on the interviews and with the understanding that data are reconstructed in the process of transcription (Poland, 2003) I retold my participants' experiences in writing with the necessary care and reflection on issues of authenticity and representation. I analyzed the scripts by using a 'thematic analysis' (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Joffe & Yardley, 2004), following the coding suggestions of key textbooks (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Finally, ethical considerations in social sciences, vis-à-vis the choices and dilemmas I encountered are discussed and the limitations of this study are presented.

Philosophical Underpinnings of Social Research

Every research activity is inextricably embedded in a particular theoretical framework, a 'paradigm' which guides and explains the process of research, including what we choose to study as well as how we study it (Babbie, 2007; Corbeta, 2004; Grix, 2002). In social sciences there are several paradigms for understanding social behaviour each of which is constructed on the basis of certain epistemological ontological and methodological assumptions (Babbie, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003a; Usher, 1996a).

At the turn of the 20th century, social researchers' growing recognition that people and their institutions are fundamentally different from the natural phenomena, hence,

social reality cannot simply be observed but rather needs to be interpreted, new paradigms were developed about what knowledge is valid which collectively are called “interpretivist” (Bryman, 2004; Corbetta, 2003). Interpretative research is concerned with everyday experience and ordinary life and asks how meaning is constructed in the social interactions of those researched who are located in a particular historical and cultural context by which both the researched and the researcher are influenced (Goodwin & Horowitz 2002; Scott & Usher, 2011; Usher, 1997). My discussion in the previous chapter of the historical development of lifelong learning since the 1920s to the present illustrates that there is no such thing as a universal lifelong learning concept which the researcher can measure against standard variables. Instead, the meaning of lifelong learning has been subject to a range of interpretations in order to serve the interests and activities of supranational organizations as those were shaped by social, economic and political changes over the years. The current dominance of an economic rationale in the context of neoliberalism at the expense of earlier emancipatory and egalitarian goals as articulated in the UNESCO reports of the 1970s, is supposed to serve the interests of capital as articulated through the discourse of the ‘knowledge society’. Drawing from the writings of Lyotard, Foucault and Baudrillard theorists have suggested that currently lifelong learning is concerned with certain kinds of knowledge, those ones which increase performativity; aims at disciplining individuals in a non-coercive manner; and its content –what to be learnt and by whom- is decided by those who control the mass media and mass consumption. By locating my research within a framework of globalised capitalism and in a country fraught with the effects of a prolonged economic crisis, I wish to draw attention to women’s lifelong learning experiences, including mine, as these are lived in a particular socio-economic context.

In terms of ontology, interpretivists assume a constructivist ontological position, which claims that there is not one specific and definitive social reality, but social phenomena and their meanings are continually being constructed by social actors (Corbetta, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003a). Thus, human beings are not passive observers of a rational world, but active agents in shaping it (Agger, 1991). Their race, class, gender, and culture shape how they construct their visions of what constitutes their individual realities (Campbell & Wasco, 2000). Hence, in addition to the theorists' interpretations of lifelong learning I have also to consider my participants' and my own as these are shaped by both our personal choices and our cultural and socio-economic circumstances. At the same time, I understand that these experiences are multiple and diverse as I recognize that there is no unique woman; not only women vary across classes, races and cultures but they also may vary according to the experiences resulting from their multiple identities (Harding 1987). For example, my experience as a lifelong learner is influenced by my triple identity of student, teacher and wife, as much as the experience of some of my participants is influenced by their identity as students, mothers, and employees.

In terms of methods, interpretivists prefer qualitative research methods (Corbetta, 2003; Howe, 2001). Goodwin & Horowitz (2002:35) in acknowledging that there is no consensus about what qualitative research is conclude that "it is simply a residual category – all sociology, that is, which is not quantitative or simply theoretical". Qualitative research has not a distinctive set of methods; yet what is different in qualitative methods is that knowledge is generated through a process of induction (Bryman, 2004; Corbetta, 2003; Mason, 2006). For example, I first broadly defined the research questions from an investigation of the literature in the related area, and

then selected the participants in order to collect data. The interpretation of data led to the generation of new knowledge (Bryman, 2004).

So far I have addressed the philosophical underpinnings of social research with the aim to explaining how an understanding of ontological and epistemological considerations are necessary in order to establish and justify the choice of the conceptual framework in which I have placed my research process. In the following section I turn to one particular paradigm within the interpretive approach, which has been relevant to my research process, that is, feminist research.

Feminist Research

According to Harding (1987:8) “if one begins inquiry with what appears problematic from the perspective of women’s experiences, one is led to design research for women”. Thinking through the theoretical schools and controversies of feminist research is therefore a *sine qua non* for understanding women’s lifelong learning experiences with regards to work and life.

Academic discourse has identified a number of feminist schools of thought including but not limited to liberal, radical, socialist, psychoanalytic, post-colonial and postmodernist. Although these schools of thought differ in their philosophical and political allegiances they share an interest in viewing society from women’s perspective and in giving voice to women’s experiences which are considered to be legitimate sources of knowledge (Ackerly & True, 2010; Campbell & Wasco, 2000; Harding, 1987; Leicester, 2001; Riger, 1992; Usher, 1997). Methodological debates abound within the different feminist schools of thought; nevertheless, many writers have shared commitments in their research goals and principles (DeVault, 1996;

Riger, 1992; Usher, 1997; Waller, 2005). The following list is one of many, but I chose it for being the most applicable set of guiding principles for my research methodology, while it also justifies my claim that this research is feminist:

a. “Attending to the marginalized people in a social context” (Waller, 2005:21)

One of the fundamental goals of feminist research is to reveal the ways in which multiple forms of oppression influence women’s lives, as well as on other marginalised groups (Babbie, 2007; Harding, 1987; Marchant & Parpart, 1995). Borrowing from Foucault’s analysis of power, postmodern feminist theorists have foregrounded how privileged discourses have silenced competing dissident voices (Marchant & Parpart, 1995). Using the bourgeois white man’s perspective in order to explain social phenomena can offer only a partial and distorted understanding of women’s experiences (Harding, 1987). It is only through women’s voices that such experiences can be effectively represented, and oppressive practices exposed (DeVault, 1996; Harding, 1987; Waller, 2005).

I maintain that women’s experiences as lifelong learners have been ignored or marginalized in the public discourse of lifelong learning. The literature review provided in the previous chapters confirms that the rhetoric that surrounds lifelong learning systematically overshadows the gendered nature of its construction, while the gender-blind language used in governmental discourses ignores gender inequality in access and consumption of lifelong learning opportunities (Brine, 2006; Edwards, 2007; Fenwick, 2004; Jackson, 2004; Rogers, 2006). Also, lifelong learning has been propagated on the basis of the fundamental argument that it is necessary for acquiring and maintaining employment (Billett, 2001; Brown et.al, 2003; Gouthro, 2002;

Jenkins, 2006). However, despite women's increased participation in lifelong learning, certain structural factors do not fully allow women equal employment opportunities (Crompton & Harris, 1998a; Fenwick, 2004; Fuller et.al., 2005). Furthermore, the persistence of gendered division of non-paid work at home in addition to demands from the workplace and academia place a disproportionate burden of responsibility on women resulting in excessive stress, depression, and anxiety on the life of women with work and/or caring responsibilities (Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002; Edwards, 1993; Home, 1998). Consequently, even if women were equally acknowledged in the discourse of lifelong learning, their work and life realities would place them in the margin.

b. Recognizing and revealing the nature of one's values with the research context (Riger, 1992:736)

Harding (1987) claims that good feminist research occurs when the researcher's class, race, culture and gender assumptions and beliefs are revealed, so that audiences know how these characteristics have influenced her research. Whereas in the positivist paradigm distance is thought to be an important guarantor of objectivity, with the researcher being a silent observer, in the interpretivist feminist tradition it is considered as a barrier to good research, advocating thus, that the researcher be placed back in the picture (Davies & Dodd, 2002; Goodwin & Horowitz, 2002; Harding, 1987). Choices made about the field of research, object of study, methods, techniques of collecting data, as well as analysis of data –what to include and what to leave out– prove that researchers' values and prejudices are implicated in knowledge generation (Bryman, 2004; Corbetta, 2003; Friend & Thomson, 2003; Goodwin & Horowitz, 2002; Usher, 1997). Acker (1981:96) has commented that “Many of us study aspects

of our autobiographies partially disguised as a 'detached' choice of an interesting problem”.

Indeed, it is my own membership in the group of women lifelong learners that has shaped my interest in the relative absence of women lifelong learners in both public discourse and academic literature. Revealing my personal views to those being studied and to the readers, allows me to demonstrate my critical stance towards lifelong learning. During my lifelong learning engagements I have seen the quality of my life eroded. In my current situation, whilst the support of my employer is virtually non-existent, and the impact on my earnings insignificant, I have been struggling to accommodate long working hours with studying, domestic pressure, and care-taking responsibilities for my two elderly parents. Amidst feelings of guilt for not ‘being there’ for my significant others, and despite physical exhaustion, I have on several occasions experienced the pleasure of learning and accomplishment associated with academic success. Most importantly, I have acquired an interest in the lifelong learning experiences of others, -students, colleagues and friends- which were both comfortingly similar to, and alarmingly different from mine. Therefore, I recognize that the experience of being a lifelong learner creates some common ground with my participants, in the particular socio-economic and cultural context in which we are located, but also questions my pre-suppositions that such an experience of combining education with work and other life commitments is necessarily problematic. Usher (1996b) mentions that one’s pre-suppositions are put at risk, tested and modified in the process of interpretation during the inquiry. Therefore, rather than being prejudices or biases, our specific limited perspective becomes the starting point for acquiring knowledge by being open to being connected with other perspectives, what Gadamer (2004:306) calls “fusion of horizons”, which inevitably lead to broadening of one’s

horizon. In order to achieve that, I needed to repudiate the role of the objective, invisible, anonymous and all-knowing expert, and strive for establishing an egalitarian relationship with the research participants (Campbell & Wasco, 2000; Harding, 1987).

c. Establishing an egalitarian relationship among all people who interact in a research project (Waller 2005:21)

Regarding methodology, what is perhaps most distinctive from the positivist paradigm is the emphasis placed by researchers working within interpretative paradigms on the empathetic interaction between the researched and the researcher (Davies & Dodd, 2002; Harding, 1987; Lather, 1986; Oakley, 1981). Oakley (1981) advocates humane treatment of the interviewees, based on ethics and morality, which can be achieved only if the relationship of interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical and when the interviewer is prepared to invest his or her own personal identity in the relationship. In order to overcome issues of power resulting from my role as an interviewer, (in addition to others such as teacher, administrator, educated upper-middle class female, and lifelong learner), I followed Oakley's (1981) advice of treating an interview not as a pseudo-conversation but as an honest discussion among two people, where questions were mutually answered. When power relations are confronted and dealt with honesty the negative effects of hierarchy are reduced (Tisdell, 1998). Lather (1986) points out that an egalitarian relationship is built when reciprocity is achieved. She defines reciprocity as going beyond the concern for more and better data to a concern for helping participants to understand and change their situations. I will return to Lather's point about action-driven research further below. Blurring the boundaries between the roles of the researcher and the researched without

losing sight of the research guidelines – one major goal is to receive rich data- requires experience in interviewing which I have to a certain extent.

d. Rejecting the traditional commitments to truth, objectivity and neutrality as neither feasible nor good (Usher, 1997; Waller, 2005).

Interpretivists claim that there cannot be objective and impartial knowledge; there is not one true method through which knowledge can be acquired (Davies & Dodd, 2002; Howe, 2001; Leicester, 2001; Usher, 1997; Usher, 1996b). Postmodern take an extreme relativist approach and argue that there cannot be a social reality, since the social world is generated in discourse; any knowledge has to be represented through a signifying system therefore, the real, and any understanding of it, is always mediated by language and texts of the socio-cultural world (Ackroyd & Fleetwood, 2000; Bryman, 2004; Friend & Thomson, 2003; Howe, 2001; Riger, 1992; Usher, 1996a). Since human experience is expressed through language it follows that there cannot be a neutral reflection of that experience which is historically and culturally located (Campbell & Wasco, 2000; Edwards et.al., 2002; Marchant & Parpart 1995). I agree with the postmodernist view that there are not universal truths but points of views or “multiple truths” (Kilgore, 2001:56)“ all of which have to acknowledge their own partial and limited insights” (Usher, 1997:47). I use direct accounts of experience but I acknowledge that these are not necessarily true reports of my participants’ inner selves (Griffiths, 1995). I also recognize that my engagement and solidarity with lifelong learners do not leave room for value-free and objective research. However, I agree with Edwards et.al. (2002) that even partial situated knowledge is still knowing. Actually, admitting partiality is “more trustworthy than partial knowledge presented as generally true” (DeVault, 1996:41).

However, assuming that there is not only one truth that the researcher can attain raises issues of validity in qualitative research which have been dealt with in a number of ways by interpretivist researchers. Davies & Dodd (2002), adopting a feminist approach, propose reflexivity, which Edwards et.al. (2002:136) define as “self-consciousness of our stance toward the research in which we engage” a continuous critical examination of one’s influence of the subject, data and their interpretation”. They suggest analytical reflexivity -which for Usher (1996a) means recognizing the assumptions, values and bias of the research process- rather than the descriptive confessional one. I provide a reflexivity note further below in this section.

e. Orienting research towards change in social institutions, structures, and cultures (Waller, 2005:21)

Feminist theorists, especially those affiliated with Feminist Critical Theory, agree that feminist research has emancipatory aims, that is to say, research which has a value to women and leads to change beneficial to women (DeVault, 1996; Francis, 1999; Griffiths, 1995; Harding, 1987). According to Harding (1987) the questions posed by feminist researchers are not about finding pure truth, but an attempt to find answers that will guide them in how to change women’s conditions. Social change can be achieved by empowering women to initiate resistance, informing the public through the dissemination of research results, or even via the processes of the research project itself (Francis, 1999). For example, Critical Theory research in lifelong learning would aim to understand women’s lifelong learning engagement as tied to issues of powerful structures (supranational organizations, academic institutions, or powerful elites) with the aim to unmask the ideologies that maintain their interests, and empower women to act individually and collectively to change the conditions of life

(Kilgore, 2001; Lather, 2004; Usher, 1996b). Not only does social research is expected to advocate action against oppression, but also it has an ethical obligation towards participants who “in allowing themselves to be studied, a subject population has a right to expect from the field researcher something more substantial than bourgeois respect, courtesy and honesty; they have a right to the social power that comes from knowledge” (May, 1980: 365).

By researching women’s lifelong learning experiences, while adopting a feminist constructivist approach, I admit my commitment to the goals of emancipatory research, to the degree that the breadth of this research allows. My research might not stimulate political action or policy changes, but it can have an educative role for both parties. Through my interviewing in a dialogic, respectful, and reflective manner, I have provided my participants and myself with a means of foregrounding our lifelong learning experiences, raising our consciousness of power and oppression in lifelong learning rhetoric, connect with others in discussions and readings of my data, and developing our understanding of lifelong learning assumptions and goals. Moreover, it has helped me to empathize with my lifelong learning students –both female and male– and develop a series of open workshops for both the faculty and the students in the college I work, on issues of lifelong learning, work, studies and life.

A Reflexive Note

Despite the many accounts of the importance of reflexivity in social research, none of the articles on lifelong learning researched explained precisely how to locate the self effectively in the research¹⁵. On the one hand, one has to avoid the trap of a long self-indulgent, confessional autobiographical note, and on the other, the theoretical inward-

¹⁵ I found most helpful Etherington’s (2004) book on reflexive research, although her analysis is based on her experience in therapeutic counselling.

focused account (e.g., Edwards et.al., 2002) nearly incomprehensible to the uninitiated reader. Given my long experience of the educational culture of the British system, where personal circumstances are rather irrelevant, as well as the lack of practical guidance from the literature, I realized that it requires confidence and courage to produce in writing a reflexive text of my own research. Nevertheless, I have established early on in Chapter One and later in this Chapter the personal significance of the topic for me and my lifelong learning experiences (mostly negative) vis á vis work, life and academia. I noticed that sharing these with the women (timidly in the first interviews but with greater confidence in the following ones) set the ground for a more open and sincere discussion, and eventually richer data. Moreover, my choice of topic, theoretical standpoint and methodological approach has been influenced by the historical and cultural context my participants and I live. With the current financial crisis in Greece I have been greatly puzzled with the Western expert discourse for severe and unfair austerity measures as rational, necessary and inevitable. I have interpreted this discourse as an excellent example of positivism- a dominant ideology with the aim to persuade people to accept the world as it is. It is from this standpoint that I selected the literature on lifelong learning, and soon realized the similarities and interrelation of the discourses of positivism and lifelong learning. I was also attracted to feminist research for its attendance to women's issues. My acquaintance with postmodern theories provided me with the critical tools to analyse the 'grand narrative' of lifelong learning and with the confidence that "small stories from the heterogeneous "subject positions" of individuals" (Agger, 1991:8) are valid sources of knowledge. This is what I had in mind when I started the interviews; this is why I asked the particular questions; and this is how I organized and interpreted the data.

In this section I have discussed the main tenets of feminist research with the intention of explaining why feminism is the paradigm in which I have located my research. In the following part I will present the methods.

Research Design

Research design includes the decisions made with respect to sample, data collection methods, and analysis. Despite the rigorous planning of this design, I have taken particular care to allow for flexibility, by viewing it as a continuous process informed by constant review of decisions and approaches (Mason, 2006). Therefore initially this design had served as a plan for strategic thinking and reflection throughout the research process, and was modified several times as unexpected setbacks and further reflection required adjustment. My main goal was to design a plan that would be coherent with the purpose of this study and my epistemological and ontological beliefs, while at the same time to fit with practical considerations such as time, resources, purpose (a study undertaken within the constraints of a Ph.D. thesis), and wordage. Most importantly, I wanted to design a plan consistent with “an ethic of closeness, of care, of proximity, or of relatedness” (Schwandt, 2003:317), grounded in my responsibility for an open and honest disclosure of the decisions I made around data gathering, analysis and presentation (Olesen, 2003).

In response to these considerations and to the findings of the literature review, this study took a qualitative approach. Bryman (2004) summarizes the critique against qualitative research as being difficult to replicate impossible to generalize and lacking in transparency. However, as I have discussed above, feminist researchers have convincingly argued that the impressionistic and subjective nature of qualitative research is an asset rather than a problem.

One of the central tenets of qualitative research is that it is fundamentally inductive (Bryman, 2004). I hold that these questions can be only approached inductively; rather than pigeonholing my data in carefully selected and narrow variables, I chose to allow the important themes to emerge from my participants' experiences, even if these went beyond my initial presuppositions.

Sample

The sample consisted of 23 women. Appendix 1 provides a full profile of the interviewees. The strategy I followed to select them was "purposeful criterion sampling" (Patton, 2002:238), rather than random which is more appropriate for increased representation of the population of interest. Hence, the women interviewed were not statistically representative, but they were chosen on the basis of their experience on the topics of this study, so as to ensure a good correspondence between the research questions and sampling (Bryman, 2004). The underlying criteria were as follows:

- a. Women who are lifelong learners: I selected women who have had successive learning episodes in a higher education context. As indicated in Chapter One, the lifelong learner is not simply an adult learner, but one who has been educated before, and plans to continue to do so, repeatedly in her adult life in the pursuit of certified qualifications. In view of the fact that in Greece currently, professional recognition is only given to higher education awards, I chose women who were, or had recently been students in pursuit of degrees.
- b. Women who have been working during their studies as the impact of lifelong learning on employment is one of the key themes of the literature.

- c. Women with life responsibilities, for example, being married, having children, living on their own, or caring for others during their studies.

Participants were selected through my social networks and by using the snowball technique. Although this is not a systematized method of identifying participants, it is nonetheless effective (Marshall, 1995). The purpose was to ensure a spread in terms of women lifelong learners' characteristics such as age, profession and sector, and educational experience. Instead of treating women lifelong learners as a homogeneous group, I sought to problematise notions of sameness and expose their differences, if any, with respect to the research question.

