# Why Do Students Miss Lectures?: An Exploratory Study of a Faculty at a Post 1992 University

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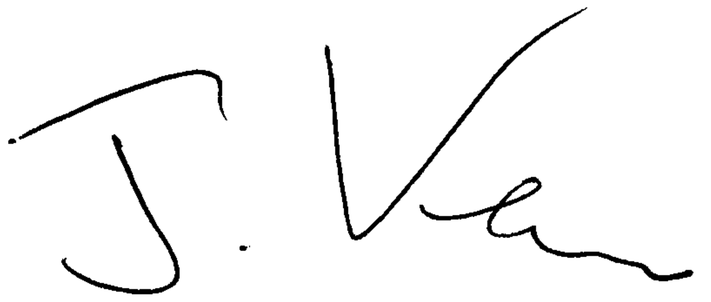
***This thesis was completed as part of the Doctoral Programme in Educational Research.***

## *Declaration*

*This thesis results entirely from my own work and has not been offered previously for any other degree or diploma.*

*Signature -* 

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*Abstract*

**Why Do Students Miss Lectures?: An Exploratory Study of a Faculty at a Post 1992 University**

A large number of factors are known to be influential on student absenteeism, but little work has been undertaken into understanding this behaviour at a more conceptualised level. In the UK, it appears that only one small scale study has been undertaken into reasons for absenteeism specifically from lectures, despite the growing concerns about this behaviour. This thesis attempts to both improve understanding of why students miss lectures in a Faculty at a post 1992 university, and to explain this behaviour in a more conceptualised way. Nine attributions categorised using three headings: 'student', 'lecture' and 'context' are first proposed from which three broad constructs are derived that, it is argued, give meaning to the experience of missing lectures for many students in the Faculty. The three constructs are disinterest, disquiet, and disengagement. Disinterest is about an approach to study and learning in the context of missing lectures and is understood as the `Can`t be bothered` attitude to attending lectures; disquiet is about the affective meaning of students missing lectures and is a `Don`t like it! response to the lecture experience; and disengagement is a rational assessment of lectures as having a low expected gain to the student as a `What`s the point?` deduction in relation to attending lectures. It is possible that these three constructs allow for a reconstruction of the empirical data within a holistic framework interpreting the behaviour of missing lectures from either an etiological perspective, or from an individual psychoanalytical perspective. Low immediacy, instrumentalism, expectations, isolation, discomfort and goal ambiguity, are argued to be the important influences on disinterest, disquiet and disengagement. This thesis presents empirical evidence supporting disinterest, disquiet and disengagement as important constructs in the student's attendance behaviour, and considers how these constructs might be used to guide future research. The thesis concludes with a discussion of the issues for the Faculty raised by the research.

***Acknowledgements.***

I would like to acknowledge my gratitude towards my supervisor Professor Colin Rogers (and previously Professor Peter Goodyear who is now in Sydney, Australia). Colin took me on after Peter left for new adventures, and has shown me support and kindness throughout. There are so many others I also need to thank as well. Colleagues who have listened to me discuss the work I have done throughout the Doctoral programme, and who have also been kind enough to read my drafts and make comment. A number of my friends have also done the same. I am particularly indebted to Professor Bob Ryan for helping me in the latter stages with certain ideas and proof reading, and to those mentioned in the thesis who helped in various ways (Ann, Sarah, Rob, Lyndon (the random number generator!) and the two unnamed tutors). A final and important acknowledgement goes to my partner Amanda for all the same reasons.

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my good friend who was inspirational in my decision to do a PhD, but sadly is not here to see the finished thesis.

In memory of Dr Anthony Roy Beasley (R.I.P)

## Chapter One: Introduction

This thesis is an attempt to study a complex behaviour at a Faculty in a post 1992 university. The behaviour at issue is student non-attendance at scheduled lectures. Very little research has been undertaken specifically into the reasons why students choose to miss lectures, and no attempt at exploring this behaviour at a more conceptual and holistic level has been undertaken before.

The main challenge of this thesis is the lack of a relevant educational theory to guide the work. Although educational researchers are accustomed to studying complex behaviours like student learning and student motivation, the methodological issue of not having a direct theoretical framework to guide the work is a challenge, but also an opportunity for the thesis. It will be shown that the theory of choice in rational cognitive terms is well established, but the study of complex student behaviour like missing lectures is more effectively done at the current time phenomenologically.

The aim of the thesis is to improve understanding of why students miss lectures in the Faculty and to consider practice in light of this understanding. The thesis is thus a pragmatic piece of work which seeks both to improve practice and to guide future research in this area. The thesis is a response to a very real concern of the Faculty involved in this study, and the results may have implications for other similar faculties. An aim of this thesis has been to

develop a theoretically and empirically coherent research base for those involved in improving pedagogy within similar contexts. In the conclusion, the thesis attempts to briefly identify the more general implications for the Faculty which may be relevant for application elsewhere.