Method

The method I chose for this study was the feminist approach to semi-structured interviews which were conducted face-to-face during a period of four months. Feminist approach holds that the interview is a form of conversation (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). However, it differs from normal conversations in that there is always a purpose and the roles of the two interlocutors although non-hierarchical, are distinct (Kvale, 1996). I have chosen interviews because of my ontological and epistemological commitment to interpretive constructivism whose objective is to grasp the participant's perspective as she constructs her reality through language; secondly, the influence of the feminist approach of qualitative research which advocates an egalitarian and non-objectifying interaction with the participants; and thirdly, the nature of the themes which touch upon personal and private information, such as life and work circumstances, not easily shared within a group. These key features together, as well as the importance of non-verbal signals and emotions, mean that my interviews could be best conducted face-to-face. Moreover, interviews were

designed as semi-structured because although the basic themes of the conversation had been chosen beforehand, and were the same for all interviewees, sub-themes were allowed to develop as they arose during the interview, thus permitting the participants to develop their own line of thought into new territories (Corbetta, 2003; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003; Wilkinson et.al, 2004).

Oakley (1981:31) notes “Interviewing is like a marriage; an awful lot of people do it and yet behind each closed front door there is a world of secrets”. Indeed, there are a number of textbooks which give detailed guidance on how a qualitative interview must be conducted (Kvale, 1996; Patton, 1983; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003); nevertheless, the very openness and flexibility of the interview demand for on-the-spot decisions the success of which depends on the skills and knowledge of the interviewer, and the degree of her preparation (Kvale, 1996; Patton, 2002; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). In doing these interviews I have drawn from my readings of some key textbooks (Bryman, 2004; Gilham, 2005; Oakley, 1981; Patton, 1983; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003) and from my 20-year experience as a teacher. Empathy, sensitivity, modesty, ethicality, reflection, resourcefulness, alertness, respect, probing, guiding a discussion and listening are some of the qualities and skills that as a teacher I have practiced to a good extent.

The following description of my semi-structured interviews has been based on Bryman’s (2004:342) checklist of issues to consider for a qualitative interview:

1. I had approached candidates and friends for this research almost since the beginning of writing this thesis. They were all informed of the subject of my study, and I had explored with them whether they would fit the criteria for participating in the interviews, or they could introduce to me other women

who fit the criteria. Out of 29 candidates, 23 were finally selected. The majority of those who were excluded were women who identified themselves as adult learners, rather than lifelong learners. On the day of the interview and before starting, my participants signed the Informed Consent Form (Appendix 2).

2. I conducted one pilot interview, which I shared with my supervisor in order to receive feedback for further adjustments. For example, I was advised to probe my interviewees to talk in order to get as much detail as possible.
3. Interviews lasted between one and one and a half hour. In all interviews I allowed time to my interviewees to talk after I had switched off the tape-recorder. In two occasions a considerable amount of rich data resulted from these off-the-record sessions.
4. The place of the interview was chosen in cooperation with the participants for mutual convenience. Interviews were conducted at their workplace, home, classroom and cafes.
5. My interview guide was a fairly general blueprint to keep us in track of the conversation and to enhance the consistency of data (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). I used an interview guide structure based on Ritchie & Lewis' (2003) and Mason's (2006) suggestions for an in-depth interview topic guide, and Patton's (1983) guidance for the wording of questions (Appendix 3).
6. The interviews were conducted in the native language of the participants. One of the participants was a native speaker of English, and another bilingual, so she switched languages throughout the interview, which I followed.
7. The interviews were tape recorded.

8. Six months later, when I completed the discussion of the findings I emailed them a short version of the main findings, to which many of them responded with very warm comments.

In the following section I discuss the procedure of coding and analysis of data.

Data Analysis

Following each interview I proceeded with the transcription of the data. I acknowledge that transcription is not a technical, unproblematic and value-free process (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999). It is mediated by the researcher's interpretive stance, and her theoretical framework (Denzin in Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999). Therefore, once I made clear that I do not believe in the objective detached observer of a static world, it follows that I do not assume that transcriptions are accurate copies of that world either. In turning oral discourse into writing one produces a new retelling which is bound to be different from the original event, given that the author has intervened, circumstances have changed, and alterations, accidental or deliberate, have been made (Denzin in Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999). Poland (2003) suggests that transcription requires researchers to become more reflective about and transparent in their transcription procedure. This is even more so when the interview is in one language and the presentation of data in another. All but one of my interviews were conducted in Greek, and I translated in English those parts that I quoted in the following chapters. When unsure about whether the English translation captured the nuances or the strength of a given statement, I asked the advice of English native-speaking colleagues. I transcribed the interviews the same or the day after the interview. I included both the participant's and my comments. I exercised choice in which paralinguistic features such as emotion, emphasis and pace to include.

The data were analyzed following the qualitative content analysis approach. In the literature this approach has been termed as ‘thematic analysis’ (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Joffe & Yardley, 2004); therefore, I use both terms interchangeably in the following discussion. A theme is a piece of text (word, sentence, or phrase) which reveals important information in relation to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Hsieh & Shannon, (2005:1279) offer a number of different types of qualitative content analysis of which the “conventional” or “inductive” (Braun & Clarke, 2006) is closest to my approach. They suggest that this type is appropriate when there is limited research literature on the phenomenon, and it relies on allowing the themes to flow from the data rather than working on preconceived categories. However, this does not mean that the researcher’s presuppositions or biases are eliminated and that themes from the literature review are ignored (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Themes do not sit in the data waiting to be discovered by the researchers (Braun & Clarke, 2006). They develop according to questions asked during the interview, which have emerged from the researcher’s own understanding of the literature (Joffe & Yardley, 2004). Thematic analysis is often criticized because it abstracts issues from the participant’s lifeworld and groups them according to the researcher’s sense of how they are related (Bryman, 2004; Joffe & Yardley, 2004). However, the development of themes involves interpretation of underlying ideas, assumptions and conceptualizations, leading to an analysis rather than an abstracted description, a process which is consistent with my constructivist approach. Another critique for thematic analysis is that, given its flexibility, it lacks specific evaluation criteria (Braun & Clarke, 2006). However, the quality of a thematic analysis depends on the transparency of the method, how explicit one is about what one is doing and

how faithful one is to this description, which is exactly what I provide further below (Auerbach & Silverstein 2003; Braun & Clarke, 2006).

I started the analysis with some general themes derived from my reading of the literature and I then added more themes and subthemes as they emerged in the texts. The data were analyzed at two levels of coding following the practical suggestions of Auerbach & Silverstein (2003) and Braun & Clarke (2006). Coding is the categorization and labeling of data (Joffe & Yardley, 2004). At the first level of coding, after reading the texts sequentially, I identified repeating ideas from the participants' talk (Appendix 4), which I grouped and pasted onto separate files, one for each theme. At the second level, I examined connections so that initial themes merged or expanded. Subsequently, I explored relationships among the different themes in order to group them in broader categories, what Auerbach & Silverstein (2003:39) call "theoretical constructs". Finally, the theoretical constructs were interpreted and discussed in relation to research questions and the literature, leading to the production of the following two chapters. As commentators have warned novice researchers, I also found that this process was not linear, but involved much review and reflection throughout the process.

Ethical Considerations

My research includes semi-structured interviews with women lifelong learners in order to explore the impact of lifelong learning upon work and life, as perceived by the participants themselves. It is thus evident that my proposed research methodology renders itself open to the issues relevant to ethical principles in social research. I understand that ethical research is a process that permeates all stages of the research project, before, during, and after the research is completed (Davies and Dodd, 2002;

Edwards & Mauthner, 2005); hence ethics has been a connecting thread running across the different sections of this chapter. In feminist research ethics involves care and is based on values of reciprocity, responsibility and egalitarian relationship between researched and researcher (Edwards & Mauthner, 2005; Olesen, 2003). Diener & Grandall (in Bryman, 2004) invite researchers to consider avoiding transgression of the ethical principles by safeguarding that they will not harm the participants, will secure their consent and their rights to privacy, and will not deceive them. However, the researcher cannot rely solely on a set of prescriptive principles but she is required to engage in reflection on ethical issues as they arise (Tisdale, 2004).

Potential Harm to the Participants: Although I cannot envisage any immediate harm to the participants through my research, there might be hidden harmful implications as a result of their participating in my interviews. The BSA Statement of Ethical Practice (BSA, 2002) in article 27 specifies that “Even if not harmed, those studied may feel wronged by aspects of the research process. This can be particularly so if they perceive apparent intrusions into their private and personal worlds, or where research gives rise to false hopes, uncalled for self-knowledge, or unnecessary anxiety”. For example, by asking the women to assess their support mechanisms during their lifelong learning engagement, I might have encouraged them to draw attention to traits and qualities of their partners, and/or lack thereof, of which, they might not have been previously conscious. I treated personal matters with caution. I was particularly vigilant for digressions into personal issues for which I am neither inclined, nor trained to address. I did that by emphasizing my role in the discussion whilst maintaining rapport and the sense of care.

Securing Consent: According to the BSA article 16, (2002) informed consent of those studied “implies a responsibility on the sociologist to explain in appropriate detail, and in terms meaningful to participants, what the research is about, who is undertaking and financing it, why it is being undertaken, and how it is to be disseminated and used”. Informed consent further acknowledges the participants’ right to withdraw at any time (Kvale, 1996). Signing an agreement with the participants, specifying the content and purpose of the research, and committing myself to privacy and confidentiality and acknowledging their right to withdraw at any time, and to have access to the findings were the steps I took in responding to the ethical specifications of BSA (2002).

Privacy: “The anonymity and privacy of those who participate in the research process should be respected”, (BSA, article 34: 2002). Respondents’ details can be covered by using pseudonyms, and use of the general rather than the specific. I asked my participants to choose their pseudonym from a list of flower names as an indication of my appreciation of the sensitiveness and beauty of their experiences. Securing privacy is also linked with the storage of data, during and after the research project. Working with my data at the office was avoided, since our network allows other people (mostly technicians) to access my computer. Similarly, printed or audio scripts were safely stored at home.

Deception: Bryman (2004:514) defines deception as “occurring when researchers represent their research as something other than what it is”. For example, to entice my subjects to participate by not giving them a full account of the intention and method of my research would be a clear case of deception. As discussed above, I informed participants both orally and in writing.

In conclusion, ethical conduct must be taken into account at all stages of the research. While it seems that one can easily respond to the basic principles of research ethics, there are several hidden implications that the researcher must be alert to, and ethical questions that are not easily answered. Being transparent about my theoretical framework, personal assumptions and bias and methodological choice and practice, and remaining faithful as is reasonably possible to these commitments have been to me the overarching principles of ethical behavior. As such, doing ethical research transgresses rules and regulations and encompasses reflexivity and accountability towards interviewees, my university, and those who will read –and possibly re-interpret- this thesis.

Limitations

Although I consider this study as being successful in meeting its aim and objectives I find the fact that all women were living in Athens is a limitation regarding the breadth and scope of this research. Rural inhabitants are under-presented in education across Europe, and it is mainly city citizens that still have the strongest chance to benefit from lifelong learning opportunities (Cedefop, 2001). The 2011 public opinion survey revealed that 85% people in suburban and rural areas in Greece considered as an impediment to their participation the lack of opportunities in a neighbouring area (Public Issue, 2011). This constitutes social exclusion and it deserves systematic attention in research.

A further limitation has been that women were interviewed only once. I believe that if time and wordage allowed, and my participants were available, this study would have been benefited more in terms of depth from a second opportunity for interview.

Conclusion

At an ontological level, I believe that social phenomena and their meanings are a subjective reality socially constructed. Consequently, at an epistemological level, being guided by a constructivist approach, I consider that my participants' views, understandings, interpretations, interactions and perceptions are meaningful sources of the knowledge my study aspires to reveal. Furthermore, methodologically I embrace the feminist approach, as more relevant to the questions at hand. Feminist research accepts women's stories as legitimate sources of knowledge and "empowers women to tell their stories by providing a respectful and egalitarian research environment" (Campbell & Wasco, 2000:787). In qualitative research the researcher assumes a central role in the research process, and s/he is legitimated to "speak from a particular class, gender, racial, cultural, and ethnic community perspective", and it is through this personal biography that s/he attempts to capture and interpret the human experience of her/his participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003:30). Rather than being a neutral collector of data, the silent and hidden observer (Goodwin & Horowitz, 2002), I chose to acknowledge my own perspective, and how that affects my sense-making and action and honestly inform the reader of where I stand in relation to the subject-matter and the participants. Making myself visible, I also reveal my engagement in reflexivity, in a meaningful and sensitive way, "an ongoing conversation about experience while simultaneously living in the moment" (Hertz, 1997 in Denzin & Lincoln, 2003:84). For the reasons outlined above, which have been explored in the previous section and summarised here, the vehicle chosen for this study is semi-structured interviews. Yet, I understand that the interview is not a mirror of the external world, (Denzin, 2001), but a narrative device, a fabrication whose meanings cannot be separated from the context in which they are produced; the teller and the

listener, the writer and the audience. However, this does not entail a compromise in research rigour. On the contrary, academic rigour in the qualitative tradition is ensured through trustworthiness, authenticity and self-reflection. Transparency is an additional essential ingredient of rigor, and to this end, the research plan outlined in the previous section includes the multiple decisions I have made with reference to theoretical and practical considerations. Finally, I understand that ethical conduct in research is intertwined with quality (Olesen, 2003) and that it is related to a wider sense of responsibility and accountability and I concur with Davies & Dodd's (2002:288) claim that ethics encompasses "attentiveness, empathy, carefulness, sensitivity, respect, reflection, conscientiousness, engagement, awareness, and openness".

CHAPTER FIVE: MAKING SENSE OF LIFELONG LEARNING: AN EXPLORATION OF WOMEN'S UNDERSTANDINGS AND MOTIVATIONS

Introduction

The aim of this research is to explore the impact of lifelong learning on the work and life of women in Greece. In particular, it aims to present women's understandings of what lifelong learning is, what motivates them, how they evaluate the importance of learning for their work, and how it impacts upon their life. The findings are based on the thematic analysis of the data resulting from semi-structured interviews with 23 women in Greece. The results are arranged and discussed in two chapters. In this first one, women's own definitions of lifelong learning and their motivations are discussed vis-à-vis policy rhetoric and the views of those theorists who have attempted to explain lifelong learning through postmodern lens.

The literature review identified the multiple and often contradictory meanings assigned to the concept of lifelong learning by different stakeholders (Cotterill et.al., 2007; Rizvi, 2007). Policymakers, such as the EU, have propagated lifelong learning as the key to employment, economic success, and full participation in society (CEC, 2010a), and currently, as a means for exiting the financial crisis (Diamantopoulou, 2011). Conversely, social theorists have argued that lifelong learning is a tool in the hands of national governments and intergovernmental organizations for providing the markets with the flexible, adaptable and compliant worker necessary for serving the neo-liberal interests of the employers (Jarvis, 2009; Quicke, 1997; Olssen, 2008). Both parties have ostensibly employed a gender-blind discourse which ignores women's understandings of and motivations for participating in lifelong learning (Brine, 2006).

All women interviewed when asked what lifelong learning means to them, recognized the concept and provided their own definition which they further elaborated in the course of the interview. Although definitions varied to a large extent, I have identified the following attributes that have been used at least by one participant: Lifelong learning is endless; is about knowledge, employment and personal development; is organized and certified; is everything you read and learn; is a requirement for employment; is expensive; and is imposed by the market. Despite the variability in definitions, three repeated qualities of lifelong learning emerged: first, it is mainly structured and certified; secondly, is primarily required by the labour market; and thirdly, is expensive. Regarding motivation, respondents referred to factors such as a personal need, a call for caring and sharing with others, a desire to perform better at work, while a less apparent motive is related to social status and prestige.

Lifelong Learning is Structured and Certified

The majority of women defined lifelong learning as structured and certified knowledge as the following comment reveals:

In Greece you don't have many opportunities for accreditation of non-formal learning, and the informal learning does not have much value. It's a country that values degrees, your CV must show degrees if you have done something less it doesn't count... (Anemone, 46, Business Trainer/Businesswoman¹⁶).

¹⁶ In this section I identify the quotations with the participant's pseudonym, age, profession and sector (private, public, freelance or NGO) so that their views and experiences are contextualised.

Anemone understands the over-emphasis on formal education as a result of the absence of a national policy for recognizing informal learning, rather than a real need of the labour market.

Even women who spontaneously answered that lifelong learning is about any kind of learning, when they recounted their learning history they included only degree studies. It was only later, and in some cases even after the interview was completed that I found out that they had done additional learning such as painting, styling, theatre, languages, and community work. Myrto, for example, explained to me the degrees she has completed but she did not mention the theatre workshop where she has been enrolled for the past two years, for which I knew through our common friend:

[AK: In your educational history you focused on your degree studies. Do you believe that LLL is only certified education?]

Not necessarily. LLL is not just certified knowledge. I read everything, I like to be updated in many matters, that's why I read...

[AK: I know that you do theatre now, but you didn't mention it in your account of your educational history, do you consider this as LLL?]

That's a good question... to be honest I had never thought of it as such...
(Myrto, 51, Engineer/Public).

It seems that what Myrto defines as being lifelong learning contradicts what she really believes that it is and it is only with further probing that this becomes clear to both of

us. This is an additional example of why survey data on people's understandings of lifelong learning (e.g., Cedefop 2004) should be read with caution.

The recognition of non-formal and informal learning has been attempted to be resolved through national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) whose goal is to validate prior learning and experience according to a pre-defined set of competences and skills (Singh, 2009). In 2008 the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) was agreed among European institutions with the aim to promote workers' and learners' mobility between countries and to facilitate their lifelong learning, through the validation of non-formal and informal learning (CEC, 2008a). However, NQFs have been criticized for a number of reasons (Andersson et.al., 2004; Hodkinson, 2011; Young, 2008). Young (2008), through a comparative analysis of NQFs experiences, identified a number of political, administrative and educational problems in the application of the system, and concluded that the expected benefits are unrealistic. Singh (2009) has drawn attention to the hegemony of an exclusionary and selective formal system of education which informs and guides policies for measuring and administering qualifications, skills and experience. As a result, standards are set according to academic criteria alone rather than drawn from work, culture and society. Colley et.al. (2003) argue that the EU threefold classification of learning (formal, non-formal and informal) is meaningless. Instead, this division signifies the domination of an economic instrumentalism, what Power (1997) defines as 'audit society', which rather than empowering people it operates as a tool of what Foucault calls disciplinary surveillance (Singh, 2009). In Greece recent attempts to create a NQF have aimed to formalize mainly non-formal learning acquired through many EU-funded programmes offered by a vast array of non-university institutions (Dimoulas, 2010; Karalis, 2010). However, these programmes are not recognized even though their results may be

certified. Therefore, it is not just a matter of certification; these certificates have not a specific value in the Greek labour market nor do they increase their holders' negotiating power (Karalis, 2010). Moreover, the certified professional cannot proceed to a higher level of education, either (Dimoulas, 2010). The Greek top-down process is expected to create an artificial demand for certificates accompanied with the emergence of an unregulated market of offering preparatory courses for certifications to be paid by the individual, where more emphasis will be given to acquisition of certificates than to learning and the recognition of results of learning (Dimoulas, 2010; Karalis, 2010). This risk has been eloquently expressed by one of the interviewees:

Many young people who are unemployed resort to LLL without knowing why, it becomes like a sports for them, how to improve their CV, so you see a CV with 20 seminars, as if they are about to make a wallpaper with certificates... I see this with suspicion, it is insecure, vain, it doesn't give me a strong message (Orchid, 36, Psychotherapist/Private).