The thesis is a continuation of previous work on the Faculty related to students missing lectures and is motivated by the real educational concerns that this earlier work highlighted (Keane, 2001a, 2001b & 2002). Faculty tutors see associations between students missing lectures and student performance (Keane, 2001a) that have been supported empirically in many other studies (for example, by Romer, 1993). These tutors are also concerned about the significance of missing lectures for their own relationship with students (Keane, 2001a & 2001b). More widely in the UK, there is a growing commentary on the association between how students study and absenteeism in class (for example, Jones, 2002 & King, 2004). It is reported that Oxford University has decided that students missing lectures is a source of concern (THES, 2006), and two other universities are also now piloting a particular technological solution to monitor the levels of student absenteeism in response to similar concerns (Bowen et al, 2005). In Australia, student absenteeism from class is seen as a dysfunctional behaviour within the wider context of the massification of higher education and the increasing choice Australian students feel they have over whether or not to attend classes (McInnis, 2001). The suggestion is that Australian students are increasingly negotiating with their universities in what they do and how they study. Similar perceptions of choice by students in the UK as a response to the massification

of higher education have also been reported, but not in relation to absenteeism (for example, Silver & Silver, 1997).

Within a professional context the opportunity was available to study why students miss lectures in a Faculty which has been concerned about this behaviour for the last seven years. Evidence about the depth of these concerns will be presented in this chapter and in chapter three. Although the main aim of the thesis is to improve understanding by offering a more conceptualised perspective on the phenomenon of students missing lectures, it is also an aim of the thesis to offer insights for improving practice in the Faculty. This is considered in the final chapter.

In this thesis there is no attempt to settle the argument as to whether lectures are a valuable method of managing the learning process, or if they have value to students. Contributions for (Hale Committee, 1964 & Murphy, 1998) and against (Bligh 1998, Laurillard 1993, and Johnstone & Su, 1994 ) in this debate are still inconclusive, although as will be shown in chapter five, one determining factor in the degree of absenteeism is likely to be the value that students themselves place upon the experience as an aid to their own learning. A particular problem in resolving this debate is the way value is perceived. This thesis will not enter into this discussion, but instead seeks to explore at a more conceptualised level what it means when students in large numbers frequently miss lectures in a specific Faculty and how education practitioners might respond to this behaviour in practical terms.

The site for the thesis is a Business School at a post 1992 university. Although the Faculty offers a range of postgraduate, professional and research courses, the behaviour of missing lectures of interest in this thesis is by full time undergraduate students studying the main management subjects of finance, marketing, human resources and business management. The research outlined in chapter three is based on undergraduate students studying these subjects. These students made up approximately half the numbers in the Faculty in total.. At the time the research was undertaken, the Faculty had 1482 full time undergraduate students, 1233 of these were studying for a degree and 249 for the Higher National Diploma/Certificate qualification (HND/HNC). Of the four subject areas, by far the largest numbers of students were studying business management which accounted for over 350 degree students in the Faculty. Marketing had nearly 250, human resources over 120 and finance just over 80 students. .

A degree is awarded to students in the Faculty for successfully completing three years of study comprising 30 modules in total. The HND qualification is awarded for successfully completing 20 modules, equivalent in effect to the first two years of the degree. Although HND students share a number of first and second year modules with degree students, HND students are also required to do a project and a skills module that the degree students do not. The fact that modules are shared between degree and HND students is intentional because it means that HND students who achieve an overall merit can, and often do, top up to the degree. The HNC is similar to the HND, except that the HNC qualification is awarded to students for completing only

sixteen modules, including the project and the skills module taken by HND students. Degree students on entry need to have at least two A levels (or equivalent), HND and HNC students need only one A level (or equivalent).

There are no single subject qualifications offered by the Faculty[1]. All the undergraduate programmes are available as either a major/minor or a joint qualification, meaning that any student has the choice of taking a variety of subject combinations, such as a major/minor degree in finance and marketing, or a joint HND in human resources and business management[2]. Most modules within a particular subject field are thus made available to students in other relevant fields. A student majoring in marketing with a minor in business management, for example, could choose to take a particular management finance module if the module was within the relevant subject field map for that qualification. Lectures in the Faculty, therefore, often comprise of students studying for HND/HNCs or degrees, on either major/minor or joint programmes in the four main subjects.

**Students Missing Lectures in the Faculty.**

[1] This is no longer the case. Single honours degrees are now available in some subject areas.
[2] Student numbers are thus assessed on the following basis. If a student is taking a major/minor in, for example, finance and marketing, this student will be estimated to be equal to 0.75 and 0.25 respectively in full time equivalent terms to those subjects. Two students majoring in marketing would therefore be equal to 1.5 marketing students. Joints are rated 0.5/0.5 between the subjects. In addition, the University modular scheme allows for students to take subject combinations across Faculties. One example would be a joint degree in finance and sports science. In practice, much less than 10% of students at the University study programmes that are cross faculty. .

Some of the background context to students missing lectures in the Faculty is discussed in Keane (2001a, 2001b & 2002). These papers discuss the tutors` concerns about students missing lectures and the statistical relationship between attendance at lectures and student performance on one large first year module. Students missing lectures has been a source of concern for some time in the Faculty and as a phenomenon has been discussed in meetings in the Faculty since at least 1998.

A more detailed overview of the pattern of students missing lectures is in chapter three. One source of information used in determining this pattern is the minutes of the meetings where subject tutors in the Faculty meet to review progress and identify issues for their subject field for that year. There is also a combined field meeting each year which discusses issues that have been identified across the fields. Four subject (marketing finance human resources and business management) and one combined field meeting are held in total each year. During the period December 1998 to February 2002 (17 meetings in total) tutor concerns about students missing lectures were mentioned in these field meetings on no less than 44 separate occasions[3]. The minutes suggest, inter alia, that students missing lectures in the Faculty follow a certain pattern:

1 Third year students miss lectures less frequently than first or second year students.

[3] Ann Taylor, a Faculty administrator, kindly provided this data.