The greediness for certificates is consistent with the claims of those writers who have employed Lyotard's notion of performativity, the optimization of the relationship between input and output (Lyotard, 2005), for analyzing the lifelong learning discourse. From this point of view, the contemporary lifelong learner must adopt an entrepreneurial strategy towards learning for the development of his/her effectiveness and efficiency, skills and competences which must be made visible through the accumulation of qualifications, and a constant documentation of their life course (Edwards, 2007; Tuschling & Engemann, 2006; Wain, 2007). This effort is ceaseless;

It is something endless, learning never ends, never, in other words as long as we live we learn...because I have always the agony that I don't know anything, that I start from zero (Pansy, 50, Theatrologist/Private).

because the possibility of mastery of any one discipline is impossible:

... because the needs increase... there is no such a thing as I studied something and now has been completed. Everything remains incomplete, you must learn new things, to be trained, it is very important in our life because knowledge never ends (Daisy, 32, English Teacher/Private).

For both women there is a personal obligation, an imperative, even an agony to achieve the impossible, to master a never-ending knowledge. The apparent contradiction points to these women's internalization of a duty to learn new things.

Lifelong Learning Is Expensive

In this quest for acquiring an endless knowledge individuals are expected to assume the cost and the responsibility on their own. Indeed, only three women had their studies paid, one by her company and the other two because they pursued only state-provided tuition-free education. All other women assumed the full cost of their studies in state, private or universities abroad. Dahlia, a Financial Manager is certain that it will take her "100 years of work to reap the returns of my monetary investment in the MBA". The cost of lifelong learning becomes even more burdensome due to the current financial crisis which has placed an extreme pressure on them regarding their ability to continue their present studies and engage in future learning:

It [the crisis] has influenced me because LLL comes with a cost and at this particular moment assuming this cost is a risk. Perhaps if I saved this money I would feel more secure, I think that if I weighed the two I would prefer to keep the money... I have been faced with this dilemma (Orchid, 36, Psychotherapist/Private).

It is evident across OECD countries that as the welfare state dwindles and the employers' budgets for training beyond the immediate working environment are cut back, the responsibility for funding learning falls on the individual (Crowther, 2004; Foley, 1994; Livingstone, 1999; Wain, 2000). My interviews revealed the unwillingness of the employers to fund lifelong learning. The absence of a lifelong learning culture is more evident in SMEs, for which the cost of training becomes unbearable in times of increased global competition (Hamburg & Lindecke, 2005). The following comment illustrates what the majority of the participants felt about their employers:

There is no culture of learning in the organization in Greece... the majority of my employers didn't believe in the value of education, didn't think of education as a qualification or there was not a system of support, study leaves or financial assistance, or giving me time for research. They expect you to purchase all the skills and knowledge they require each time from your own pocket (Anemone, 46, Business Trainer/Businesswoman).

When training is funded by the employers is designed to cover strictly company-related activities, rather than activities chosen by individuals and pursued outside the workplace (Schuetze, 2007). Myrto is the only one of my participants who had her

full tuition paid by her employer. She has chosen both postgraduate degrees she studied from the list of programmes and providers funded by her company, rather than her personal interests. For Livingstone the learning organization is an example of the “instrumentalist approaches to learning, whereby learning is designed and controlled by powerful groups” (1999:165). Gouthro (2002:343) claims that when training is provided it aims at creating “almost a spiritual level of commitment” from the employee for achieving productivity and innovation at her own cost. Daisy, for example, was encouraged by her employer to attend a master degree in teaching because her school participated in an EU-funded programme which required annual staff training. When I asked her if it was a win-win investment she replied:

It's not the same, through my learning the school is also promoted...they get more clients, they earned money but I gave money, they can use my learning for advertising and reputation, I didn't get any salary increase or promotion (Daisy, 32, English Teacher/Private).

In Greece, the foundation of an Independent Fund for Employment and Professional Training (LAEK) which is managed and funded exclusively by the social partners, obliges employers to deposit to LAEK annually 0,45% of their total gross salary costs which they can claim back for their employees training expenses (Yannakourou & Soumeli, 2004). However, although funds are available, employees are not encouraged and in many cases have to negotiate their entitlement to funding:

When I asked for funding I was told that it is the policy of the company not to fund employee studies. I exercised some persuasion and I got some 10% of my tuition, I spoke with our Accounts Office and talked to them about the LAEK, and my manager said yes, after being persuaded that I

wouldn't stop working as much as I did (Poppy, 35, Assistant Operations Manager/Private).

It is interesting to note that Poppy's employer considers her engagement in lifelong learning as a possible distraction to her commitment to work, rather than a benefit to the company. As such, her employer's unwillingness to fund her learning is justified. The point here reinforces Anemone's statement, above, about the lack of a learning culture among employers in Greece.

Lifelong Learning as a Labour Market Requirement

Policy rhetoric has overemphasized the role of lifelong learning for individual and national economic competitiveness (Coffield, 1999; Field, 2000a; Rizvi, 2007; Wilson, 2009). Indeed, the second definition given for lifelong learning by the majority of my participants is that learning is required by the labour market. This is understandable given that these women defined lifelong learning as primarily structured and certified education, and any learning beyond that as mainly a leisure activity. Therefore, it is not surprising that most of them defined lifelong learning as a requirement, a need, or an imperative for remaining competitive and flexible, imposed by the labour market.

To me LLL means that learning is necessary in order to work and to be in a process of learning because things change very fast, because someone who refuses to update one's knowledge stops being competitive, and it is impossible to be productive, whatever job ones does, lifelong learning goes hand in hand with work (Freesia, 42, Office Clerk/Private).

Freesia's definition for lifelong learning as a means for productivity, competitiveness and employability echoes policy claims. Most of women recited similar definitions, thus verifying the penetration of the official discourse into public views.

The fact that these women define lifelong learning as a job market requirement does not necessarily mean that they themselves yield to this call. Their motivational factors hardly square with their assertion that lifelong learning is "a labour market requirement", as the following section will show. Thus it is possible to argue that the policy discourse provides them with an acceptable justification for engaging repeatedly in learning for reasons which are deeply personal and self-oriented.

Women's Motivations for Lifelong Learning

In terms of motivation 21 out of 23 women agreed that their main motivation for engaging in lifelong learning has been a personal need for constant learning and personal development. The other two were not able to distinguish between personal and professional motives. The following comments are indicative of women's understanding of their motivation:

It is mainly a personal need. I haven't felt a threat from my job; on the contrary after 26 years working as a teacher, I feel much more secure than ever (Fuchsia, 47, Primary School Teacher/Public).

Fuchsia, after further probing questions explains that this is a need for development which exists in her probably as a result of her parents' insistence on the value of education. The question that arises is if women believe that lifelong learning is primarily about making one productive, flexible and competitive, why don't they consider labour market demands as their main motivation for engaging in it?

These seemingly contradictory findings may be explained through Foucault's notion of governmentality. Unlike other forms of power, which operate through law, governmentality works by infiltrating regulation in practices of self care, in a non-coercive manner (Darmon & Perez, 2011; Olssen, 2008; Usher & Edwards, 2007). It is the conduct of the conduct; therefore it presupposes individuals' freedom to act (Nicolli & Fejes, 2008):

It's [lifelong learning] a kind of freedom, knowledge is freedom. You know more you can make more choices. You feel safer to decide about things (Magnolia, 37, Foreign Language School Owner).

Governmentality shapes individuals' consciousness, their interests and needs from within. Lifelong learning discourses propagated by powerful agents such as the state, intergovernmental organizations, the academia and corporations, direct human conduct (Dean, 2010), so that individuals, acting in an independent, autonomous, self-interested and self-responsible manner (Bagnall, 2000) become dutiful, responsible and active learners as an act of self-care:

It [LLL] is worthwhile, because we do it for ourselves, and this is very important, because usually women do things for others and we leave ourselves last in the row, we forget ourselves, and [LLL] is amazing because it shows that somewhere in our daily routine we take care of ourselves, we enjoy ourselves, it is something for us... (Pansy, 50, Theatrologist/Private).

In taking care of themselves, individuals internalize the general imperative for participation in lifelong learning, and learning becomes an "internalized educational

aspiration” (Tuschling & Engemann, 2006:458), which people freely pursue, albeit within the confines of pre-defined possibilities (Darmon & Perez, 2011). Most of my participants defined lifelong learning as a labour market requirement to which, though, they remain impervious; their decision in becoming dutiful, responsible and active learners is guided by their inner aspirations and needs for learning and personal development. In other words, having long internalized the general imperative of lifelong learning participation as something inherently good, they are ‘enabled’ to take care of themselves and meet those specific needs that the policy rhetoric has created for them.

I would fully accept the above-mentioned argumentation, only if my participants’ other motivation had not been their need to care, to share, and to support. This finding is not entirely consistent with the individualistic, self-interested and disciplined individual assumed by the mechanisms of governmentality. Acacia describes this need as follows:

It is important not to do things only for ourselves, one must always have in her mind to whom one refers, why do you do all this learning, okay you learn, the thing is how we can return this learning to others...

(Acacia, 33, Senior Nurse, Researcher/Public).

Hyacinth (Senior Manager at a Maritime company) is feeling the same need to share what she learns with her colleagues, and help them. Magnolia (Foreign Language School Owner) explains her need to learn as “care for others, help others doing better what they do” and Dahlia (Financial Manager at a public organization) derives great joy from learning as she sets herself as an example for other younger colleagues. Azalea is heading a department of 600 people and she responds to the question of why

she has been engaging in lifelong learning by explaining the benefits in relations to others:

... I simply recognized the gaps I have had, and in my effort to fill them I did what I could... in other words, how I could do my job better, how to give back to my employees the best I could...

[AK: All this learning you have done, do you think that it has a positive effect, in doing your job better, for example?]

Yes, it has helped me to encourage others in the department to do more things, not to remain stagnant (Azalea, 48, Senior Manager/Public).

For Azalea learning for doing her job better is not about herself, for example to receive a wage increase or promotion, but about helping others develop.

In her seminal book “*In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s Development*” Carol Gilligan (1936-) traces women’s development in moral thinking and concludes that women developed in a way that morality for them has a responsibility orientation, as it focuses on connections among people; it is as an imperative to care for others. Women judge themselves “in terms of their ability to care” (Gilligan, 1993:17). Women’s tendency to care has been explained on the basis of family dynamics, socialization processes, and social structures which are premised on the expectation that caring for others is part of the female role (Wood, 1994). In the workplace, women’s tendency to care has been explored by a number of studies related to management and leadership styles among men and women. Rosener (1990:120) describes women’s style as ‘interactive leadership’, the main components of which are sharing of power and information, participation, and concern for

providing service to others. Phillips (in Oshagbemi & Gill, 2003) suggests that women tend to emphasize caring and nurturing relationships with employees as part of their management role. Krishnan (2009) refers to previous research which distinguishes the way men and women perceive power, with women viewing it in terms of dissemination of information and knowledge. Hamilton (2011) examined similar issues of gender behavior, from a non-managerial view, by interviewing workers at lower rungs of hierarchy. She describes women's practices at work as "caring/sharing" as most of the secretaries she interviewed emphasized how they cared for their colleagues with whom they felt as a family and ready to offer support to each other. Although research is not sufficiently clear about gender differences in management style, and whether these differences stem from beliefs in stereotypes or reality (Oshagbemi & Gill, 2003), findings seem to suggest that women are more democratic, participative, compassionate, helpful and generous (Duehr & Bono, 2006; Gardiner & Tiggemann, 1999; Northouse, 2010). More qualitative data is required in order to evaluate caring behaviour among female employees at all levels of the organizational hierarchy.

In addition to caring and sharing, six of my participants also felt motivated for engaging in lifelong learning by their desire to perform better at their job. Myrto explains that as follows:

I started my studies with the ambition to do my job better, in other words it has been my inner impulse to be good at what I do (Myrto, 51, Engineer/Public).

This finding is consistent with Cedefop's (2004) survey which reports a 27% of respondents being motivated by their need to do a job better. However, these results

are not analysed by gender. A concern for doing one's job better may be, among other factors, an extension of the caring attitude, as discussed above, or of increased pressure due to sex discrimination in the workplace, an issue that I will return to in the following section. In the absence of relevant research, it seems that there is a lack of conceptual understanding of the relationship between performance and caring.

A further motivation for some of the respondents, although not explicitly stated, has been the attainment of benefits associated with consumerism such as social status and prestige. It would be difficult for my respondents to blatantly accept that their lifelong learning engagement is related to consumption, especially if one takes into consideration that consumers are portrayed as shallow, greedy, victims of a consumer culture and passive (Usher, 2009). Therefore, when explicitly asked almost all of them did not recognize elements of consumerism in their personal experience of lifelong learning. Their arguments against this idea were that they make careful and informed choices about their education rather than picking up from the shelf; the material benefits of their 'purchase' are in several cases non-existent since their learning is not translated to increased salary, promotion or better employment opportunities; and that the personal cost resulting from long and excessive effort, hard work, and family sacrifices is inconsistent with any act of consumerism. However, a more careful reading of their experiences, as shown in the following sections, may provide support to some authors' claim that lifelong learning is inextricably tied to postmodern conceptions of consumerism (Edwards, 1997; Usher, 2010; Usher & Edwards, 2007; Wain, 2004). Following Baudrillard's theory of value-signs, these authors argue that lifelong learning is an act of consumerism and knowledge is a value-sign which can be purchased and consumed for its economic and cultural value in order to communicate difference or solidarity among people and

convey messages about their social position and wealth (Usher & Edwards, 2007). Hence, personal funding of lifelong learning activities becomes legitimate for those individuals who by constantly pursuing learning, they aspire to become members of the elite society –a hyperreal society or a simulacrum- that the knowledge economy promises, and enjoy the associated status and prestige, and competitive advantage. Jasmine acknowledges the fact that other people consider her different:

It [LLL] is a little bit of a luxury ... you must be financially able to do it... I understand why some other people consider us an elite...
(Jasmine, 38 Café Owner).

The associated prestige and status of degrees in Greece is testified by Fuchsia who ascribes her thirst for learning to her parents' belief that education will enable their kids to climb up the social ladder:

Because my parents are people who lived during the Occupation, they valued school and education very much, they didn't study themselves, but they placed a great value on education for their kids in order to move on... (Fuchsia, 47, Primary School Teacher/Public).

In view of the fact that Greek society is characterized by a relatively high social mobility for those who have university-level education (Liagouras et.al., 2003; Psacharopoulos & Papakonstantinou 2005; Saiti & Prokopiadou, 2008), women lifelong learners may be purchasing their social mobility through repeated episodes of learning. Being an important signifier of identity ('educated' versus 'uneducated') and social positioning, lifelong learning becomes a social communicative act which is perpetually repeated as identities are ephemeral and social rankings fluid (Usher,

2010). Seen within this framework, lifelong learning is a “social, relational and active” consumption (Featherstone, 1995:24).

Conclusion

In this Chapter, I discussed the meanings that women assign to the concept of lifelong learning and their motivations for engaging in it. Despite the variation in both meanings and motivations a number of ideas have consistently emerged in the interviews. First, lifelong learning is understood as formal learning leading to certified and recognized knowledge. Secondly, the cost of lifelong learning is high and is disproportionally undertaken by the women in the sample themselves rather than the state or the employer. Thirdly, policy rhetoric about the role of lifelong learning for professional competitiveness and advancement is acknowledged as valid by the majority of the participants, although it is not the rhetoric that has persuaded them to participate but personal considerations.

In terms of motivation, most of women embarked on it out of their personal and inner need for learning and development, as well as for satisfying their desire for caring and sharing with others. A number of participants have also mentioned their wish to perform better at work, while a less explicit motive is the impact of lifelong learning on social mobility and prestige.

These findings contradict the policy rhetoric in a number of points. First, lifelong learning is not life-wide; secondly it is not available to all, if one takes into account its high cost; and thirdly, it is not primarily undertaken for job-related benefits, but as a result of personal need. Whether this need is the outcome of an internalized imperative for participation within a pre-defined set of possibilities, what Foucault

calls ‘governmentality’, or not, this last finding gives a signal to the policymakers that personal rather than work-related benefits might motivate women more to take part in lifelong learning.

The next chapter will discuss the impact of lifelong learning on women’s life. Specifically, it will explore what impedes and what enables women in their effort to accommodate competing demands from work, life and academia.

CHAPTER SIX: THE IMPACT OF LIFELONG LEARNING ON WOMEN'S WORK AND LIFE: MYTHS AND REALITY

Introduction

In this Chapter the impact of lifelong learning on women's work and life is explored through women's recounting of the benefits, obstacles and support they have experienced in their professional and personal life as lifelong learners. The Chapter is divided in two sections with a number of sub-sections.

One of the major policy claims for the benefits of lifelong learning is that it is vital to acquiring and maintaining employment, while at the same time, contributing to the nation's overall growth (Billett, 2001; Brown et.al., 2003; Jenkins, 2006). However, statistics consistently show that women participate in lifelong learning and in particular in tertiary education, more than men but they have lower employment rates. In Greece although women have achieved higher educational qualifications compared to men, the unemployment rate of women is almost three times higher than men's (Petraki-Kottis & Ventura-Neokosmidi, 2011). Commentators have suggested structural and agential factors for explaining the discrepancy between women's education level and employment opportunities as discussed in Chapter Three. In the first section, I will explore these reasons further on the basis of my interviewees' experiences of the impact of lifelong learning on their work. Three main themes emerged within this part of our interviews: first, the impact they felt that their learning had on the way they did their jobs; secondly, the monetary benefits it yielded; and thirdly, the obstacles they experienced in the workplace in making the best out of their investment lifelong learning.

The second section will consider enablers and barriers that women lifelong learners experience in accommodating the demands of work, private life and academia. Previous research on the effects of lifelong learning on women's life, albeit limited, has drawn attention on strain resulting from role conflict, role overload and role contagion (Home, 1998). Coser (1974) has used the term "greedy institution" to describe structures such as work, family and academia which demand exclusive and undivided loyalty, resulting in excessive psychological stress. However, few studies are concentrated on women who engage in learning several times in their life as opposed to adult learners, and even fewer have attempted to explore the interplay of all three institutions in female lifelong learners' life. The current emphasis of national and European policy discourse on the power of lifelong learning to assist individuals and their countries exit the financial crisis and lead them to a prosperous future makes this research even more relevant. In other words, if we continue to participate, either from necessity or choice, what is it that we sacrifice? Who supports us? What are the obstacles that we encounter? And how much shielded are we against the threat of the crisis? I have consistently tried to indicate the gendered nature of lifelong learning discourse and practice throughout this thesis thus far. But it is in this section that findings make gender inequalities most visible.

The chapter concludes with a summary of the key findings of the impact of lifelong learning on women's work and life.

Lifelong Learning And Employment: Is There A Link?

Job Performance

Almost all women agreed that their successive episodes of learning have had a positive impact on the way they conduct their job. However, some of them found difficulty in verbalizing this impact. For example:

Yes, it [LLL affected my work] positively, I have no doubts about this... it helped me see some things differently.

[AK: Can you tell me an example of what you just said, different in what ways?]

[silence]... I can't think of something concrete right now, but I feel that I have changed... (Rose, 38, Educational Manager/Private).

Those women who were more eloquent about the benefits of their learning on work mentioned a number of skills that they acquired through their studies, such as communication, presentation, research, collaboration, thinking and solving problems, creativity and project management skills, and personal qualities, such as self-confidence in dealing with colleagues. Anemone in talking about the usefulness of her first two degrees in her job, she says:

It [LLL] benefited me, not as a result of the immediate object of studies, but in my way of thinking and understanding things, as a personality...

[AK: So you think that you didn't use your first degrees directly in your job...]

No, not directly, but they helped me to develop other skills which are equally helpful (Anemone, 46, Business Trainer/Businesswoman).

Although Anemone finds difficult to name these skills she feels rather confident that they exist and they have been developed as a result of her learning.