2 Higher National Diploma (HND) students miss lectures more often than degree students.

3 Students missing lectures increases gradually over the semester,

4 Students missing lectures is particularly apparent when assignments are due in.

Some other insights from the minutes were:

`*Student attendance was poor because they (students) relied on the books*` ($7^{th}$ February 1999 meeting. Mentioned with respect to module BM202[4])

`*Concerns still continue to be expressed about the lack of attendance and pre-work in the case of some modules*` (20 September 1999 meeting of Combined field Board)

`*Again to encourage attendance it was proposed to designate the module category A, where compulsory attendance is required*` (18 September 2001 meeting of Combined Field. Mentioned with respect to module SF121)

These minutes suggest, therefore, that relying on books, not being prepared and lack of compulsion to attend, may be important factors influencing attendance.

Field meetings since 2002 have regularly revisited the issue of why students miss lectures.

## Factors in student absenteeism:

[4] BM refers to business management. The relevant acronyms for the other fields are HT (human resources) MM (marketing) and FM (finance). SF121 is a skills module taken by all the degree students which is not therefore field specific..

Although there appear to be no direct theoretical explanations for why students miss lectures, there is some empirical evidence indicating the factors that may be important in determining student absenteeism. Reasons for absence by students have been identified in a small number of studies: Morgan (2001), Woodfield (2006) (both pertinent to the UK higher education sector), Longhurst (1999) who offers interesting results from the UK further education sector and Gallichon & Friedman (1988) and McCutcheon & Beder (1987), who examined absenteeism in the US context

Morgan (2001) is the first of only two papers to explore the reasons why students do not specifically attend lectures at a UK university. The paper is based on a small scale investigation of business management students in their final year at Bradford University. After interviewing three students, piloting a draft questionnaire comprising 19 items identified from the interviews, and then surveying 48 students who attended a particular module, Morgan found that only three items seemed to have a positive influence on whether students attended lectures. These were: the year of study, whether the lecture was considered interesting, and the attitude of the student. Morgan concluded that there may be a more powerful motivation to attend in the final year and that attitudes towards attendance may be influenced by poor time management and social activities the night before a given lecture. The paper did not attempt to provide a deeper theoretical understanding of the processes involved.

The only other paper on why students miss lectures (and tutorials) at a UK university is by Kossatz (2005)[5]. This paper had not been published when the research reported in chapter three was undertaken and therefore, as with Woodfield (2006) below, it had no direct bearing on the research method or findings obtained in this thesis. Kossatz undertook exploratory interviews with 12 students and then did a follow up survey of 155 students at London Metropolitan University. The results of the survey suggested that illness, transport problems and having to hand in other assessments were by far the most important influences on why students miss lectures. The discussion of the findings of the correlational analysis of the data included a comment that a student's sense of self esteem and their perceived ability to cope with lectures may be significant in none attendance at lectures. The results also suggested that the attitude of the lecturer, as perceived by students in the lecture, may also be important for some students.

The other recent paper by Woodfield et al (2006)[6] reports the findings of a substantial two part study of the relationship between attendance at seminars and other class activities such as laboratory sessions (importantly not lectures), and performance of graduating students at Sussex University over three years. The principal concern of the paper is whether gender is

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[5] As with Woodfield below, an email was sent to Rita Kossatz in late 2006 about her paper. The reply stated that she was on maternity leave. .

[6] The very recent publication of this paper means it had no bearing on the method and research findings reported later in this thesis. Correspondence with Ruth Woodfield has taken place. She has been sent a copy of Keane (2001b) because it contains empirical data on attendance and performance which supports some of the conclusions in her paper. There is some agreement between the paper and this thesis, even if Woodfield et al made use of particular models of cognition and personality in their work and cite a number of papers about students attitudes and behaviour that were not considered here. The paper is principally about gender and performance in relation to absenteeism from seminars and other class activities that were argued to be compulsory which is why the authors did not collect data on lectures or consider studying absenteeism from the perspective of choice. Their research was funded and is a much larger study than this thesis.

influential in this relationship. However, interesting findings were noted in relation to the possible reasons and feelings expressed by students about missing classes. The research design involved a general questionnaire to 650 students and a more detailed questionnaire completed and diaries kept by 39 students who received a small payment for their participation. Woodfield et al's work suggests that the students' cognitive ability and personality may be important explanatory variables in determining application to study. Female students were found to be more conscientious in their studying behaviour and to be more trusting and compliant than their male counterparts, all of which appeared to be important in predicting levels of absence. The relevance of attendance at class as a predictor of degree performance, even after compensating for both cognitive ability and personality, was strongly supported by this research. Woodfield et al in conclusion argued that understanding the factors involved in encouraging student attendance is important because student performance is not simply about personality and the ability of the student. They argued that more work should be done on identifying the reasons why students miss class in order to understand why students perform in the way they do..

Absenteeism has been recognised in the further, as well as the higher education sector. Longhurst (1999), exasperated about the levels of absenteeism for one of his own classes, sought to investigate the reasons for non-attendance. His approach was first to identify, in a preliminary student survey, the broad range of possible reasons for missing class which were then used as the basis for more in-depth interviews with students. The analysis of

these interviews suggested that there were a large number of factors in the decision to miss class which were tested statistically using a questionnaire survey of 107 students. The fifteen factors identified as being statistically significant are listed below in order of importance.

Illness
Medical appointments
Weather conditions
Social activities
Doing college work
Transport problems
With friends from college
Family obligations
Holidays
With friends not from college
Pretending illness
Seeing boy/friend
Work commitments
Dislike subjects
Dislike teachers

Another paper, but this time US in origin, that looked at absenteeism of students at university is by Gallichon & Friedman (1988). They surveyed 300 students studying at a university in New York. The first part of the questionnaire asked students about their attitudes and opinions towards socializing and studying. Part two then asked students to quantify the importance of specific reasons why students miss lectures such as employment and interest in the subject. In part three, students were asked to self report on how many classes they had missed in the last month, and the final part of the questionnaire asked for personal data on gender, age and so on. In this study, thirteen factors were found to be strongly correlated with reported absences as below:

Finding class boring

Outside employment
Dislike professor
Class of no use to future career
Beautiful weather
Disliking class
Having access to another students notes
Staying out late the night before
Bad weather
Responsibilities to school club, team etc
Drinking alcohol beverages
Smoking marijuana
Using drugs

Finally, a much smaller empirical study by McCutcheon & Beder (1987), revealed 51 separate reasons why students miss class which they then synthesised using factor analysis into six factors as below:

Negative perceptions of Professor
Irresponsible pursuit of leisure
Fatigue associated with excessive socializing
Low incentive or penalty for missing
Academic failure
Other responsibilities

The results of these papers suggest that there are identifiable and specific reasons for students missing classes. The general themes which emerge include the obvious one that attitude toward the tutor is important for some students missing class, as are outside commitments. Finding the subject boring may also be important.

In total, seven general factors emerge from these papers[7] that may be influential in why students choose to miss class as indicated in the table below. Of these seven factors just two appear common to all of the studies:

[7] This does not include Woodfield et al (2006) for the reasons given in the earlier footnote.

attitude towards the tutor and the negative impact upon attendance of the student's personal and social life.

Table 1: Main factors in student absenteeism

| | | M | L | G | B |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | attitude towards tutor | X | X | X | X |
| 2 | subject boring | | X | X | X |
| 3 | irrelevant to future aspirations/ careers | | X | X | |
| 4 | lack of interest in own education | X | X | | |
| 5 | not being organised for class | X | X | X | |
| 6 | negative impact upon social life | X | X | X | X |
| 7 | other outside commitments | | X | X | X |

(Note: **M** - Morgan; **L** - Longhurst; **G** - Galichon & Friedman ; **B** - McCutcheon & Beder )

A significant problem in interpreting the importance of these factors is both their high degree of interconnectedness and their relevance to this thesis. For example, finding the subject boring and attitude towards the tutor are likely to be related to one another. A student who has a poor attitude toward the tutor may also find the subject the tutor is teaching boring. At another level, being bored and not organised for class may also be highly influenced by social factors. In terms of relevance to the thesis, only one paper is specifically about lectures at a UK university, two papers are about US experience and are over fifteen years old, and the Longhurst paper is of a further education college.

The papers can also be criticised at a technical level. Morgan, for example, acknowledges the potential bias in only surveying students who had attended

a particular lecture. There are questions about how willingly these students volunteered and therefore how reliable were their responses. Morgan acknowledges these limitations. One criticism of the US studies and Longhurst is the fact that the number of absences relied on self report by the students. The statistical results thus depend heavily on the accuracy and honesty of the respondents. Woodfield et al (2006) noted that this was a particular issue in their study in that a number of male students were found to have significantly under reported their absences. The two US papers can also be criticised for the lack of a justification for the questions they used in their questionnaires. Unlike Morgan and Longhurst, it was not made clear how the questions used had been derived. Therefore, although these themes are useful in helping to design the research as explained in chapter three, the results obtained have some important limitations that need to be highlighted.

One final concern with concentrating on the factors associated with absenteeism is that they only offer a partial understanding of what by definition is a complex behaviour. Harvey et al (2006) have recently suggested that student behaviour increasingly needs to be studied at a more holistic level than simply identifying specific factors which time and time again can be shown to be relevant to the student experience, but offer little in the way of insight into how these factors need to be responded to. What is very clear from the papers above is that there are a considerably large number of factors involved, but there is no overall understanding of why students are absent.

## Research Question and Objectives

This thesis has one overriding research aim which is to investigate the reasons why students miss lectures in the Faculty. In so doing, the thesis needs to consider the observed pattern of missing lectures, and how the research will deepen understanding beyond the large number of factors known to be associated with student absenteeism. The thesis has the following principal question.

*Principal Question: Why do students in the Faculty miss lectures?*

With the following objectives:

1 To identify the key influences on why students miss lectures beyond the factors suggested by empirical research already undertaken on absenteeism.

2 To construct a deeper understanding of missing lectures that is more conceptual.

3 To consider the behaviour of missing lectures at a more holistic level

4 To outline the research that might be undertaken in future into missing lectures in light of the thesis.

5 To discuss the implications of missing lectures and how the Faculty might respond.

## Thesis structure and signposts

The next five chapters of the thesis are as follows:

Chapter two is a brief overview of some theoretical ideas concerning student behaviour. A deterministic process explaining student behaviour as a rational choice is presented which is followed by a discussion of student behaviour in the contexts of learning styles and learning orientations. The literature on student choice emphasises the role of beliefs in relation to expectations, goals and self efficacy. Styles and orientations are more concerned with learning behaviour as an outcome.