A central pillar of the EU economic policy is the development of the skill level of the EU population, which is seen to have economic benefits for individuals, employers and the economy as a whole, as it is declared in numerous EU statements (Cedefop, 2008). Although, there is little agreement of what skills are and how they are measured (Felstead, et.al., 2004), it seems that more recently in the EU skills are equated with qualifications (CEC, 2010b). Therefore, in the EU terminology, a highly-skilled employee means a highly-educated person (Payne, 2000). However, a focus on the skills/education possessed by individuals overshadows the level of skills/education demanded by the job (Felstead et.al, 2004). ILO (1998) adopted the term ‘skills-related underemployment’ to describe the situation of workers whose skill set exceeds that required by their job. It is interesting to note that only one of my interviewees mentioned the acquisition of new knowledge as a corollary of her engagement with lifelong learning. Although, the majority of them defined lifelong learning in terms of ‘knowledge acquisition’, when it comes to work, this knowledge seems to have no impact on their job.

One explanation might be the fact that these women do jobs that the advanced knowledge they possess is not required or is underused. This is emphatically supported by both Iris and Primrose:

Nowadays, because the hunting for clients for engineers has become very difficult, I have done several applications for public sector organizations, and I didn't get the jobs because there were other architects with a PhD.

[AK: Do you need to have a PhD to work, for example, in the Ministry of Culture?]

(laughs...) No way! I mean for the kind of things the Ministry does, you don't need anything beyond a first degree... It's an artificial demand... (Iris¹⁷, 33, Architect/Freelance)

In Greece there is all this publicity about degrees, we have all become over-educated. It's not strange for someone to have a PhD nowadays... In Greece [these degrees] have no meaning

[AK: Do you believe that you could have this job even if you hadn't done all this learning after your first degree?]

Absolutely yes, I'm laughing with all this... In Greece you have a rich CV and you can't find a job... you learn but then you have to hide what you learnt, not to show it on your CV in order to find a job (Primrose, 28, Social Worker/NGO).

This finding confirms the literature on the phenomenon of qualification inflation, and in particular, Livingstone's (1999) theory about the performance gap, that is to say,

¹⁷ Iris worked at the Ministry of Culture as an architect, in the past, on two sequential short-term contracts. When these contracts expired she re-applied for a long-term contract and this is why she now contemplates to continue for a PhD so that she increases her chances.

workers having more education of what their jobs really need. The skills/education supply being greater than skills/education demand has been verified in all EU countries and it is more evident in women (Eurydice, 2009). In Greece this mismatch is most notable in the case of tertiary-education graduates, who have the highest unemployment rates of all young graduates in the EU and OECD (Liagouras et.al., 2003). This reality casts serious doubt on the appropriateness of the transfer of the EU's human capital policy to Greece, while the associated forecasts of the EU for an increase of jobs for highly-qualified people by 16 million by 2020 seem irrelevant in this country (CEC, 2010a).

The reasons suggested to explain this pronounced mismatch in Greece include the belief that tertiary education secures employment in the public sector and the incapacity of the country's economy to absorb highly-skilled employees (Liagouras et.al., 2003; Livanos, 2010; Patrinos, 1997; Psacharopoulos & Papakonstantinou 2005; Saiti & Prokopiadou, 2008).

The belief that higher education leads to secure employment is not just imaginary. The public sector has been the single most important employer of the Greek-universities graduates, and civil service jobs are for life, highly protected by unions, dismissal is almost impossible, starting wage is higher, pension schemes are better than the private sector, and salary perks are many and not linked to productivity (Livanos, 2010; Psacharopoulos & Papakonstantinou, 2005; Tsakloglou & Cholezas, 2005). However, the current bailout conditions have resulted in major horizontal cuts in public posts, salaries and pensions (Featherstone, 2011).

Furthermore, the strength of the economy and the technological dynamism of the private sector are not such that can absorb the increased numbers of highly-skilled

employees (Livanos & Pouliakas, 2009a; Patrinos, 1997). Liagouras et.al., (2003) support this view with reference to the underdeveloped R&D activity in private-sector firms. Therefore, although there is a marked supply of PhD holders, many of whom from renowned universities in the US and Europe, the so-called 'knowledge economy' has not developed at the same pace. Amaryllis completed a PhD in Biotechnology at one of the world-class Universities. Being a single mother, she does not have the luxury to wait until she finds a position at a public research institution; therefore, she currently works as a salesperson in a company that sells consumables, while she is about to complete a lower-level degree in business administration. Being obliged to work in a different sector and at position lower to her formal qualifications, Amaryllis feels disappointed with her employment experience in Greece:

You know what saddens me very much? As long as I was in England I felt really strong, I was accepted to do a PhD without even doing a master, I got a job, I felt really strong [said emphatically], that they recognized my qualifications, when I came to Greece, I don't know how this has happened, but I feel a tremendous insecurity, I feel that the others are better than me (Amaryllis, 34, Salesperson/Biotechnologist/Private).

Amaryllis understands the mismatch between her qualifications and her job as a personal deficiency. Other colleagues with fewer qualifications are better equipped for the job; consequently, she has entered into a new round of learning, in order to respond to a competition for a job which is lower than her standards. Her situation is what critical theorists claim about employers' requirement to have 'plug-in-and-play' workers, (Brown et.al., 2003:114), who are prepared to bear the responsibility for a

constant training in order to be “flexible pegs for a diversity of holes with ever-changing shapes” (Quicke, 1997:140).

According to Liagouras et.al., (2003) “The oversupply of young graduates encourages employers to be very demanding in terms of qualifications, and especially of work experience”, and this is how Poppy understands her employment reality:

The jobs I have had so far did not require an additional degree... In Greece what counts is experience, no matter how many degrees you have, they tell you I want three years experience in a specific area... There is a tremendous supply of degrees (Poppy, 35, Assistant Operations Manager/Private).

Poppy understands that employers’ insistence on her having work experience is related to the over-supply of qualifications.

Economic Benefits to Lifelong Learning

The minimal and often non-existent impact of their learning on salaries was mentioned by all my participants. These results support that the HCT whose main assumption is that education yields a return in the form of enhanced future earnings (Becker, 1964) is not applicable in the case of lifelong learning in this context. In Greece, there is not a study on rate of returns for lifelong learners. But it is well documented that the increasing supply of university graduates over the years has resulted in a decline in the wage return for both sexes, although there are variations depending on the type of degree, discipline and sector (Livanos & Pouliakas, 2009b). In Greece wage rates, allowances and working conditions are dictated by minimum effective floors set by the National General Collective Agreements (EGSSEs) for all

salary workers in the country, signed by representatives of the employers and workers, and ratified by law (<http://www.gsee.gr>, on 5/1/2012). In the public sector salary grades are based on years of service, education and family status (Koskina, 2009). In terms of education, employees receive an allowance as a percentage on their base gross salary, provided that the degree(s) is relevant to the job position, is recognized by the national authorities and is the first of the same level. For example, Ivy recently signed a permanent full-time employment agreement with a peripheral hospital as a registered nurse. She has completed two Master-level degrees one in Critical Care and one in Transcultural Nursing. She could have a salary premium for one of them. However, her current job position is not in the intensive care unit, nor is there a requirement for a degree in order to serve foreign patients. Therefore, she has not benefited financially from her postgraduate studies, so far. However, in view of the fact that degrees receive credits in promotion reviews, there might be a chance these degrees to be calculated if a relevant senior post opens when she is senior enough to apply:

There is no progression or salary benefit... in the public sector the additional degrees or seminars you have done play no role, perhaps they will take them into consideration when you will be reviewed for becoming a manager, but until you reach that point, that takes years, if you ever reach it, you don't have any recognition (Ivy, 31, Registered Nurse-Public).

Interestingly, for Ivy the non-recognition of her degrees means that she is not recognised as an employee either. It seems that the lack of pecuniary benefits attached to lifelong learning has wider consequences on her self-esteem.

Even if an employee reaches the appropriate seniority the actual managerial positions are less than the suitably qualified candidates, mainly due to flat hierarchical structures in the public sector. For example, Koskina's (2009) study of a major public company revealed that there were 25 candidates for seven middle management positions.

In the private sector women believe that their negotiating power on salary matters was exhausted at the time of hiring, and on the basis of their hitherto qualifications. Any subsequent training and/or education have not resulted in an increase of their salary. However, their salary is above the national minimum wage; hence their employer can claim that financial benefits accruing from degrees are already incorporated in the salary and/or the bonuses. It is interesting to know that even businesswomen and freelancers do not believe that their degrees will bring them any financial benefits. For example, Gardenia does not see any need to use her degrees in recruiting students:

I don't mention my PhD often...Yes... I don't feel the need to say that...

[AK: Don't you believe that you would achieve higher enrollment if you mention all this educational history you have had?]

No, it doesn't count; I haven't used this ever (Gardenia, 49, Foreign Language School Owner).

[AK: Do you use all these additional degrees you have when you meet your clients?]

There is no reason.... I have added on my card that I have two Masters, but it doesn't play any role in our job... I mean the projects I undertake don't require all this knowledge. If I am to continue working as an architect, there is no need for any further studies beyond my first degree, obviously (*the last word emphatically said*) (Iris, 33, Architect/Freelance)

Apart from the phenomenon of overeducation, the discrepancy between educational qualifications and wage earnings is attributed to the disciplines women choose to study. Research has shown that men and women acquire degrees in different fields, with men more often choosing science and women languages and humanities (Bratti et.al., 2008; Davidson & Burke, 2011; Finnie & Frenette 2003). Using micro-data from the Greek LFS, Livanos & Pouliakas (2009b) found that women are relatively over-represented in subjects such as Education, Humanities and medical-related sciences (e.g. speech therapy, physiotherapy, nursing etc.) which generate the lowest wage returns. Jasmine seems to be aware of the consequences of her choice of less financially-rewarding disciplines and she links this choice to women's motivation:

[Women] have a romantic view about education... they do it for their own personal development, for example, I studied Greek civilization, I didn't do, for example, science or business which lead to a career... (Jasmine, 38, Café Owner).

Although, estimating the rate of return to education according to disciplines involves a number of parameters, such as age, degree level, degree classification, prestige of the educational institution, and others, not all of which are taken into consideration in any one study, the researchers seem to agree that one reason for gender differences in

the rate of returns is that women tend to select academic streams which offer lower earnings.

Asplund (2006:10) based on the EDWIN¹⁸ project results, concludes that “much of this over-education turns out to be of a temporary rather than stationary nature”. This claim is consistent with a variant of the HCT known as Career Mobility Theory (CMT), (Budría & Moro-Egido, 2009). CMT suggests that it will be rational for individuals to spend a portion of their working career in occupations for which they are overeducated, because the experience and on-the-job training acquired will permit them to subsequently be promoted to a higher level either within the same firm or at a different one (Sicherman & Galor, 1990). Those workers who are not promoted are more likely to quit and explore other opportunities in the labour market (Sicherman & Galor, 1990).

Indeed, my participants who are in the public sector anticipate a future promotion by reference to their length of service, while, women in the private sector hope for better employment opportunities or even a different career path. For example, Fuchsia is currently a teacher at a public primary school, but she expects that her Master degree in Clinical Psychology will open up for her an opportunity in counseling. Similarly, Jasmine, used to work for an NGO, but her degree in Human Rights and Education led her to the decision to start her own alternative café; Anemone feels that her PhD will help her training company in participating in EU-funded projects; and Tulip believes that her specialization in Special Education might be the springboard for a new career in the future. In view of the financial crisis, the great majority of my

¹⁸ This is a 30-month project on *Education and Wage Inequality in Europe – EDWIN2002-00108*) covering the period between 2002 to 2005 aiming at an in-depth analysis by using cross-country comparative data of the interplay between educational expansion and wage inequality in Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Norway, Sweden and the UK (Asplund, 2006).

participants believe that more and better future opportunities will be available for them abroad, especially in Europe. Therefore, despite the fact that the available evidence about the validity of CMT is inconclusive (Budría & Moro-Egido, 2009), the likelihood of occupational upgrading is one possible future employment benefit of lifelong learning.

However, in several cases their progress and advancement have fallen short of their expectations due to first, lack of meritocracy, especially in the public sector and secondly, patriarchal structures in the workplace.

Obstacles to Women Lifelong Learners' Career Progression

All of the women employed in the public sector spoke about or alluded to impediments posed on their career advancement by party patronage. The following two comments illustrate this point:

... on the basis of law you get credits for the degrees you have studied in order to be promoted, although sometimes this can be bypassed by other interventions [*in low voice*] political... (Azalea, 48 Senior Manager/Public).

...on a personal level there is recognition, yes, on an institutional level, in Greece, I should say that, I mean, professionally things could be better if on an institutional level these degrees had been recognized, and I don't mean money-wise, but with a better position, but in Greece it's not like this, I mean, it's not necessarily the one who has the most education who is selected for a higher position, other things count, and

other factors and other elements, you know what I mean [*she glances over the tape-recorder*]... (Myrto, 51, Engineer/Public).

Greece is a typical example of patronage democracy (Bratsis, 2010; Pappas, 2009) whereby, politicians form clientilistic relationships with voters and offer state employment to their 'political friends' in return for allegiance to the party or the individual politician-patron (Katsimi & Moutos, 2010; Koskina, 2009). Therefore, notwithstanding educational qualifications, if one lacks the proper connections access to higher levels of the hierarchy is most often closed (Patrinos, 1997). Civil servants are often obliged to declare their party loyalty in order not to be left behind in their careers (Katsimi & Moutos, 2010; Kotsilieri & Marshall, 2004). For example, one of my respondents explained off-the-record that due to the change of the government she was appointed to a 'freezer' managerial position, one that had no specific object, no subordinates to manage, and no office to work. She spent six tormenting months wandering from office to office until a new governmental committee, and in the absence of any other suitable candidate, re-appointed her to an active post. It is worth noting that she was co-candidate with a male colleague but she was the one for the 'freezer' post while her male colleague was given a key post.

Although, political patronage affects both male and female employees, patriarchy has negative effects only on women's career prospects. The interviews in this study pointed to certain patriarchal phenomena in the workplace such as glass ceiling, old boy networks and tokenism, which impede women's advancement on the higher echelons of the organizational ladder (Barreto et.al., 2009; Eagly & Carli, 2007; King et.al, 2010; McDonald, 2011; Oakley, 2000). The exception was one of the

interviewees who described a case of positive discrimination in the profession of teaching foreign languages, where women are preferred to men:

M: I think it's easier for women to find a job in this profession [teaching English] than men. They chose me because I'm a woman, this boss of mine, I've noticed other men coming to give applications for the job but when the school year started I saw no man. (Magnolia, 37, Foreign Language School Owner).

The metaphor 'glass ceiling' is used to describe how women, equally qualified as men, fail to climb on the organizational ladder due to artificial barriers based on organizational and conceptual bias (Barreto et.al., 2007; Kaparou & Bush, 2007; Kotsilieri & Marshall, 2004; Oakley, 2000; Petraki-Kottis & Ventura-Neokosmidi, 2011; Wirth, 2001). Petraki-Kottis' (1996) survey of the largest companies in Greece revealed that women's participation in the higher levels of hierarchy was minimal and symbolic especially in multinationals companies, mainly due to outdated stereotypes. Primrose's experience is apposite:

Yes, but all the managers are always men. I firmly believe that my gender has been a hindrance ... and I'm saying that I have missed opportunities because of that... I'm the sweet little girl, who is clever, but it's just a girl, suitable to be the secretary, your role is to get married rather than to have a career, and this is evident, and it's sad because I work at a place which is supposed to support the human rights, an NGO where most of them are leftist... (Primrose, 28, Social Worker/NGO).

Despite affirmative action and advanced and progressive legislation for gender equality, the glass ceiling remains unbreakable in Greece as elsewhere in Europe (Petraki-Kottis & Ventura-Neokosmidi, 2011). One further peculiarity which proves Greece's insistence on maintaining vertical job segregation, especially in state employment, is the regulation that allows women's voluntary retirement after 15 years of service, thus encouraging women not to go higher the hierarchy (Koskina, 2009).

The 'old-boy networks' in the workplace is defined as a powerful informal male social system that excludes women (and other less powerful groups) from valuable resources for career advancement such as information, influence, status, friendships and alliances (Davidson & Burke, 2011; Ibarra, 1993; Kanter, 1977; Oakley, 2000). Limited access to these networks is associated with limited mobility and glass-ceiling effects (Ibarra, 1993). Breaking into male networks is hard especially when these are centered on masculine activities (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Those of my participants who worked in male-dominated jobs have experiences of old-boy networks in their work. Amaryllis, for example, raises this issue as follows:

The discussions... the serious discussions take place only among men and their cliques. Their clique doesn't include women. Being a woman they don't ask your opinion... unless you are nearby and you happen to listen... no, no men do not have to prove with qualifications that they know some things, they just hang out with other older men, the cliques I said before, in order to learn (Amaryllis 34, Biotechnologist/Salesperson/Private).

The message here is that the male network works as a source of free-of-charge, relevant and experiential learning, which Amaryllis cannot access. As she has fewer opportunities for informal learning within the company, she is obliged to purchase formal learning (the MBA in her case) at her own cost.

Kanter's (1977) seminal research of the experiences of female senior managers of a *Fortune 500* company gave rise to the theory of tokenism which suggests that minority groups in particular contexts face negative experiences, such as increased visibility and social isolation. She found that women in top management positions, being few, tend to be criticized on the basis of stereotypical attributes, therefore, have to work twice as hard as dominant group members in order to prove their competence. Gardiner & Tiggemann (1999), in a study of 60 men and 60 women, found that women in male-dominated industries reported greater stress than men in feeling that they had to perform better at their job. For example, Hyacinth works in a major shipping company of 300 employees, and she is the only female manager among nine male ones:

We have a disadvantage, we're women, and where I work we are a minority, and we have to keep a defensive stance, one look one word and you don't know how it will be interpreted. And to prove all the time that you're good at what you're doing. You have to explain to others that you're just one more employee, one of them... (Hyacinth, 49, Senior Manager/Private).

Hyacinth describes her constantly being on-guard as a result of increased visibility in her male-dominated work environment.

Subsequent research has shown that numerical rarity per se is not sufficient to trigger negative experiences for token groups, but gender plays a role too (King et.al., 2010; Turco, 2010). Yonder (1991) has argued that token women are more likely to be discriminated than token men, hence, as Beaton (1995:13) notes “sexism against women is inherent to the tokenism process”. Yonder’s (1991:181) claim that “the visibility afforded token men may work to their advantage, enhancing their opportunities for promotion” is confirmed by the women I interviewed at a public hospital:

.... Also men in our field move on the hierarchy very quickly because they are very few and the women around them support them very much. Think of an electorate body consisting of women... there is no way that these women will not vote for a male candidate. Men in our field get promoted very quickly, but only for that reason, not because they are trusted more. (Acacia, 33, Senior Nurse, Researcher/Public).

The majority of my respondents referred to their unequal opportunities for promotion, which leads them to more lifelong learning. The following comment by one respondent is apposite:

I can see that women feel somehow little... when a woman sees that she has the same qualifications as a man but nevertheless gets less money and is never promoted, she tries harder, and gets more degrees, and there is schizophrenia in this process... (Orchid, age 36, Psychotherapist/Private).

In these circumstances, lifelong learning becomes a means for fighting against gender injustice:

I feel like I have to prove that I can do more than just give birth, and perhaps, inside me, this need that I have to learn is to tell people, you know I can manage, look at me... (Primrose, 28, Social Worker/NGO).

It can be therefore argued that the link between lifelong learning and employment is rather loose. Many women perceive the impact of lifelong learning on employment in terms of doing their job better as a result of more skills and others have used their degrees for entering and/or securing a better job in the public sector. However, the knowledge they have acquired seems to be of less importance to the employer and the majority of them have not benefited financially from their investment in lifelong learning. Lack of meritocracy and patriarchal practices in the workplace have not helped them to advance their careers, either.

In the following section I will discuss women's sources of support and conflict as they juggle their multiple roles.