Chapter three begins by outlining in more detail the observed patterns of missing lectures in the Faculty. It is shown that students missing lectures is more pronounced amongst first years, that HND students miss lectures more frequently than degree students, and that students miss lectures in increasing numbers as the semester progresses. This is followed by an explanation and justification of the research design as a semi-structured interview with designated sub samples of students. The way these interviews were arranged and conducted is described in detail and how the data were interpreted is explained in depth. Meaning in the context of this interpretative method is based on the influence of student and conditional factors (student, lecture, context). The chapter explains how data were interpreted with a detailed example in Appendix A. In reflecting on the philosophical issues in

using interviews to explain the meaning of experience, it is shown that there are clear limitations in using words as data. The methodological position adopted is that scholarship in research is a process of systematic enquiry which is transparent and is based on an understanding that this thesis is a process of negotiation with a reader. Accepting the results of this approach is about intuition and the generation of recognizable realities. This is a professionally grounded thesis aimed ultimately at improving practice and the pragmatic implications of the thesis as they have value professionally is ultimately the justification for the method adopted.

Chapter four presents the first level interpretation of the interviews. A primary aim of the chapter is to offer a large number of examples of how the data were interpreted. Nine broad attributions that are associated with students missing lectures are identified that were derived using the three conditional factors (student, lecture and context). The results of this interpretation are subject to an assessment of data coverage, for deviant cases, and then to an evaluation of reliability using two tutors in the Faculty. A chi-square statistical test on the data is also undertaken as supplementary support that the attributions capture the main patterns of students missing lectures as revealed in chapter three. This chapter is supported by three appendices where data and the results of these evaluations are outlined in detail.

Chapter five presents a broader and more constructed interpretation of the findings in chapter four. What emerges is that three broad concepts (3Ds) explain much of the data about the experience of missing lectures. The first

`D` is disquiet which refers to the affective meaning of missing lectures that makes students feel discomfort in them for specific reasons. This is referred to as the `Don`t like it!` meaning behind students missing lectures. The second concept is disinterest which is interpreted as an attitude towards lectures in general meaning a student `Can`t be bothered` to attend. The third `D` is disengagement which is a rational assessment of outcome of the lecture in terms of expected gain and is presented as an experience which can be interpreted as meaning `What`s the point?` of going to a lecture. The main influences associated with these experiences are argued to be instrumentalism, expectations, value, goals, isolation, discomfort and immediacy. A key message from this chapter is how the 3Ds appear to explain why final year students miss lectures less than first years, why HND students miss more lectures than degree registered students, and why lectures are missed more regularly as the semester progresses.

Chapter six discusses the findings of the thesis.. Possibilities for how the 3Ds might be interpreted holistically are offered from an etiological and a psychoanalytical perspective. The first etiological holistic interpretation of the 3Ds is argued to explain disengagement. The possibility of a vicious circularity to missing lectures is also offered. The second holistic interpretation uses a neo-Freudian theory of communication known as Transactional Analysis (TA). The possibility that missing lectures represents a crossed transaction in which some students may be struggling at a subconscious level with lectures is suggested. It is proposed that future research using the 3Ds should begin by verifying some of the propositions

suggested in chapter five. The most important research tasks are to undertake longitudinal studies into the development of the 3Ds, to assess if there is an etiological relationship between them, and to consider whether missing lectures can be explained from an ego perspective.. The chapter then discusses the potential interventions for the Faculty arising from the 3Ds. The importance of building good and close learning relationships with students in lectures as part of an affective learning strategy is discussed, and the importance of improving self efficacy to create positive expectations for lectures is outlined. Some of the wider implications of the 3Ds in what they suggest about passive aggressive attitudes and withdrawal are also raised. The thesis is concluded by reflecting briefly on the principal question and four objectives of the thesis.

## Chapter Two: Explaining Student Behaviour

This chapter introduces some important ideas about student behaviour. Two contrasting approaches will be outlined. First, the rational cognitive explanation of student behaviour based on the idea of reasoned choice is discussed; second, student behaviour in relation to styles of learning and learning orientations will be briefly explained.

### Rational Choice

The theoretical discussion of choice begins with an understanding that in psychological terms it is the outcome of a process that starts with the formation of beliefs. Humans, through their capacity to reason, will make choices about how to behave based on beliefs rather than simply react instinctively to situations and circumstances (Locke & Latham, 1994). This ability to reason implies a purpose behind human agency that is necessary if choice is based on something specific and is logical. Reason can be described as purposive and intentional thought (Ajzen, 1985). In order to reason, however, an individual needs beliefs. Beliefs form the premises upon which argument and other modalities of rational discourse are based. Without beliefs a person could not reason. How people come to form their beliefs is not clear, but it may be related to the innate human ability to reflect on experience (Kolb, 1984) as a heuristic and learn. In order to reason and thus

to make choices, requires that at some level learning (the acquisition of beliefs, justified or otherwise) must have taken place[8].

The learning that underpins belief ultimately comes from experience. Learning from experience is what Dewey (1936) considered the `*situations of learning*`. In other words, for Dewey, beliefs are at the individual level the learned personal knowledge of the world that has been acquired through experience[9]. Within the empiricist and pragmatist traditions, learning, and the formation of beliefs, is viewed as an inductive process at first, moving from experience (data) to beliefs which may be about the world of observation (observational beliefs) or in a more generalised form (theoretical or conceptual beliefs) (Sosa, 1997). Once a person acquires beliefs, reasoning in a variety of forms can occur, and given intentionality and goal seeking behaviour, the individual will make choices which drive their actions[10].

This simple linear model can be represented as in Figure 1 overleaf:

[8] Beliefs are taken at the subjective level to be personal knowledge. It is the personal beliefs an individual has which determines how they reason when given the choice. Whether it is justified and thus can be considered true knowledge is really a question for philosophers to debate.(see Gettier, 1963).

[9] A simple example of this is learning that fire is hot. If after experiencing fire there was no learning and forming the knowledge (belief) that fire burns, an individual would simply continue to be burned when s/he came into contact with fire.

[10] Although intuitively compelling this linear model of individual choice can be criticised. It ignores, for example, the recursive element in belief formation in that our choices and our actions influence our experience and our interpretation of our beliefs. However, as a simple model it offers a structure for understanding at least certain elements of the psychology of choice.

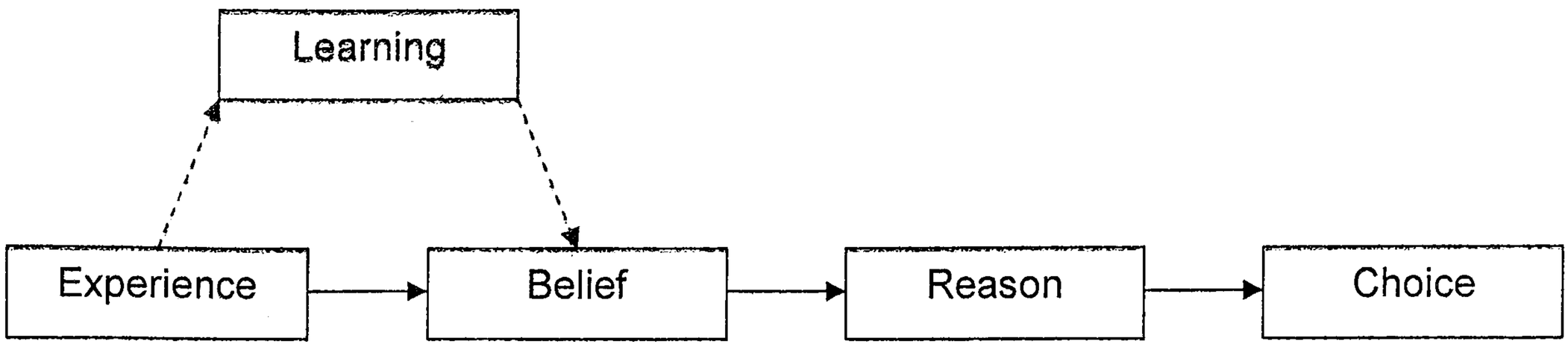


Figure 1: Experience through learning leading to reason and choice

If belief is the result of learning by experience, then reasoning based on these beliefs allows individuals to make sense of the world. Beliefs at a deep level are how the individual constructs their version of the world and forms the basis of their world view. Beliefs, as outlined above, can operate at the level of what the individual can or may observe as aspects of their experience (experiential beliefs) and they can also operate at the theoretical or conceptual level (constructed beliefs). These beliefs can also be existential with reference to the self (reflective belief) or with reference to the external world (referential belief) (Sosa, 1997). Beliefs about both self and the world are required if a person is to have some sense of the world and make choices for how s/he will behave within it. The schematic above incorporating this interplay at the level of self as the development of personality and attitude can thus be extended as below in Figure 2:

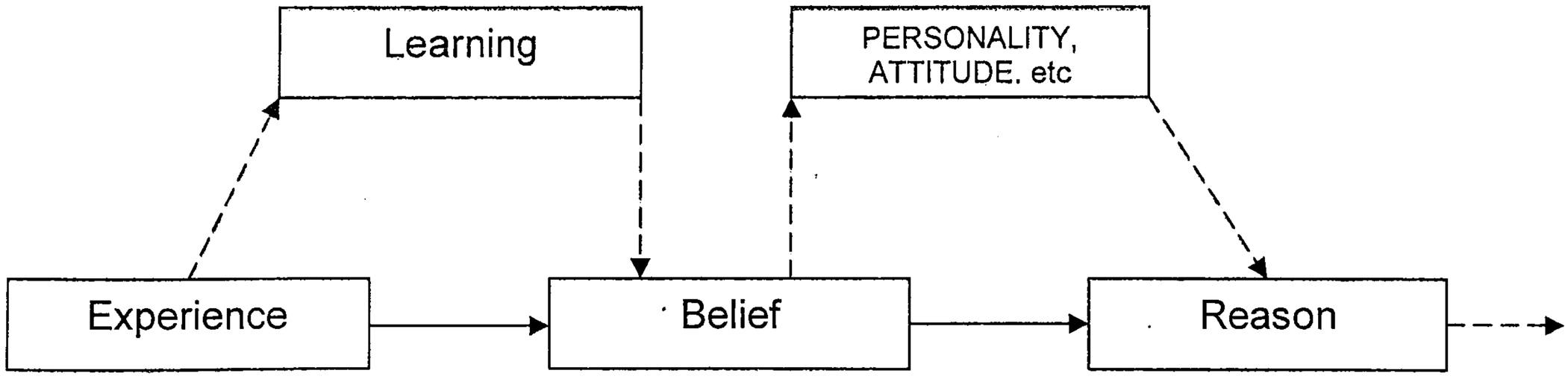


Figure 2: Beliefs as personality and attitude influence reason

At a philosophical level, the fact that people experience the world and form beliefs is based on the assumption that they have consciousness of it. According to Locke (1996) consciousness must contain volition (will) or ultimately human beliefs are based solely on external experience. The existence of volition, and thus of agency, must be assumed if there is real choice in behaviour (Bandura, 1997). It is thus volition that generates intention and purpose in behaviour. Without it anything a person does is pre determined[11]. True choice thus rests on the assumption of the existence of the will to act.