Juggling Work, Life and Studies: An impossible mission for women lifelong learners?

Support and Obstacles in the Workplace

Although the effects of the changing labour market trends on the life of lifelong learners have been sparsely examined (Gouthro, 2005; Fenwick, 2004), research on the life of adult learners has shown that combining work with studies leads to increased role conflict (Arthur & Tait 2004; Butler, 2007; Giancola et.al. 2009; Raddon, 2007). Organizational changes such as delayering and downsizing, in order

to drive costs down, have induced firms to assign more work to fewer employees who are expected to work long hours too (Gambles et.al., 2006; McInnes, 2006). Work intensification and long hours are intensified in times of crisis as job insecurity increases (Felstead et.al., 1998; Perrons et.al., 2005). Indeed, most of my respondents expressed their agony as their work realities have changed drastically, as the following comment indicates:

There are many people in my work who have been laid off and I have undertaken more tasks without the relevant salary increase. I try to do many things at the same time, and I feel inadequate because you cannot do all what you are asked to do equally well (Amaryllis, 34, Biotechnologist/Salesperson/Private).

What is more disheartening is that these women do not feel that are better shielded than others who have invested less in learning:

There is a lot of insecurity... the workload has increased massively, there are no salary cuts where I work, but the responsibilities have increased, I work 15 hours more. And I was fired from the other job I had at ABC where I earned approximately 5,000 Euro a year, and that was basically my mortgage... and of course it was us the degree holders and the experienced ones who were fired first...(Pansy, 50, Theatrologist/Private).

Stress from job intensification is not necessarily related to fear of job loss as Ivy's comment shows below:

My salary has been cut and will be cut even more, and we don't have the required nursing staff so we have to work all the time, yes it has brought me down and I feel that I have nothing.

[AK: Mine has been cut three times already. Do you feel vulnerable, do you feel that your studies cannot protect you?]

No, no I don't know really how things are in the private sector, but in the public, no, no. But we the nurses are not threatened to be placed on reserve (Ivy, 31, Registered Nurse/Public).

The distress felt by all three women stems from feelings of personal inadequacy as personal agency for changing the situation seems to be cancelled.

Work intensification and job insecurity lead to work intrusion into people's lives, thus affecting health, psychological well-being and family life (Felstead et.al., 2002; Hyman et.al., 2003). The European Working Conditions Observatory has drawn attention to stress-related health symptoms resulting from intensification of work and long hours. In Greece, however, work-related stress is not directly included in the list of occupational illnesses recognised by Greek legislation (Lampousaki, 2010), although the 2008-2009 National General Collective Agreement provided for the first time for the immediate implementation of the EU framework agreement on work-related stress (CEC, 2011).

The greedy nature of the workplace for most of my respondents is also evident from the little support they reported having received from their employers both in terms of working hours and study leaves. None of the respondents was aware of a work-life balance policy (WLB) implemented in their workplace, other than leaves and

working-time reduction for maternity. Despite the recent flexibility-oriented legislation, Greek employers, especially in SMEs which form 99 percent of the Greek economy, tend not to implement alternative forms and practices for organising and regulating working time; instead of hiring new workers and pay a higher cost for wages they choose overtime work (Kretsos, 2007). In practice, the managers/owners can defy labour regulations for work schedules, limits on overtime hours or dismissals, and employees are required to work under strenuous and unregulated conditions (Burtless, 2001; Papadimitriou, 2003). Mihail's (2004) study of 16 Greek SMEs found that in order for SMEs to respond to market shocks, they rely on internal flexible arrangements (overtime, functional and pay flexibility, work intensification) due to the informal close interpersonal relationships between the owner/businessman and the employees.

In Greece, the institutionalization of study leave since 1984, although the country has not signed the ILO Convention 140, is a step towards employers' contribution to employees' learning endeavours. However, the majority of the respondents did not manage to claim study leaves, even in the organizations that such a provision is institutionalized, because leaves are approved by the Board of Directors and are based on the availability of staff. For example, Azalea (Senior Manager/Public) in the 1990s managed to receive an annual leave for her master degree, because at that time there were few requests and the schedule of shifts was manageable, but Ivy, a young nurse, has received only one day study-leave during her studies, and this was after much negotiation:

Usually they reject requests for study-leaves, they haven't given to other colleagues either, I was lucky that I got that one day... They don't care,

I don't know about the private sector, but in the public sector there is a negative attitude towards those employees who want to learn (Ivy, 31, Registered Nurse/Public).

Ivy understands that the rejection of her study-leave applications is a result of her employer's little appreciation of the value of employee learning. Hence, although for her the learning she engages in is strongly linked to her profession for which she becomes ever better, for the employer it is nothing more than a distraction of the scheduling of the nursing staff.

Similarly, in the private sector most women did not even dare to ask for a leave as the following comment illustrates:

I have never asked for a leave. In Greece they don't care, especially the older you are the more they think that you study out of a whim, in order to leave work on time, not to stay longer as you ought to... there is not the kind of support that I have seen abroad (Camellia, 32, Manicurist/Freelance).

The unwillingness of employers to support the lifelong learning of their employees makes women reluctant to inform them about their studies:

I haven't informed my employer about my studies, he hasn't paid them, and he won't pay me for them, therefore, I think that it is something I'm doing independently of my work (Freesia, 42, Office Clerk/Private).

Several women hide their engagement in studies from their employer because they fear rivalry, discrimination or even hostility, as the following comment demonstrates:

The employer that I used to work for 11 years didn't know, because I didn't want them to tell me that I spent time from my work for studying, I was worried that my employer would tell me that I am tired because of my studies (Hyacinth, 49, Senior Manager/Private).

Interestingly, self-employed women were equally inflexible to themselves, thus confirming the claim that women prioritize work over studies (Edwards, 1993):

[AK: you as a boss do you allow time to you as a student to study?]

No, I sacrifice a little bit of my family life, a lot [of family life]... I'm responsible as a person, so I'm responsible to the students and the teachers who work for me there, so I don't make great sacrifices in my job, because other people benefit from that and I don't want them to benefit less (Magnolia, 37, Foreign Language School Owner).

Three women reported a positive attitude from their employers, two of whom were NGOs and the other a public sector firm. The support consisted of allowing them to leave half an hour earlier the days they had classes, or take a leave for studying which, however, was subtracted from the annual leave, or reschedule meetings to accommodate their class-schedule.

Childless and single women lifelong learners have been neglected by much of the contemporary research despite the changing demographics of marriage and family (Hakim, 2003), while role conflict has been almost exclusively measured and discussed in relation to work, family and childcare (Wuamsley et.al., 2010). Despite the increase in the number of people living alone and/or not having children across the Westernized world (Gangong & Sharp, 2011), persisting privileging of marriage and

family has contributed to the marginalization of the experiences of these groups of women (Baumbusch, 2004; Casper et.al., 2007; Hamilton et.al, 2006). Excluding people who do not live within a family with children from WLB surveys is both discriminatory and misleading (Casper et.al., 2007; Hamilton et.al., 2006; TUC, 2008). The following comment is indicative of how childless women feel about others' expectations in relation to work:

Women's life is a constant running around. If you have kids you must be perfect at home and at work, if you don't have kids you must constantly prove that you do more, since you don't have kids you must run around more... (Pansy, 50, Theatrologist/Private).

For Pansy single women must be sentenced to a constant busyness in order to justify to society their 'deficient' marital and family status. Being a signifier of a higher social status (Gershuny, 2005), busyness can counterbalance the social pressure for unmarried and/or childless women.

Support and Obstacles in Private Life

Much of the literature on the impact of lifelong learning on private life is concentrated on role conflict resulting from demands from home particularly, due to unsupportive husbands or unequal share of household. Research has shown the resentful, jealous even hostile attitudes that adult female learners experienced from their male partners (Gouthro, 2005; Stalker, 2001; Vaccaro & Lovell, 2010; Zosky et.al., 2004). Freesia feels disappointed at her husband's lack of support for her studies:

... my husband was angry, and perhaps competitive I went through a crisis because of my studies, we started together the Open University

but he dropped out... he told me “you should be careful with all this reading you’ll go mad”, and this is a nasty comment, it makes me sad (Freesia¹⁹, 42, Married, 2 children).

In Greece, as the welfare state is still underdeveloped, women tend to do most of the household despite their increased participation in education and employment (Alipranti-Maratou & Nikolaou, 2008; Mencarini & Sironi 2010; Vryonides & Vitsilakis, 2008). Commentators have explained that men are unwilling to participate in household and childcare because such an engagement threatens their masculine identity of which paid work is a central component (Collinson & Hearn, 1996; Edwards, 1993; McCrate, 1988). Unequal share of household creates tension in the couple, and role conflict for the female adult learner. However, these results are not confirmed by my respondents. With the exception of Freesia and one more all the other married women I interviewed spoke positively and enthusiastically about the support they have had during their studies by their partners and children. This is even more interesting if one considers that only one woman was married to a lifelong learner, whilst 11 out of 15 women had higher educational qualification(s) than their husbands. The following quote is an example:

My husband helps me a lot, he undertakes some household tasks that I used to do before, I don’t mind if I don’t cook or if he goes to the supermarket, in any case, we always have done things together, he has a different mentality (Camellia, 32, Married).

Camellia feels well about her husband’s involvement in household, possibly, because she has not guilt for his doing something that traditionally she owed to do.

¹⁹ In this section I identify women with their pseudonym and family status.

For most women though, support was explained not so much in terms of a fairer division of household tasks, but the husbands' tacit approval and acceptance, for which women felt particularly grateful:

Support means to me my family's tolerance. Because nobody would ask me anything when I had to study, neither to eat nor to drink... I think that tolerance is a huge thing to have. It is support. My kids in particular, during the examinations... (Dahlia, 49, Married, 3 children).

This ostensibly different result may be linked to the dominant gender ideology in Greece which is shaped by culture, individual resources, power and options. Gender ideology is defined as the beliefs and attitudes a person holds about gender, based on which men and women form perceptions about unfairness and dissatisfaction about household sharing (Davis & Greenstein, 2009; Nordenmark, 2004; Nordenmark & Nyman, 2003). Hochschild (in Davis & Greenstein, 2009) classifies gender ideologies in traditional, egalitarian and transitional. Prior research has shown that gender ideology varies according to national contexts and is linked to the prevailing views on gender equity in any one country (Greenstein, 2009; Nordenmark 2004). Hence, women holding traditional gender ideologies, in countries with low gender equity, tend to consider uneven distribution of household neither unfair nor unjust (Greenstein, 2009). In Italy, for example, Carrierio (2011) found that the majority of Italian wives and their husbands perceived the division of household tasks as fair although about two thirds of them were performed by the wives. Although there are not similar studies about Greek wives it is not arbitrary to hypothesize that in general the Greek wives hold similar views with the Italians. Despite the increased

participation of Greek women in the workforce traditional gender roles are resistant to change (Lyberaki, 2011). Hence, it is evident that for some of my respondents their husband's support was in line with their expectations, and their satisfaction was not related to what or how much household is shared as the quote below suggests:

[AK: Can you give me an example of this support, does he help you with the household, for example?]

I don't expect my husband to mop the floors or to wash the windows... Obviously, I don't want to see him with an apron around his waist, it's so non-sexy, obviously, but for example, in the weekends that I had to study my husband would take my daughter to his mother... (Anemone, 46, Married, 2 children).

Despite the support provided by family members, half of the married women felt guilty about the time they 'stole' from their family in order to study and attend classes.

As a woman I have more problems, my role at home is central, even if we don't do so much household nowadays, we feel obliged to do many things, and this is when I feel guilty, about not being able to manage here and there. I would have drowned in guilt if I didn't do therapy, as my therapist told me, I have to set my priorities and if I'm not good at something there is no need to feel devastated... (Fuchsia, 47, Married, 1 child).

Similarly, Amaryllis felt guilty because she sacrificed common time with her daughter at the crucial age between 2 and 3 years old; Anemone for having to say 'no' too

often to her kids and husband; Lily for not being able to spend time with her children when they needed her; Orchid for leaving her husband alone in the weekends as she had to be at college; and Azalea for leaving her kids at her husband's and parents' care because she had to literally live in the hospital where she works, for days in order to study for her PhD.

Feelings of guilt were further fueled by fear not to cause irreparable damage to their marriage and some women felt obliged to 'pay back' their husband's tolerance through their conscious effort to normalize relations, as the following quote demonstrates:

We have lost what we used to have as a couple, we lost our contact
with friends...

[AK: Will you be able to get this back after you finish?]

I have thought about it, and I will try to regain our contact, what matters to me is to win back the quality in our relationship which has been affected a lot, I wish that my effort will go well... (Fuchsia, 47, Married, 1 child).

Guilt has been found to be a pervasive feeling of working parents (Burke, 2006; Daly, 2001; Shaw & Burns, 1993), resulting from the discrepancy of what is the ideal level of home participation and what is possible given the competent time demands they face (Hochwarter, et.al., 2007). However, there is little literature on guilt stemming from the lifelong learning engagement of parents (Zosky's et.al., 2004), and even less, if any, of childless couples. Examining guilt feelings of lifelong learners is important because, unlike adult learners, tensions in their familial relationships may

be repeating as their learning episodes are many, and seeking approval by family members may be a recurring process, as the following quote indicates:

...so I ask him [husband] every time to decide, if he couldn't deal with this, I wouldn't have done, I mean I ask his opinion, I wouldn't study if he didn't agree. I waited for his answer before we started. And I say we, because I think that we did them [degrees] together. (Rose, 38, Married).

Those married women in the sample who did not mention guilt, explained the lack of such feelings as a result of their heroic efforts to accommodate their family, work and study obligations into their family schedules at the expense of their own leisure time:

[AK: Do you feel guilt for the time you take out of your family?]

No, I would feel guilt if we didn't manage to find the way to have a balance, there is goodwill and we find the time... there are times that I haven't slept at all in order not to deny my husband the opportunity to go out together, this has happened a lot of times, it is my choice, I have chosen this, so it's my responsibility (Tulip, 34, Married).

I work 10 hours a day, I study in the weekends only, whenever I have time, after midnight, and I accomplish all my responsibilities. My daily life is crazy. But I find time to see my daughters, to cook, iron, clean, study and see my friends too..it's scary what I do every day (Hyacinth, 49, Divorced, 2 children).

The subtext to both Tulip and Hyacinth's words is that they sacrifice their own personal time, the time for "care for self" in order to satisfy spousal and childcare duties (Reay 2003). Tulip, specifically, views this sacrifice as a responsibility towards her husband, an unavoidable side-effect or even a self-punishment for her engagement in studies.

As mentioned above, despite the changing demographics, the idealization of marriage and child rearing remains pervasive, and as a result singles and/or childless couples suffer from pressure from parents, relatives and friends, and from a negative viewpoint from a couple-oriented society (DePaulo & Morris, 2005; Kotsilieri & Marshall, 2004). Social stigmatization, personal deficit, and isolation as well as personal satisfaction, achievement, independence and pride are recurring themes in studies about single women (Hamilton et.al., 2006; Macvarish, 2006; Reynolds & Wetherell, 2003). However, none of the studies researched has dealt with lifelong learners and the constant requirement for these women to explain themselves, justify their choices, or even apologise for their learning pursuits because "The single women in contrast, is expected to have an explanation for her 'condition', preferably a story of 'circumstances' and 'missed opportunities' or one that blames herself for being 'unable to hold on to her man'" (Reynolds & Wetherell, 2003:2). All of my respondents who belong to this group considered the criticism they receive from family and friends about their lifelong learning engagement as a lack of support and a source of stress, as the following quotes illustrate:

Look, women are expected to reproduce, there are some people who think that whatever we do apart from human reproduction is just a

joke. After your twenties, everybody looks at you and waits for an answer, yes, there is always a question...

[AK: Yes, it happens to me too. I always get this question about kids. I still haven't found the way to answer it without being apologetic or other times aggressive. Does this bother you too?]

Of course it bothers me, I would be lying if I said no. I don't like the suspiciousness. It bothers me that someone asks you so easily such a personal question, and one may also comment on your answer... you have to justify yourself all the time, because 'I don't have kids' means to others 'poor thing', and this is strange because we're living in an era that if you want a child you can have it (Pansy, 50, Single).

Orchid feels similar pressure from her friends:

Yes, I have a lot of girlfriends who tell me what you need all these studies, there is no reason to be still in a classroom. Because for many it is right to study until your 28, but then you must have a family. This is very stereotypical (Orchid, 36, Married).

For unmarried women the pressure is mainly from their immediate family. Acacia explained the tension that she experienced in her relationship with her parents every time she started a study programme:

Then when I started my PhD, the tension started all over again... it is because of all these studies that you don't get married and don't have children... Indeed, one of my friends invited me to give a talk at a

conference on career advancement and family life, because she considered me as an example of a woman who has a career at the expense of a family (*laughs*)... (Acacia, 33, Single).

Public's views on lifelong learning as a poor alternative to family formation are similar for younger unmarried women too:

When I was 25 years old, or 26, or even 30 they used to tell me well-done, fine... now that I completed this programme, and this is something that has bothered me a lot, almost everybody told me "I hope you don't do anything more, do something else, get married" I heard that even from my girlfriends who are modern women... They link lifelong learning with your marital status... (Ivis, 31, Single).

As long as single or married without children women cannot prove that their learning translates into career advancement and monetary benefits, others consider their lifelong learning pursuits either as an attempt to fill in a void in their life, or a hurdle in having their own family.

Support and Barriers from Academia

Several studies have shown the tremendous demands from academia on adult learners (Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002; Edwards, 1993; Gouthro, 2005; Kramarae, 2001; Vaccaro & Lovell, 2010), and many commentators have suggested that higher education has been organized to serve the needs of the 18-year old male learner (Edwards, 1993; Fairchild, 2003; Giancola et al. 2009; Home, 1998; Zosky et.al.,

2004). Less evidence exists on the role of academic institutions in providing support or impediments to women's engagement in lifelong learning (Scanlon, 2009).

Women in the sample showed particular interest in this part of the interview, and were very forthcoming when our conversation turned to the ways their academic institutions have assisted or impeded them in fulfilling their academic goals. I should stress the great value of my respondents' comments in this area not only because of their long experience in education but also due to their familiarity with different educational systems (Greek, American and British), variety of study modes (full-time, part-time, distance and on-line) levels of study (undergraduate, master and PhD), and diversity of disciplines (humanities, science, engineering, business and nursing). It is interesting to note that the majority of women spoke about the inertia of the academic world and its lack of preparation in educating lifelong learners. Their experiences resonate with Boud & Symes' (in Askham, 2008) comment on the arcane tendencies of the academy, as well as Terrell's (in Cox & Ebber, 2010:339) comment that programmes for adults are "cleverly disguised attempts to morph adult learners into traditional models". All participants agreed that their multiple identities have not been taken into consideration by the traditional academic institutions they attended; on the contrary they are treated as if they were 18-year old students. These claims were substantiated with reference to rules and regulations, assessment methods, and scheduling.

There are no provisions for adult learners in Greece; all students are treated in the same way, as if they are kids. It is indicative the fact that for both master programmes I did, one of the entry requirements was that the candidate shouldn't work. I didn't have the option of a part-

time mode, in the second master degree I had classes in the morning 9-11 (Iris, 33, MA in Civil Rights & Education²⁰).

Similarly, Primrose feels the absence of provisions for working women as an indication of lack of respect, and her institution's demand not to work as lack of sensitivity to her life conditions:

I can say that there is no respect, if someone has a child what can she do? They take it for granted that there is a family behind... If I were in England and in the situation I'm now, being unpaid for 7 months I would find a job at the Top Shop, but here they don't allow you... it is clear that the system is for non-working students. The communication with the professors for example, you send an email and they tell you "I didn't see it, why don't you pass by the office?" because I have a job, I have a life I cannot run after you... (Primrose, 28, MA in Civil Rights & Education).