*The need for goals in choice:*

The next important step in making choices from the existence of beliefs and reason is that they lead to the formation of goals. Since the process of reasoning is about coming to conclusions from knowledge (beliefs) it must result in conclusions. In other words, the ability to reason creates conclusions and in turn expectations. In choice situations there must be a number of possible expectations to choose between.

On the presumption that individuals are rational in their formation of beliefs then logically they will be prepared to make decisions based upon their own

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[11] A behaviourist view of human behaviour is that any behaviour can be predicted accurately as a science with enough data and appropriate models. According to Cook (1993) improvements in both our ability to model behaviour and to statistically analyse data because of advancements in computer technology, are beginning to improve our understanding of even complex human behaviour using these methods.

perceptions of the optimal choice of outcome open to them. The concept of goal seeking behaviour follows naturally from this idea. The existence of goals arises because in order to reason rationally and to make choices, the individual needs some criteria for choice (Pintrich,1999). Goals form the reference point for judging the value of expected outcome and are critical to the understanding of student behaviour and expectations.

The schematic after reason and incorporating expectations and goals is thus extended as below in Figure 3

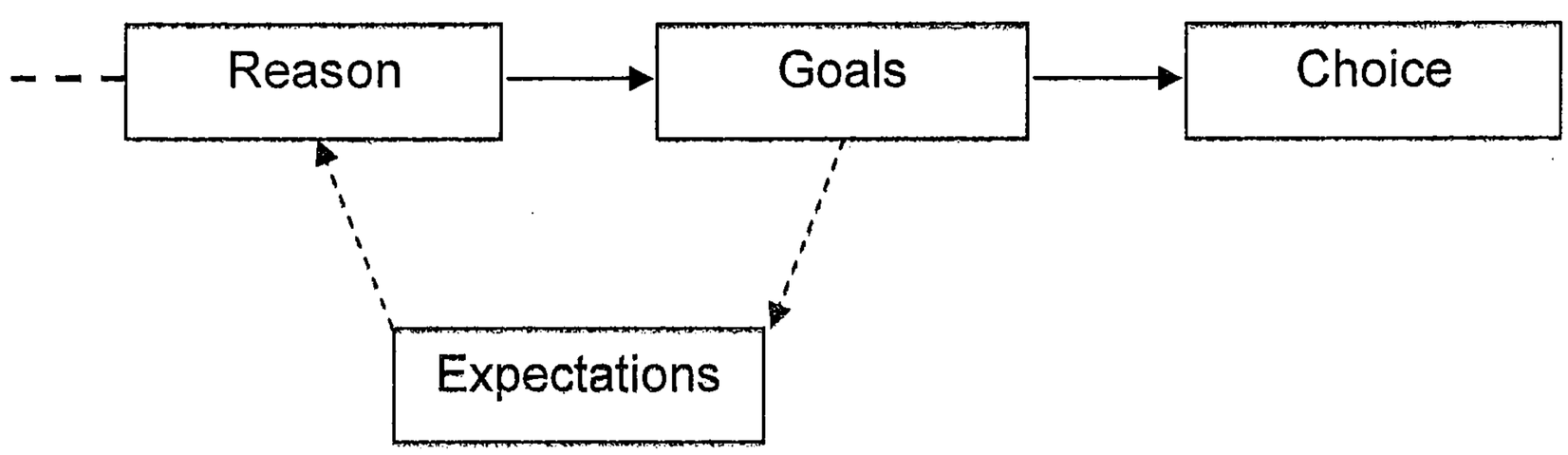



Figure 3: Expectations and goals influence rational choice

How specific goals, goal types and goal orientation are formed during this process is not well understood at present (Oettingen et al, 2001), despite the fact that by 1996 over 500 papers on the subject had been published (Locke, 1996). Oettingen et al argue that certain beliefs are particularly influential in goal formation. Individuals who have, for example, an optimistic perception of reality (in the context of their fantasies) tend to set ambitious goals for themselves whilst those of a more pessimistic outlook are likely to be much more conservative and, arguably, realistic in their goal setting. Since the predisposition to optimism or pessimism are both rooted in the experiences of

the individual and based on what Oettingen et al suggest are personality variables, goal formation and adaptation must be a slow process. Individuals will be resistant to sudden change depending on the degree to which the personality as a belief system is fixed.

An important belief that is influential in the context of learning is 'self efficacy' – a belief in competence to achieve. Bandura (1995:2) defines self efficacy as:

> *`Self efficacy is the belief in one`s capabilities to organise and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations`*

Bandura argues that self efficacy is a belief that arises from the social cognitive process of self persuasion. Sources such as the opinions of others, feedback, evaluation, past experiences, perceived skills and so on all influence the emergence of self efficacy (Dornyei, 2001). Bandura reduced these influences to four primary factors – previous experience, vicarious learning through observing others, verbal encouragement and physiological reactions to events.