Dahlia critiques the disrespectful way that the Greek university treats mature students:

The master degree I did was meant for executives, people with at least a 5-year experience in managerial positions, so they knew that they are not dealing with little kids, but they treated us as such.

[AK: Can you give me an example of what you're saying?]

²⁰ In this section, next to the pseudonym and the age, I add the degree that the respondent was studying or had just completed at the time of the interview. For a complete list of the studies of the participants, see Appendix 1.

We were sitting exams and they asked us to sit one by one with a desk in between, and each row was given a different set of questions... this is like we were at the primary school. This is totally disrespectful. It's obvious that the academic world is not prepared for this group of learners (Dahlia, 49, MBA).

Camellia, who attends classes where she is a minority in terms of age and experience, feels disappointed at the faculty who organize their courses and lectures for an 18-year-old naïve and inexperienced audience, and although her speech is heated, her point about faculty's discomfort for having mature students in class is evident:

They [faculty] are programmed to teach teenagers... they don't like you make suggestions, although they say that they are open to everything, you cannot help telling your opinion, because it is your critical ability that they want, but then they don't want it, and I haven't seen this abroad, we do a course evaluation which is confidential and then it isn't and they invite you to tell your opinion but then they don't take it seriously (Camellia, 32, BA Psychology).

Her comments are confirmed by Magnolia too:

Because I'm experienced, they [faculty] know that I'm critical, and they're scared about my reactions, or how hard I can come on them, or how much I demand, and I try to be one of the students, because this is my place, yes, I'm more critical because I'm experienced (Magnolia, 37, BA English).

This finding is consistent with the literature that states that professors may feel intimidated by older learners who are less timid and more demanding and because of their real-life experience they bring in the classroom (Lynch & Bishop-Clark, 1998).

Askham (2008:91) points out that “The assessment process seems to be one of the most significant contextual aspects of higher education that causes a great deal of anxiety”. Knowles (1996:88) states that “Nothing makes an adult feel more childlike than being judged by another adult; it is the ultimate sign of disrespect and dependency, as the one who is being judged experiences it”. Myrto explains how the current assessment methods in the Greek higher education thwart her efforts for high academic achievement:

...at this age I can't memorise, the power of my mind lies in my ability for critical thinking, therefore, if you build an educational system on the basis of exams, you have predetermined my failure. I was hard pressed for the exams... Being older we have the need to do well, we have a high sense of responsibility and a strong ego. It would be much better if exams were abolished and we had only assignments (Myrto, 51, MSc Human Resource Management).

Two women suggested that although educational systems have been organized for the traditional-aged students, academic rules should maintain equality among students. However, Anemone contradicts the notion of equality by saying:

Yes, I want equal treatment on the provision that there is equal treatment in the labour market too. Equality in studies but equality in jobs, I want to get the same salary, to have the same chances... I think

that difference is not taken into consideration in the academic world. Although there are issues with women, I see that this kind of equality in academia is against women. But then when you go to work, difference in gender is against women too (Anemone, 46, PhD Social Sciences).

Positive feedback from instructors as a result of individual behaviour rather than institutional policies, and distance learning (DL) were the only examples of good practice. The following quote is indicative of the role of teacher encouragement in women's continuation of studies:

In the institution I'm currently studying the Programme Leader is aware of my identity, and her role is very encouraging, because she has shared with us her own experience as an adult learner and mother and this encourages us a lot... I haven't seen similar support from my previous studies at the state university... What I want is the encouragement, the psychological support, this is very important to me. (Fuchsia, 47, MA Clinical Psychology).

The importance of positive feedback for these women can be understood as a request for acknowledgment for the extensive effort they make in order to respond to their academic obligations as diligently as any other student:

I could have asked an extension for assignments, but I didn't. For example, I was pregnant, and I didn't ask for an extension, I knew that the deadline was around the date I would give birth so I worked much

harder the days before, to submit my essay before the deadline
(Anemone, 46, PhD Social Sciences).

Previous research has revealed that supportive feedback and respect from tutors, as well as procedures specifically designed for adult learners contribute to sustaining a supportive learning community (Askham, 2008; Burton et.al., 2011; Cox & Ebbers, 2010; McGivney, 1993; Scanlon, 2009). McGivney (1993) examined the factors that assist women's access, participation and progression in education and identified the crucial importance of having empathetic tutors and staff who are capable to show sensitivity and understanding to women's multiple identities. Burton et.al. (2011) focused their study on key barriers to learning for 84 mature adult learners at a college in the UK, and concluded that individualized support and guidance from faculty and staff as well as supportive policies and procedures designed for adult learners contribute significantly to adults' effective learning. Cox & Ebbers (2010) examined the persistence factors of adult female students at a community college in the U.S. and found that the presence of caring and attentive faculty played a major role in women's desire to persist despite the obstacles. Scanlon (2009) conducted a phenomenological study of adult students at an Australian college and found that students anticipated teachers to treat them with respect, teach with enthusiasm, and have good communication skills.

DL and on-line are considered to facilitate adult learners in combining their different roles, while it addresses issues of marginalization and exclusion (Arthur & Tait, 2004; Kramarae, 2001; Raddon, 2007; Vryonides & Vitsilakis, 2008). In Greece, distance higher education was only recently recognized as an equivalent to that provided by the traditional universities following the establishment of the Greek Open University

(HOU) in 1998 (www.eap.gr). Unlike other European Open Universities, HOU is much less advanced in terms of incorporating ICT to support learning (Koustourakis et.al., 2008). Six of my respondents had at least one degree completed via DL, two of them at the HOU, two at the British Open University, and two are currently attending DL programmes with British Universities. All six commented positively of the convenience of DL as it allowed them to study at home and be available when needed. Freesia notes both the convenience and the support from the faculty as key motivating factors for her:

The HOU has been organized for people with family and work obligations, so it has a rationale which helps people like me, I think that I had a wonderful experience I wish the traditional universities were like that. The professors were open-minded we didn't have to deal with a military kind of organization, obviously there were limits and obligations but there was respect from both sides, and this motivated me, I wouldn't sleep only two hours a day in order to study in any other case (Freesia, 42, MA Clinical Psychology).

However, commentators have pointed out that DL limits learners' opportunities for interaction, collaborative learning and personal relationships all of which women are supposed to value more than men (Edwards, 1993; Kramarae, 2001; Taplin & Jegede, 2001). Three of my DL respondents agreed with this view:

I want you to make it public, for all the universities to hear, because they could help us, you could help in that. There are many universities that tell you that this is DL and you think that it will be manageable because you study at home, but it isn't like that, because you are

terribly alone, you don't have any classmates to exchange views.

[*emphatically*]: You have to publish this... Because you start with a good intention and then when you realize the demands you get scared and if you don't have someone to help you, there is no way to carry on.

I believe that there would be many more women lifelong learners if academia were not so rigid (Gardenia, 49, MPhil Special Education).

Apart from feelings of loneliness, DL students have less access to support services provided on campus, as Anemone, a PhD student, states:

I must also say that I was distance learner, and this made my life difficult, I didn't have the same chances with the rest at home campus...

[AK: How do you mean that? Give me an example]

I cannot pick up a book from the shelf when I need it, I cannot knock the door of my supervisor when I'm literally desperate for an answer, which via email he may reply to me after two weeks, I cannot benefit from the seminars, events, lectures that are organized on campus...

(Anemone, 46, PhD Social Sciences).

The Benefits of Lifelong Learning on Women's Life

I have chosen to close this chapter with a positive note about lifelong learning. Prior research has focused mainly on the problems that mature women students encounter in juggling different roles in their life (Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002; Coffield, 1999; Edwards, 1993; Gouthro, 2005; Home, 1998; Stalker, 2001). Much less is known about the positive ways in which lifelong learning affects women's lives

(Jackson, 2003; Vaccaro & Lovell, 2010). The reason why this aspect of lifelong learning has been rather ignored, despite policymakers' emphasis on lifelong learning for personal fulfillment (CEC, 2001; OECD, 2004) is that a number of theorists, who have adopted an anti-neoliberal stance have mainly concentrated on criticizing the employment-related aspects of the concept and its associated compulsive, unequal, and gender-blind nature (Borg & Mayo, 2006; Brine, 2006; Coffield, 1999; Fejes, 2006; Gouthro, 2009; Wain, 2000). However, there is some evidence (e.g., Gouthro 2009; Jackson, 2003; Vaccaro & Lovell, 2010) that proves that adult women students' experiences include self-fulfillment, enhanced self-esteem, freedom in thinking and sheer happiness. Myrto, for example, believes that her lifelong learning experience has contributed to the development of her personality. Anemone emphasizes the role of lifelong learning in developing her self-confidence. For Magnolia lifelong learning is freedom and for Amaryllis is self-fulfillment stemming from success in her studies. Fuchsia refers to the importance for her to transcend the stereotypes and summarises the benefits as follows:

It is a very personal feeling this great pride I feel about myself and the self-confidence and I like the fact that I develop as a person no matter the age, and in doing so I go beyond and over the stereotypes of my generation (Fuchsia, 47, Primary School Teacher/Public, Married, Mother of one).

Hyacinth explains how well she feels despite the difficulties and she compares the satisfaction to a hobby:

It's [LLL] a nice thing, it opens up your mind, it makes us feel young, we meet other people who do their studies at a younger age, it's like doing a

hobby, certainly expensive and painful, but something that is so rewarding... (Hyacinth, 49, Senior Manager, Divorced, Mother of two).

For mothers, one important benefit from their learning is that they have been able to set a good example for her children:

[AK: Tell me about the positive things of LLL in your life]

I want to believe that it's more positively, because I set a good example, for my children and we're studying together when I'm home, with my girls, and this is the part I love because studying is part of our life, ok, and this is a good thing for a mother and the kids ... (Magnolia, 37, Foreign Language School Owner, Married, Mother of two).

Further emphasis is required to be placed on exploring in what ways lifelong learning benefits women. Especially, in a time of a deep economic crisis, positive feelings such as self-fulfillment, self-esteem, satisfaction and confidence have an enhanced meaning in one's life. If lifelong learning can generate such feelings for women then a more open-minded approach from the critical theorists is needed.

In this section I have analysed the impact of lifelong learning on women's life with an emphasis on barriers and support from work, home and academia. Women's experiences show that the 'mission' of the lifelong learning project is not impossible despite the many roles they are required to perform. The obstacles to their lifelong learning engagement result mostly from the workplace and academia and to a much lesser extent from family. Support is provided mostly by their family members, partners and children and sensitive tutors. Single and childless women feel equally stressed mostly due to societal pressure.

Conclusion

In this Chapter I presented and discussed the results from the thematic analysis of the semi-structured interviews with 23 women in Greece regarding the impact of lifelong learning on their work and life.

In the first section I have discussed the impact of lifelong learning on women's employment. My respondents' experiences do not confirm the policy discourse which, based on a narrow understanding of the HCT, propagates lifelong learning as the ultimate means for individual employment and career advancement. Conversely, the great majority of the women I interviewed have not financially benefited as a result of lifelong learning, while their career advancement is contingent upon the existence or absence of meritocracy and patriarchy in the workplace. Although they recognized the importance of learning in acquiring job-related skills and personal attributes, they were not able to capitalize on their investment mainly due to their being employed in jobs and workplaces where fewer qualifications were required; party patronage was prevalent; and gendered practices were widespread. These findings prove that the policy-makers' propaganda that anyone who is good enough can rise above the constraints of disadvantage is both misleading and dangerous.

In the second section I have presented and discussed sources of conflict and support from work, life and academia, from my respondents' own perspective. Rather than concentrating on a detailed description of their frenzied daily life, I was more interested in finding out the obstacles these women face in their effort to accommodate competing demands, and where they rely on to overcome them. Their experiences show that the Greek employer remains most aloof to their female employees' lifelong learning engagement, especially during this period of intense

economic crisis where extensive workload, long hours and the threat of layoffs have become a standard practice. Contrary to previous research findings, the majority of the women in the sample relied on their husbands' and/or children's support, which was enthusiastically and unconditionally offered, and which was evidenced mainly through tolerance and encouragement rather than the sharing of household. Nevertheless, a good number of my respondents continued to feel guilt about the time spent on studying and anxiety about the repercussions that studying would have on their familial relationships. The women who were more relaxed about issues of guilt were so because of their heroic efforts to retain the balance in family life. However, single and childless women, the most marginalized in the literature of lifelong learning of all, have less support than women in a family. Not only are they expected to work longer, but also they have to constantly justify their lifelong learning choices to a couple-oriented society that considers women's educational pursuits as a substitute to a 'failure' to have a family. Finally, women in the sample agreed on the lack of preparation of the academic world, especially in Greece, to serve the needs of women lifelong learners, and interpreted academia's inertia for change as a lack of respect to what these women are trying to accomplish. Also, academia's rigidity in procedures and policies, often justified in the name of equality is contradictory as it does not match similar equality for women in the workplace. Support from empathetic staff was most appreciated as a key motivation factor. DL was recognized as an opportunity, despite isolation and fewer opportunities for cooperation and learning.

The following chapter will provide the conclusion of this study. Important and new findings will be contrasted with the themes addressed in the literature, and recommendations for policy-makers and suggestions for further research will be presented.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

Introduction

The aim of this research has been to explore the impact of lifelong learning on the work and life of women in Greece. In order to fully answer the question, the following subsidiary questions have been investigated:

- What are women's understandings of lifelong learning?
- What motivates women to participate in lifelong learning?
- How do they evaluate the importance of learning for their work?
- How do they manage to balance responsibilities stemming from work, life and studies?

The discussion of the literature on lifelong learning, has pointed out the assumptions embedded in the policy rhetoric, most notably the confidence in the positive role of lifelong learning in the individual's employment opportunities and success; the belief that lifelong learning is inherently good and beneficial to individuals' lives; is a solution to social exclusion; and promotes gender equality in the knowledge society and/or economy which lifelong learning aspires to create. The literature review has further established that while studies of mature students in all areas of education have proliferated in the 1970s and 1980s and research on the economic effects of lifelong learning abounds in the literature of the 1990s and 2000s, few studies are concerned with the effects of lifelong learning on participants' work and life from their own perspective, and even fewer are interested in the experiences of women lifelong learners. Listening to women's voices is a first step towards forcing policymakers, theorists and academicians to include women's opinions, demands and concerns in the

public debate of lifelong learning, and persuading them to design policy inspired by principles of equality and respect.

The voices that are heard in this thesis belong to 23 women of a variety of professional backgrounds, family arrangements and ages who live in Athens, Greece. They are lifelong learners, that is to say, they have repeatedly been engaged in learning within the context of higher education, in a variety of study modes, educational settings, disciplines, and degree levels. Being guided by a constructivist approach and having embraced a feminist methodology I have presented women's views, understandings and interpretations as legitimate sources of the knowledge my study aspires to reveal. By having acknowledged my own perspective and where I stand in relation to the subject, I have participated in a discussion with my interviewees as both a speaker and a listener, the writer and the audience, and have strived for trustworthiness, authenticity and self-reflection throughout the writing process.

This chapter will present the key findings derived from the semi-structured interviews vis-à-vis the themes that have been addressed in this thesis. In this way, the contribution of the present study as well as areas for further research will naturally emerge. The chapter is divided into two sections, corresponding to the topics raised by the research question: first, women's understanding of and motivations for lifelong learning; and secondly the impact of lifelong learning on women's employment, and the effects of lifelong learning on women's life resulting from conflicting demands from work, home and academia. The chapter then moves on to the discussion of the implications of the study for theory and policy and concludes with a number of suggestions for further research.

Women's Understandings and Motivations: Deconstructing policy certainties

Despite the many definitions and motivations provided by the participants of this study, there are a number of significant findings that challenge lifelong learning policy discourse and provide a new conceptual framework for theorizing lifelong learning. In particular, the views of women in this study contradict current policy discourse in three claims:

First, notwithstanding the rhetoric of lifelong learning as being life-long, life-wide and centered on learning, rather than on education (Schuetze, 2007), the women in this study admitted the hegemony of a formal system of education which leads to certified qualifications. In Greece, learning beyond the country's formal system of education has not been recognised by a number of stakeholders, such as employers and academia, as of yet. It is therefore only natural for the women in this study not to include any other non-certified and/or non-recognised learning they have done into the definition of lifelong learning. Some of them, when I prompted them to discuss about this 'other' learning used the word 'hobby' to describe it.

Secondly, this study shows that policy rhetoric for the lifelong learning project as an equity strategy, disguises inequalities by ignoring barriers to participation stemming from unequal sharing of costs. Only three of the women had any lifelong learning they undertook, funded by a third party. But if the benefits of lifelong learning – above all its importance in national economic competitiveness- are spread to all, individuals, employers, society and the state, as the lifelong learning rhetoric promises, then why is it the individual who has to bear most, if not all, of its cost? Critical theorists have argued that the shift from education to learning was purposefully effected by policymakers in order to re-distribute funding responsibility

from the state to the individuals, who guided by their own self-interest will seek to enhance their employment opportunities, and will be willing to pay the cost in anticipation of the increased personal benefits in the future (Biesta, 2006; Boshier, 1998; Gouthro, 2009; Jackson, 2003; Jarvis, 2009; Olssen, 2008; Rivera, 2009; Tuijnman & Boström, 2002). The undertaking of the costs by the individual raises questions about equal participation; hence, the importance of lifelong learning for combating social exclusion is diminished.

Thirdly, an important finding is that although women in this study define lifelong learning as a labour market requirement, they do not consider this requirement as one of their reasons for engaging in it. Instead, they participate in lifelong learning for personal development; caring and sharing; and to a lesser extent for the associated prestige and social status. Therefore, their answers prove that we are not the kind of the profit-maximising individuals that the HCT assumes. Indeed, my study suggests that there is a much richer menu of motivations and objectives than those of the homo economicus. These women's lifelong learning choices are made for a variety of reasons, which postmodernist theorists seem not to take into account. One such motivation is their need to care for others. Another is to do their jobs better. The lifelong learning policy has been attacked for its close link with the concept of individualism, competition, and self-interest (Brine, 2006; Field, 2006). Indeed, acting for the benefit of 'others' is not compatible with the assumptions embedded in HCT, the cornerstone of lifelong learning rhetoric (Ahl, 2006). However, these women's learning is not just an act of self-care, but it is undertaken with the aim to be shared and in doing so, to care and support for others. It is also a need to perform better at work, which might be an extension of caring. This analysis suggests that Foucauldian perspective on lifelong learning is inadequate to explain women's experience in

relation to lifelong learning. It also suggests that the Foucauldian framework of analysis is gender-blind and androcentric, that is to say, male biased (McLaren, 2002).

Finally, a number of participants have suggested that their desire for learning is linked to social mobility and prestige which makes sense in view of the role of tertiary education in the Greek society; thus partially confirming the view that lifelong learning is an act of consumption. Although, consumerism has been associated with shallowness and greediness, one cannot distinguish between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ consumption only on the basis of the product consumed. In other words, there are no universal criteria for telling which kinds of consumption are acceptable or wasteful, unless one subscribes to the dominant morality of the particular historical moment that this conversation takes place (Wilk, 2001). In postmodernism, engaging continuously in learning can be equally consumptive with doing extravagant shopping. In both cases, the product, be it knowledge or a commodity, is a value-sign through which individuals, rather than satisfying utilities and adjusting costs to benefits, are more concerned for creating identities of difference or solidarity with other people. In the case of lifelong learning, learners purchase their social mobility and membership to an elite group of ‘educated’ individuals, through repeated episodes of learning.

The Impact of Lifelong Learning on the Work and Life of Women in Greece: Broken Links and Missing Allies

In this section key findings from the question of how women evaluate the importance of learning for their work and of how women manage to balance their multiple roles in work, life and academia are presented and compared and contrasted with the themes addressed in the literature.

The Impact of Lifelong Learning on Women's Work

Concerning the first question, the significant findings of this study are:

First, almost all women in this study perceived a positive impact of their learning on job performance, which, however, remained unrewarded by their employers, either due to employers' ignorance; over-supply of similarly qualified personnel; or the under-development of a competitive economy. Their better performance was explained mostly as the result of a number of transferrable skills (communication, problem-solving, presentation, planning, increased trust by others, etc.) they acquired throughout their studies. However, one wonders whether the acquisition of this type of skills requires repeated spells of tertiary-level education. It could be suggested that the development of the skills these women refer to is the result of life and work experience as much as of education. Therefore, I suggest that in this case the link between lifelong learning and employment is not confirmed.

Secondly, the knowledge acquired through lifelong learning is not considered to have an important impact on improving job prospects. The finding points to the qualification inflation in Greece as a possible reason for not considering knowledge acquired through lifelong learning being important in the labour market. The pronounced mismatch between qualifications and jobs is attributed to the country's underdeveloped knowledge economy, and the Greek employers' choice to use qualifications as a screening device. The public sector in particular, awards credits in hiring and promotion reviews for degrees, irrespectively of individual productivity thus, encouraging rent-seeking behavior.

Thirdly, women's work experiences show that the link between lifelong learning and individual economic benefits is weak. The assumption of a straightforward and linear relationship between lifelong learning and wage returns, stemming from the HCT on which the lifelong learning project is premised is both simplistic and misleading. This study confirms existing literature which has shown that participation in lifelong learning does not have a direct effect on women's employment in the form of higher wages (Adnett & Coates, 2000; Egerton & Parry, 2001; Jenkins et.al., 2003). The scarcity of jobs and reduced salaries due to the country's current financial crisis confirms even further the absence of the link. However, one could not expect higher wages for learning undertaken for non-economic or non job-specific reasons. Women's motivations for learning, as presented above, were mostly related to personal development, caring and sharing, and social mobility, and to a lesser extent to earning more money. One has to be mindful of the direction of causality in this instance. Do women choose non job-specific learning because they know in advance, (for example, from personal experience or concrete market data) that even a 'smarter' choice would not make any difference in their earnings? A number of structural factors in the labor market which impede women from reaping the employment benefits from their investment, suggests that the strength of the link between lifelong learning and work does not depend on the smartness of women's choice.

All women in the public sector alluded to party patronage as one reason for being disadvantaged at work despite their lifelong learning engagement. Greek politicians' practice to form clientistic relationships with the voters whereby they offer state jobs in return for party allegiance (Bratsis, 2010; Katsimi & Moutos, 2010; Pappas, 2009) naturally leave behind those individuals who have not access to or do not choose to seek benefits from political parties. Also, more than two thirds of the women

explicitly stated that their career prospects were limited due to the phenomenon of glass ceiling, whereby, men are preferred for the higher levels of the organizational hierarchy. The glass ceiling has been explained both from the supply, namely women's choices (Hakim, 1998), and the demand side, namely, employers' choice to treat male and female employees differently (Anker, 1997; Blackburn et.al., 2002; Crompton, 1998; England, 2005; Watts, 2009). The women in this study did not recognize agential factors in their limited opportunities for career progression. On the contrary, they assigned the blame solely on male (both employers and employees) exclusionary practices. Women who work in male-dominated workplaces mentioned the ways that male colleagues exclude them from information, influence or status alliances, as well as how their under-representation invites more performance pressure on them. The above findings pose a serious challenge on Hakim's preference theory as they prove that despite women's choices for a career, phenomena such as party patronage, glass-ceiling old-boys networks and tokenism impede their career advancement.

Individuals' willingness to sacrifice current earnings by spending a portion of their working life at jobs for which they are overqualified has been explained by the Career Mobility Theory (Budría & Moro-Egido, 2009; Sicherman & Galor, 1990). Despite the current insignificant impact of lifelong learning on women's wages, all of them expected some kind of reward in the future, either in the form of a promotion, increased chances for employment abroad, or a successful change of career. This finding supports this theory only in terms of expected rather than actual better career options.

The Impact of Lifelong Learning on Women's Life

The important findings of this study regarding the impact of lifelong learning on women's life are the following:

First, despite the extensive effort they have to make in order to combine competing demands in their daily life the majority of these women spoke about the ways lifelong learning has enriched their life. Mothers in particular, appreciated the fact that they provided a role model for their children. There is a tendency in the literature to overlook or diminish the importance of lifelong learning in the well-being of the learners in favour of a polemic against its economic-related aspects.

Secondly, this study has revealed that the missing allies to working women lifelong learners are the employer and the academia. Women reported their employers' demands to work both more intensively and longer hours, which were intensified by the economic crisis. More hours of work interfered with their studying and class attendance, thus intensifying agony and despair. Moreover, these women did not feel that their lifelong learning could shield them against redundancy. Not only did the great majority of these women fail to receive tuition aid from their company, but also many of them did not reveal to their employer and their colleagues their engagement in studying out of fear for discrimination, rivalry, hostility and even job loss. Only two have managed to receive study leaves, despite the existence of the relative legal framework in Greece. On the contrary, most of the women carved out days from their annual leave in order to study. This finding supports previous research on the inadequacy of work-life balance and study-leave policies to address the pressure resulting from organizational changes and study responsibilities.

In their struggle to accommodate responsibilities, for most of the women the academic world has not been an ally either. Literature has pointed to the greediness of academia (Edwards, 1993), and on how the organization of programmes and student services reflect the needs of the male 18-year old undergraduate student (Fairchild, 2003; Giancola et al. 2009; Home, 1998; Zosky et.al., 2004). In several cases, though, the discussion of the rigid demands of academia is related to the degree of support women receive from their partners (e.g. Stalker, 2001). It is assumed thus that it is not the academic world that has to change, but husbands and friends have to alter their behavior in order to serve the 'sacred' and uncontested demands of education. Several women have experienced disrespect and ignorance in their dealings with their academic institutions. In some cases, the competent performance of one role (e.g., employee or mother) was considered inappropriate for success in the other (e.g. student). Positive experiences resulted from support and encouragement by tutors who either by inclination, training or experience, rather than by institutional design, were willing to provide. Despite feelings of isolation and unequal opportunities in relation to campus-based students, women appreciated the opportunity that distance education gave them to accommodate studies within their complicated schedules. The difficulties women experience in their struggle to accommodate conflicting demands reveal the inequities and contradictions of social structures such as work and academia. However, these structures and their often unreasonable and unmanageable demands remain unchallenged.

Thirdly, despite the emphasis of the literature on the males' persisting unequal share of household as a powerful barrier to women's engagement in lifelong learning, the findings of this study point to the opposite direction. With the exception of two women, the rest spoke enthusiastically about the positive role of their partners,

evidenced not so much through sharing of household but by tolerance, encouragement and support. Women's satisfaction with the level and quality of support they received from their husbands may be linked to the country's low gender equity and women's traditional gender ideologies. It has been found that uneven distribution of household is not perceived as either unfair or unjust by women holding traditional gender ideologies in countries with low gender equity (Greenstein, 2009). Women were also appreciative of the support and tolerance shown by their children and/or extended family. However, many of them continued to feel guilty for not being able to meet the standards of an idealized mother and/or wife role. As the majority of the women considered their lifelong learning as an opportunity for personal growth rather than for earning a higher salary, it is reasonable to assume that guilt was also in response to others' perception (perhaps their own too) of lifelong learning as a selfish investment. Some women tried to cancel negative feelings by doing a heroic effort to meet the standards of a full-time commitment in all three fronts (work, family, academia).

Finally, this study has managed to restore the lack of attention to single and/or childless women, the most marginalized in the literature of lifelong learning of all. In a couple-oriented society, where family is highlighted and ritualized, single and/or childless women are constantly required to explain their 'condition' or even apologise for the 'missed opportunities', the 'wrong choices', and 'personal inadequacy' to have a family (Hamilton, et.al., 2006; Reynolds & Wetherell, 2003). It is hypothesized by researchers and policymakers that women who do not have the role of spouse and mother do not really face work-life-study conflicts. But is this perception accurate? This study shows that this group of women face equally serious, and in certain cases more barriers, conflict and strain for their lifelong learning engagement, stemming either from their employers' and colleagues expectations to work longer hours, tutors'

demands to perform better, and family members' pressure to complete or quit studies and concentrate on family. For many, their parents and friends consider these women's educational pursuits as a substitute to a 'failure'. Criticism lessens when women are able to prove that their learning is or will be translated into higher income and career advancement. This attitude is also revealing about Greek society's views on the importance of lifelong learning.

Implications for Theory and Concept

This study provides a valuable contribution to current understandings of the theory and concept of lifelong learning. There are three areas in particular, that illustrate this contribution:

1. The literature review has shown that women are neglected, to a large extent, by both theorists and policy makers in the western world (e.g., Rogers, 2006; Jackson et.al., 2011). This general lack of attention to gender problematics regarding lifelong learning has led to a dominant mode of theorizing lifelong learning whereby lifelong learning is narrowly concerned with individual and national economic competitiveness. Moreover, the literature review has indicated that postmodern theorizing of lifelong learning has been found equally deficient regarding female experience. Gilligan (1993:174) points out that "it is only when we start to value the different voice of women built on the recognition of the difference in women's experience and understanding, then we can start to expand our vision". Therefore, any study whose subject of investigation is the female lifelong learner is a contribution *per se* to the existing theoretical and conceptual understandings of lifelong learning. In particular, the evidence from this study challenges the hegemonic masculinist

values embodied in the HCT and suggests that there is a non-economistic ‘ethic of care’ that should be recognised as a key dimension of lifelong learning theory and concept.

2. Such recognition will result in shifting the emphasis away from a narrow view of lifelong learning as an investment in human capital, and start conceptualizing it in more inclusive terms so that its aim will not always be about employment skills; its content not only job-related; and its impact not necessarily be measured on the basis of tangible and immediate economic returns. This study showed that despite these women’s exemplary participation in lifelong learning (most of them at their own cost) their gains from the ‘knowledge economy’ are not guaranteed. Bourdieu’s (1985) theoretical discussion of different kinds of capital, such as social, cultural, symbolic and others, as sources of power and social advantage, provides the platform from which to extend our understanding of how non-economic benefits from lifelong learning can be related to wider social purposes in ways not fully captured by classical human capital thinking. Women in this study referred to benefits such as personal growth, caring and sharing, being a good example for their children, social mobility, social capital, self-fulfillment and self-confidence which they value more than economic-related advantages. These other gains are neither selfish nor private but they spill over and benefit others and society as a whole. They are important to the quality of human life, economic development and society’s overall well-being (Putnam, 2000). Such societal implications of our lifelong learning participation -implications that, contrary to the Bourdieusian definition of human action, cannot be reduced to

the accrual of personal advantage only – should be a key consideration in theorizing lifelong learning.

3. Since the 1970s lifelong learning has been theorized within the frames of humanistic, economic and social traditions, which have generated a variety of policies in response to emancipatory, economic and political goals. These policies have in many occasions reproduced the conditions through which lifelong learning rhetoric sustains its pervasive ideological commitment to HCT. What has been missing to a large extent from this body of literature however, is an attempt to integrate the lifelong learners' experiences through qualitative research, and in particular of women learners in the discussion of lifelong learning. The qualitative approach located within a feminist, critical and reflexive analytical framework adopted in this study provides new insights in the complex interplays between work, academia and private life and proposes a more supportive and gender inclusive theoretical framework for lifelong learning.

Implications for Practice

The final question I asked my interviewees was what they wanted me to tell people out there about women lifelong learners in Greece. In order to write this section I have chosen two quotes which articulate powerful messages for policy change:

“Gender plays a role in lifelong learning... there is silence about gender issues in the rhetoric of lifelong learning” (Primrose)

Gouthro (2009) claims that only when gendered roles and responsibilities become issues of public debate can action for social change be taken. She along with other feminist writers, have gradually lifted the veil from the optimistic, inclusive and

liberating prevailing discourses and have unmasked the gendered, racialised and classed configurations of lifelong learning.

This thesis provides further evidence that the missing element from both theoretical analyses and policies of lifelong learning is gender. Government, universities and employers propagate the importance of lifelong learning for today's citizen and employee, without realizing that this population is not a homogenous group. Their motivations, enablers and barriers, benefits and disadvantages are constructed upon gender, race and class and only if they are listened to and taken into account does the knowledge society that lifelong learning aspires to create stand a chance to succeed. Women's learning experiences of lifelong learning are not only a matter of personal decisions. They are linked to social contexts, where gender inequalities such as division of unpaid labour, organization of work, employment and career advancement opportunities, access to curriculum subjects linked to profitable jobs, and gendered expectations of appropriate behavior, are still persistent.

“Tell people to support us, yes... tell them we demand respect” (Camellia)

As already highlighted in the preceding chapters, gender inequalities in the workplace, homeplace and academia call for an explicit policy for meaningful support to women lifelong learners.

The Greek government must invest on disseminating information about the vast and often bewildering range of lifelong learning provision, and provide supportive policies and initiatives, such shorter full-time working hours, childcare services, maternity and paternity leave entitlements and eldercare services, which will make it easier for women (and men) to combine studies with employment and non-work

responsibilities (Fagan, 2003). However, WLB policies should extend beyond work and family to include arrangements for other life domains, such as learning and leisure, as key dimensions of what constitutes 'life' (Warren, 2010).

The Greek employer must respect the law and provide women with equal opportunities for employment, learning and career advancement.

Academia must design services and procedures for a female mature student body which will challenge the assumption that educational commitments hold a hegemonic priority over non-academic responsibilities. Providing support for women lifelong learners according to their social, economic and familial realities is an indication of respect to these women's distinct lives.

Future Research

This study has pointed to a number of areas in which further research is required.

A comparative qualitative study of both men and women lifelong learners is required in order to establish areas of similarity and difference in lifelong learning experiences.

Moreover, it is evident that studies which measure the monetary private returns to lifelong learning are rare. Much of the criticism on lifelong learning is based on ideology rather than concrete data. Qualitative studies such as this one can inform quantitative research in ways that quantification of some aspects of women's experiences can still be compatible with feminist ontological positions.

Existing qualitative work on women lifelong learners tends to concentrate on women of a high educational level who enjoy a privileged social and economic status. This study is not an exception. However, the experiences of women who work at lower-

paid jobs are less well documented (Warren, 2000). Combining gender with class is an important factor to be considered in further analyses of women's lifelong learning experiences.

This study has revealed that for many women formal learning is not necessarily linked to higher earnings. Nevertheless, their engagement in learning is not a futile activity, as they acknowledge other non-economic advantages for them, their families and communities. Substantial literature has indicated the importance of linear education for the enhancement of social capital (Puntman, 2000; Schuller, 2000). Further empirical evidence is required in order to increase understanding of the profound consequences of lifelong learning beyond the increase of skills, employment and economic competitiveness.

Finally, recent demographic, employment and educational trends have had a substantial impact on women's choices on marriage and parenthood. However, a pervasive ideology of marriage and family is dominant in laws, social policies, and everyday interactions. Most research on lifelong learning has ignored the experiences of single women or women without children. More research on this group of lifelong learners is therefore required, if equity and justice through research on lifelong learning is sought to be achieved.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Participants' Profile

Appendix 2: Sample of the 'Consent Form'.

Appendix 3: Interview Plan

Appendix 4: Sample of Interview Transcript and Coding

APPENDIX 1: PROFILE OF THE PARTICIPANTS

Name (Pseudonym)	Age	Job	Family Status	LLL History	Sector of Employment
Acacia	33	Senior Nurse	Unmarried, no children	BA Nursing; MSc Critical-Care Nursing; PhD (ongoing)	Public
Amaryllis	34	Salesperson - Biotechnologist	Single mother of one daughter 3yrs old	BSc, MSc, PhD in Biotechnology; MBA	Private
Anemone	46	Business Trainer	Married, mother of two, 15 and 5 yrs old	Diploma in Teaching English; BA History; MA in Mediterranean Studies; MA in Organizational Psychology; PhD Social Sciences	Businesswoman (Owner of Training Company)
Azalea	48	Senior Manager (Hospital)	Married, 2 children, 17 and 15 yrs old	BSc in Nursing (Technical University); BA in Nursing; Diploma in Teaching; MSc in Research Methodology; PhD in Critical-Care; MBA Administration of Health Centres	Public
Camellia	32	Manicurist	Married, no children	Diploma in Marketing, BA in Business, BA in Psychology (ongoing), Certificate in Manicure	Freelance

Name (Pseudonym)	Age	Job	Family Status	LLL History	Sector of Employment
Daisy	32	Teacher of English	Married, no children	BA in English; Diploma in Translation; MA in Teaching	Private
Dahlia	49	Financial Manager	Married, three children, 19, 17, and 3 yrs old	Certificate in Business; BA in Political Science and Management, MBA Finance; Foreign Languages (ongoing)	Public
Freesia	42	Office Clerk	Married, 2 daughters, 8 and 6 yrs old	Diploma in Computing; BA in Greek Civilization; MA in Clinical Psychology (ongoing) Certificate in Painting	Private
Fuchsia	47	Teacher at Primary School	Married, one daughter, 21 yrs old	BA in Primary Education; Diploma in Teaching; MA in Clinical Psychology (ongoing)	Public

Name (Pseudonym)	Age	Job	Family Status	LLL History	Sector of Employment
Gardenia	49	Businesswoman	Married, 3 children, 21, 12, and 11 yrs old	Diploma in Business Adm.; MA in English Language; PhD in Linguistics; MPhil in Special Education (ongoing)	Foreign Languages School Owner
Hyacinth	49	Senior Manager	Divorced, 2 daughters 19 and 15 yrs	BA in Business; Diploma in Accountancy; Foreign Languages; MBA (ongoing)	Private
Iris	33	Architect	Married, no children	BSc in Architecture; MSc in City Regeneration; Certificate in Weaving and Sewing; MA in Civil Rights & Education (ongoing)	Freelance
Ivy	31	Registered Nurse	Unmarried, no children	BSc Nursing; MSc in Critical Care; MSc in Transcultural Nursing; Certificate in Critical Nursing for Multi-injured	Public

Name (Pseudonym)	Age	Job	Family Status	LLL History	Sector of Employment
Jasmine	38	Coffee-shop owner	Unmarried, no children	Diploma in Interpreting; BA in Greek Civilisation; MA in Education and Human Rights (ongoing)	Businesswoman (in process)
Lily	30	Teacher of English	Married, two children, 3 and 2 yrs old	BA in English; Diploma in Methodology; MA in Teaching; Diploma in Greek language (finished three months ago)	Freelance
Magnolia	37	Businesswoman Teacher of English	Married, two children, 10 and 6 yrs old	BA in Biology; Certificate in Accountancy & Business; Diploma in Methodology of Teaching; BA in English Language (ongoing)	Owner of a Private School of Foreign Languages
Myrto	51	Engineer	Married, no children	BSc in Engineering; BA in Economics; MA in Lifelong Learning; MSc Human Resource Management; Theatre-Acting	Public
Orchid	36	Psychotherapist	Married, no children	BA in Communication; MSc in Information Systems; MA in Clinical Counselling; Diploma in Counselling Therapy (ongoing)	Private

Name (Pseudonym)	Age	Job	Family Status	LLL History	Sector of Employment
Pansy	50	Theatrologist	Unmarried, no children	Diploma in Acting; BA in Theatre; MA in Directing; MA in Human Rights & Education (ongoing)	Private
Poppy	35	Assistant Operations Manager	Unmarried, no children	Diploma in Tourism; Diploma in Teaching Methodology; BA in Business; MBA in Marketing (ongoing) Foreign Languages (ongoing)	Private
Primrose	28	Social Worker	Unmarried, no children	BA in Social Work; Certificate in Social Care; MA in Civil Rights and Education (ongoing)	NGO
Rose	38	Programme Manager in Education at Private College	Married, no children	BA in Psychology; BA in English; MA in Cognition; PhD in Special Education; MA in Speech Pathology Diploma in Music (Piano)	Private
Tulip	34	Nursery Teacher	Married, no children	BA in Early Childhood; Diploma in Dyslexia; Diploma in Autism; Certificate in Special Education; MPhil in Special Education (ongoing)	Public

APPENDIX 2: SAMPLE CONSENT FORM

“The Impact of Lifelong Learning on the Work and Life of Women in Greece”.

Researcher: Alexandra Kaoni
University of Leicester
(PhD student)

Supervisor: Dr. John Goodwin
University of Leicester

Purpose: To understand how lifelong learning impacts upon women’s work and life experiences.

Researcher: Alexandra Kaoni, DSS Student, CLMS, University of Leicester
8, Amvrosiou Moschonision Street, 17123 Athens Greece
Tel: 210 9319398, 6948306425 Email: ak297@leicester.ac.uk

Supervisor: Dr. John Goodwin
University of Leicester
7-9 Salisbury Road, Leicester LE1 7QR, United Kingdom
Email: jdg3@leicester.ac.uk

Participation

I understand that:

My participation in this study is voluntary.

I may withdraw from this study at any time for any reason.

I may refuse to answer any of the questions.

Confidentiality will be strictly respected and anything identifying me, personally or any organization or people that I may name, will be removed from the written transcript.

Any such information given during the interview, it is understood and agreed by the researcher that will not be communicated orally or in writing to third parties.

I can have access to the findings of the study by contacting Alexandra Kaoni.

I understand the researcher will address any questions or concerns I may have about this study.

I also understand that I may register any complaint I might have with the Thesis supervisor.

PLEASE INDICATE THAT YOU HAVE GIVEN YOUR CONSENT BY SIGNING THE TEXT BELOW

Subject: Consent

I have read and understood the document - Consent Form: “The impact of lifelong learning on the work and life of women in Greece” and agree to participate in this study.

Signature:

APPENDIX 3: INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Brief introduction of the study including purpose, confidentiality, recording, timing.
2. Participant's present circumstances (studies, work, life arrangements);
3. Defining lifelong learning: what it means to me this term? How do I understand it?
4. Defining myself as lifelong learner: what makes me believe that I am a lifelong learner?
5. Motivation: What makes me participate in lifelong learning?
6. The impact of lifelong learning on my work
 - a. Work Benefits for my engagement with lifelong learning: how do I benefit (past, present, and future) in terms of employment?
 - b. Changes in work: how does it affect my work? (present)
7. The impact of lifelong learning on my life
 - a. Changes in life: how does my engagement in lifelong learning affect my life beyond work (or has affected my life)?
 - b. Potential help and support: what do I think about support from employer, tutors, family, social contacts?
 - c. Potential barriers: What has impeded my lifelong learning engagement?
8. The role of academia
 - a. How has academia helped me in my lifelong learning? Any impediments?
9. The role of the current financial crisis
 - a. How does the crisis in Greece affect my work and life?
 - b. Does my engagement with lifelong learning help me in facing the current situation?
10. Reflection:
 - a. What do you want to tell the world about women lifelong learners in Greece?
 - b. What would you like to tell policymakers, academia, employers, or your family?
11. Closing/Feedback
 - a. Is there anything else you want to say and I didn't ask?
 - b. How did you feel about this interview? How did I do? Would you like to suggest anything about my interviewing?
12. [Recorder is switched off] Any other points: We have some more time, would you like to talk about anything else?
13. Closing interview: reassurances about confidentiality and how the data will be used, and arrangements to receive the results in case she wants to comment on them.

APPENDIX 4: SAMPLE INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT WITH CODING

Key to colours

	Definition and Motivation
	Recognition of studies
	LLL and employment
	Patriarchy/ sex discrimination in the workplace
	Academia
	LLL and life- support and impediments
	Friends/ environment
	Influence of financial crisis

Magnolia 7/11/2011

AK: Ok, as you know my research is about women in Greece who have been in education over and over again, and I know that you are one of them so would you like to tell me about your educational background so far?

M: I graduated in Australia, and I had a gap year, and then I decided that I really loved biology so I started working in aquarium, while I studied biology at Perth university well life changed, we have had lots of health problems in family, my father had to undergo a lot of surgeries here so this changed my orientation, and I had to work as a secretary, and I specialized and I did a year of studies in logistics, economics in the private sector and the same time I had a friend from Wales Lucie, and she told me that I could use my English here in Greece and would be a great idea teach as a part-time job, just to augment my income and I didn't really choose to teach just because I wanted to become a teacher, but my students really liked the way I was teaching and I found out that I was a little bit talented, just by inclination without really knowing it, so I felt a little bit insecure of what I was doing at that time, and it would be nice to find out more about teaching, and then I got married to a Greek person and I had to stay in Greece and somehow I had to change my career. At the beginning I worked at his school teaching biology he has had his own business for 37 years now, but then I quite liked what I was doing in the English language. I felt so insecure I wanted to do something more profound of what I was doing I felt really responsible of what I was doing with my students and wanted to find out, so I started an intensive course in teaching methodology, and I liked it and I did the second year and then the third year, and then sat the examinations for the Certificate. After years I have my own business, for the last 16 years, two frontistirios now, and I felt I needed to be more updated to what I was doing, feeling insecure again, I think, just trying to be more effective, not being left out of what is going on and find out about things, by inclination, because I do this for many things in my life, so why not study more, and did some study on my own because I couldn't attend a regular course at that time because I had two babies at home, and well, I felt I could study on my own and sat examinations in methodology the Michigan one and I did both so I got a certificate again. Years later, when my daughters didn't really need me that much they're now ten and eight years old I thought of doing some more scientific study let's say, and go to a college, because I just like it I guess, to spend time and study...

AK: You described a very rich educational background... do you think that this is because you have a natural need to learn, to develop yourself or is it related to

professional aspirations you have had in different phases in your life or could it be because it was imposed on you by the labour market circumstances?

M: Well, first of all I think people have inner needs about learning things and study, because I do have fun when I study it's never boring I always find something interesting even the specific subject is boring sometime. I find some interesting things.. I think that I quite like learning things.

AK: So it's like a need to learn and then a secondary thought is to combine this with a profession with working...

M: Right! Yes, a need to learn anyway, generally, because I do the same with other things in my life not just academic studying

AK: Do you agree that you're a lifelong learner?

M. Yes, I guess, I never thought about it (laughs)

AK: What do you understand by lifelong learning?

M: I understand that people care about what they do, they want to go on further and searching why they do, and find out how they can do it better, or help others doing better what they do or they care just because they care doing it and finding out why, the results of it, I think it's about care, people care

AK: Have you supported yourself in these studies, who has paid for your studies?

M: Me just me

AK: I have financed my studies too. All studies I did was with tuition that my parents or I paid. I didn't have state support. But do you think it's the responsibility of the individual to do this caring?

M: Yes, I do. You have to do on your own, and it's really worth if you do all of them nobody else has helped you it's your achievement even if you fail, somebody feels proud of this, it was a good thing to do

AK: The literature I have studied supports that lifelong learning is an imperative, it's a way that the state has found to transfer the responsibility of learning on the individual. What do you think about that?

M: Emm...

AK: Would you like the state to have supported all this studying?

M: Yes, I would like the thinking of being taken care of by my government, I would love this, or if what I've been doing had some... somebody would ever show respect to what I have accomplished, and make it worth my while, as far as the government is concerned.

AK: Would you say that respect has to do with recognizing what you've done...

M: Recognising yes, and it would be a good thing not because it's in a selfish way, look what I've done, but the thing that I care, and it'll be a great thing if there are people who care about what they do, we would have a better society and protect this material if we're all material or resource in this society.

AK: Let me close this part of this interview, and conclude that you believe that you're an Ill and you have educated yourself extensively by self-supporting yourself all these years, and you have been driven to these choices primarily because you like to develop yourself to learn because you care, but some stimuli have been created through your jobs and secondarily you also care about using this knowledge to find a better job.

Yes, exactly... to do my job better, because I had a job already when I studied

This leads me to the next part of LLL and work.

You chose these areas of studies studied different things, because you related this to a job you did. So you think that doing education is related to your professional life..

M: Mmm, well, my choices were affected by my career that's for sure, because I chose what I did, and what I'm doing right now because of my career but no it's not only to find a better job but to do what you do in a more profound way, you feel better you feel more confident, and if this has an effect on how you present yourself to an employer yes then ok, it might be to find a better job or to sustain what you have or become better

AK: So, you don't think learning as an obligation but mostly as a need coming from the deep of yourself

M: [inaudible] Yes it's not something I have to do

so it might be a matter of nature, character or experience that has led you to all these rather than labour market considerations?

M: Well, after 16, no 17 years of teaching I wouldn't think I have a big problem finding a job with all this experience but still I chose this degree because I did it for me and become a better professional and maybe have another career on what I'm doing, I can expand what I'm doing not just teaching

AK: What kind of benefits have you had on your job because of learning?

M: Right, I feel really safe, when it comes to decisions like a methodology or having to hire staff, or business choices I really feel safe because I have the background now,

AK: is this true for your previous jobs and education, when you said you were a secretary and you did accountancy...

M: Yes, to feel safer in my decisions, not to be just intuition or rely on my instinct (laughs),

AK: Have the different working environments created any problems for your learning, like long hours? Did they help you, for example through work-life balance policies that they might had..

M: Ah... no I don't know any policies for studies

AK: Did they know that you were studying?

M: Not really, they found out after finished...

AK: Why is that?

M: Because they would use me in different ways, they would behave in different ways...

AK: What do you mean?

M: You know, now that you know more let's use you more, then when I had accomplished, I could say now I know, you can use me, I got promoted twice just of what I knew

AK: So it was recognized by your employers, was that in Greece or in Australia?

M: No, no in Australia of course..

AK: but at the time you were doing your studies you were afraid that your boss would give you more work to do and this might affect your studies?

M: They would like to check me like scanning and it was always the possibility that I wouldn't have the whole knowledge, a certificate is not really enough, it's a matter of confidence. I wanted to be in the known and pass their test...

AK: Now you're the boss of yourself, do you impose problems on you as a student?

M: Sometimes I behave as a teacher to other teachers, I'm a teacher and it's like having friends we work together we're all bosses in a way but someone has to lead, of course I'm the owner but I don't want them to think that I manipulate things, and use them, I respect them as individuals, I'm always a teacher even if I'm a boss, I teach younger colleagues, and I get their feedback and I respect their feedback.

AK: yes, I wanted to find out if you as a boss allow time to you as a student to study?

M: No, I sacrifice a little bit of my family life, a lot...

AK: Which leads me to the question of how's your life as a lifelong learner [interrupt]

M: juggling

AK: I know what you mean... I'm also juggling although I don't have kids.

M: But you're married, right? And you work long hours, possibly more than me.

AK: Yes, but I'm supposed to have more free time than you, at least this is what people think. How LLL has affected positively and negatively your life...

M: I want to believe that it's more positively, because I set a good example, first I set a good example for my students because they know that I'm studying, for my children and we're studying together when I'm home, with my girls, and this is the part I love because studying is part of our life, ok, and this is a good thing for a mother and the kids and I feel great about my husband, [in a lower conspiratory voice] I'm talking about positive things now, [back to the normal tone] because he knows that I care and he admires me, I want him to do so for the rest of my life, but I know it's not going to be like that...

I'm responsible as a person, so I'm responsible to the students and the teachers who work for me there so I don't make great sacrifices in my job, because other people benefit from that and I don't want them to benefit less I'm struggling for everything to be ok, not just coping but struggling, I want to be a good student, because I know what a good student should be like

AK: When do you study? You said you don't sacrifice professional time, but I suppose that you sacrifice some other time [interrupt]

M: family time I try to combine my studying with their studying, when we go out for fun, such as a picnic and I get my things and I read while they're playing but they're very helpful and they're really autonomous because I'm like that, and they know to do their own thing, so yes, I think there are some positive things there, everybody knows his schedule and everything seems to be working fine.

AK: You didn't mention your personal time..

M: Personal time... this is my personal life, because I've chosen to do that, other people have hobbies, going out, or dancing, I don't know swimming or whatever, but this is my hobby, my hobby seems to be studying because I feel happy

AK: any problems you have faced due to your multiple identities, are there anything that impedes your learning efforts? Do you feel guilt?

M: Yes, but I'm always guilty about something, it's a personality issue maybe,

AK: Do you feel that you're stealing time from them?

M: Yes, stealing time from them not giving them what I could give them, efficiency is not the issue, I know I could give them more, and if I want to give them more, and I can't, so not guilty but sad, but then I know that I have to do my own thing, because this thing is for me too, it's not just giving all the time

AK: Do you get help [interrupt]

M: Yes from everybody I mean everybody like my husband, he's been very very helpful, my daughters and my colleagues, when I have to skip a class they can help me with that or in case I need somebody to do something at home my family would take care, my husband...

AK: He's very supportive in what you do.

M: Yes,

AK: Do you think he's supportive because he expects what you do will affect the family,

M:some profit?

AK: some profit in a wider sense, or is it that he very much believes in your need to learn to develop yourself... I suppose you've done this many times before,

M: Yes we were married and I had a baby I think I have convinced him that this is me, so if he wants to be with me this is how it's gonna be, because this what I do if he loves me he loves me because I'm this way

AK: Is he an LLL himself?

M: No, he's not!

AK: But he understands what you're doing

M: Yes, this is amazing now that you're saying. It's like nobody can stop me.

AK: You have not negotiated this?

M: No, never but he never said no.

AK: What about friends, what do your friends think about that?

M: They think that I over-exaggerate.

AK: My personal experience is bitter, not entirely but you know I feel sometimes that they pity me for all the trouble I take, what about you do they criticize you?

M: Yes, criticism, why do you do this, you don't need that, why do you do this to yourself, this is a torture but for me it's a like a hobby everybody has a hobby I have this

AK: How does this make you feel, I mean this reaction?

M: Snobbish. At the beginning people found it snobbish on my part, shocking that I didn't spend much time with my family as I should have and then again when they ask me questions about what I've learned and I start discussing things they get very interested, oh you learn all these things, it's really cool, they quite like it, it's not jealousy but you do something different and for in the Greek culture it's very different, why you do this thing to yourself.

AK: And the last part it's academia and LLL. Quite honestly this is an area of particular interest to me, because I have read all these articles and I haven't seen any criticism on academia. Whether you feel , not just now but in what you did before, the

people who run the academia really take into consideration your identity as a woman and a mother?

M: Because I'm experienced, they know that I'm critical, and they're scared about my reactions, or how hard I can come on them, on how much do I demand, and I always have this in mind, I try to be one of the students, because this is my place, yes, I'm more critical because I'm experienced.

AK: I see what you mean. Actually I do the same and sometimes I feel like being rather aggressive because I feel completely alienated with the academia, especially the British academia (laughs)... Would they take into consideration that you are a mother for example in case of the deadlines?

M: It would help but they shouldn't I think

AK. Mmm, why do you say that?

M: Because if they did, I wouldn't cope well with deadlines so If I've known that I have a another week or another month it would be the same for me because I need deadlines, to have a schedule, what would help for me is to know the deadlines in advance really in advance so I can program my life, my time, most of them are cooperating because they understand, not all of them..

AK: Do you think your tutors, now or previous ones, really think of you as one with all these different commitments?

M: No, I'm one of the students. But I think this should be the case, I've chosen to do that I knew from the beginning

AK: So, you think it's fair to be treated the same as all the students no matter of their identity, equally

M: It would be a good idea for people who are married or experienced to have special courses students there will be of the same critical level, the same needs, demands or more or less the same schedule

AK: to be placed in classes with other mature students. Do you think that your academic environments have helped you if you can think of any examples that you received help?

M: They understand, I haven't faced problems like this they are all flexible with us.

AK, If we talk about your current situation, Is it because they are aware of what you're going through and that's why they show flexibility?

M: I couldn't possibly know, just because they're more experienced and grown up I think they respect that I'm here studying trying to cope with things they show this flexibility

AK: All in all you would say that this has been an enjoyable journey [interrupt]

M: Always

AK and you would do that again, something that you enjoyed no matter how difficult it was...

M: Yes, it's like playing games by learning things and trying to find out things about my life...if I ever manage to find these answers

AK: If you hadn't done all these studies, would you have the same chances in terms of labour,

M: Here in Greece yes, I've done it before I studied it, that wasn't a barrier that I didn't have a diploma or a certificate on the things I had to work. I worked as a secretary and then in the economics dpt and then I said why not I study something and so I studied teaching

AK: I'm doing these interviews in the middle of the crisis. Actually my supervisor has drawn my attention to the necessity for this question I guess he wanted to know if this crisis has affected my data somehow. So my question is how do you think that this economic crisis has or will affect you?

M: I did something funny this year. I wanted to find out if I could find a job elsewhere and I did. I keep telling people that not all people that I interview are quite proper to get a job, really they hold certificates, not that I show disrespect to their studies and the things that might have done in their field but possibly they don't know how to sell it, or they know but they can't put it in practice. I put a bet with a friend and now I work now to another school because I gave my word. My friend told me not to tell them that I study. And I tried to find a job in the middle of the crisis because of the bet and I did, my boss knows nothing about my own school. She thinks that I work in two schools, but I'll let her know after Christmas, I have to

AK: The bet was to actually work there?

M: Yes, to work yes, get an offer and work in the middle of crisis because I do believe that people cannot find a job because they don't know, not just sell it... mm, I don't really know

AK: You think it's not just the qualifications

M: Yes, it's idiosyncrasy, it's not qualifications in the sense of certificates and degrees Open minded, not really snobbish cooperative, the right personality and this has nothing to do with the crisis

AK: These people who say that women are less privileged in the market, because of their multiple commitments, would you reply that it might be their choice not to have these opportunities?

AK: I think mainly it's their choice, if you show people what you really need and what you really want to do, and you're in the correct environment, and the environment of your family is what you have chosen people who understand you your needs your personality and the way you want to lead your life, then yes it's your choice.

AK: And this is the same in relation to the job

M: I think it's easier for women to find a job in this profession than men. They chose me because I'm a woman this boss of mine, I've noticed other men coming to give applications for the job but when the school year started I saw no man.

There was one who was given the schedule and everything and I thought ok, he's going to be one of my colleagues and two weeks later I asked what happened to this gentleman "He was a gentleman"

AK: So there's some positive discrimination here... in this profession.

M: Yes, see this is very interesting interview for me, because I just found that you are an employer and an employee, so I go back in my questions, I have a blueprint, but I guess I have to forget it with you (laughs). So the current boss doesn't know that you're a ll, right?

AK: Why is that?

M: It was in the bet with my friend

AK: Ok, so why you think your friend asked you not to reveal that you are studying?

M: To minimize my chances...

AK: So your friend thought that your degree studies would increase your chances for a job.

M: Yes...

AK: But you proved that you didn't need this to get the job.

M: Exactly.

AK: OK, so this links to what you said before that, in a way it proves it that you've been doing all these studies not as a result of an anxiety about your professional future but you're doing it as a genuine need to develop yourself

M: just me. Yes, what else is there?

AK: How did you feel about this interview.

M: relaxed, and nice and comfortable

AK; How would you like me to do with this data, I mean you know that I'm doing this research about women, what would you like me to tell the public...

M: Tell them to be for women less depended on men. And I'm not a feminist myself.

AK: I'm not either, I think... (laughs)

I used to and I really regretted. I've given it up years ago.

So what what would you like to say about women lifelong learners? Women work with their instincts more than men... Not to feel insecure and support their dreams for their own reasons, try not to identify themselves within their family environment we don't belong in a particular environment we have to follow our needs and the things we want to do, and it's us who have to decide and not the society and sometimes you're trapped in things you have to do and things that you should never do, just because other people have imposed these on you.

AK: But for you LLL was something you chose to do, not imposed on you...

M: Yes, I chose to do it, it's a kind of freedom, knowledge is freedom this is how I see things, when you know more you feel safe to decide things that other people would never do, I think you feel better, you know more you can make more choices...

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