The concept of self efficacy is important in understanding how students behave in a number of ways. In situations of choice it is important because self efficacy influences expectations of what can be achieved. Where individuals have a high degree of self efficacy then they will be more assured in their own ability to manage prospective situations and therefore be more aggressive in forming goals that are difficult to achieve and accept more goals

that are perceived as being difficult to achieve. This is not optimism strictly, but is a more logical way of forming expectations that are seen in relation to goals. As Bandura (1998:73) explains:

> *People with high assurance in their capabilities approach difficult tasks as challenges to be mastered rather than as threats to be avoided. Such an efficacious outlook fosters intrinsic interest and deep engrossment in activities. They set themselves challenging goals and maintain strong commitment to them .....*
>
> *In contrast, people who doubt their capabilities shy away from difficult tasks which they view as personal threats. They have low aspirations and weak commitment to the goals they choose to pursue.*

Self efficacy is an important concept in learning choice because in influencing expectations it acts as a regulator of behaviour when choice is involved (Kuhl, 1992). This is because self efficacy, as suggested by Bandura above, influences how committed or not an individual is towards a task. An example of self efficacy regulating behaviour would be where a student avoids an activity if there is an expectation that their performance may affect their sense of self worth. (which is important for students as suggested by Covington, 1984) or, if they anticipate a personal threat because of the context in which this activity is being undertaken. In other words, the student will avoid situations where they expect to have an experience of, for example, learned helplessness (Lucas, 1990). Self efficacy works as a regulator in this situation because it is a belief derived from previous experiences that learned helplessness is an expected outcome in these contexts. In this case, self efficacy may cause feelings of anxiety (an affective not a cognitive response)

that are perceived as an expectation of a negative experience. Self efficacy then changes the way a task and the environment in which the task is to be undertaken is perceived as an expectation. This leads to the straightforward conclusion that it is the individual's feelings of self worth and their expectations about how they will perform in a given situation that leads to avoidance behaviour.

The schematic from a learning perspective can be extended as below in Figure 4:

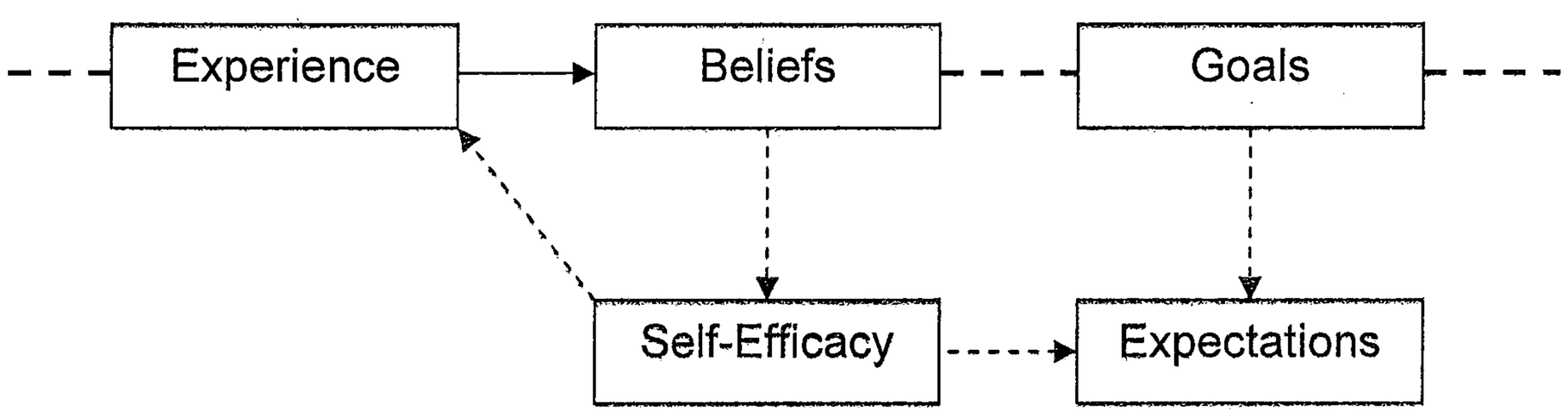



Figure 4: Self efficacy regulates expectations

Self efficacy is thus a particular belief influencing expectations. Where choice is involved, there are a number of goals that can potentially be achieved and the choice taken depends on how these expectations are viewed in context of these goals. This view that students have multiple goals is consistent with the concept of learning orientation suggested by Taylor (1981) and explored later in this section. Choice simply recognises people may have more than one goal.

The next stage in making choices in context is to recognise the role of expectations and goals in relation to the idea of value. A reasoned expectation of satisfaction, and thus of being attracted to doing the activity (valence), is rational in determining what goals are formed and are influential in the choices made (O`Neil, 1994). Satisfaction is the result of achieving something of value to the person and can thus be considered an aim[12] and an expectation if an individual is to make a choice. The aim is simply to achieve a goal that is valued which must be expected in choice. In the previous example, perceptions of self worth as a belief can be seen as an aim that has value because these perceptions help achieve a goal of enhancing a student`s sense of self esteem (Covington, 1984). In learning, an expectation of satisfaction may arise from either intrinsic or extrinsic sources that have value (Deci & Ryan, 2001). Whether an individual has an aim of gaining an intrinsic satisfaction (satisfaction for doing something for its own sake) or extrinsic (gain satisfaction because the outcome helps achieve another purpose) will thus influence the goals they set for themselves. Satisfaction as a measure of value is therefore important in determining which goals are formed. Choice, if rational, means that students will aim to achieve the goals they value the highest, taking into account their expectation of achieving them.

The schematic can be extended further in Figure 5 overleaf

[12] In economics this is called utility. Rational choice in economics is based on maximizing utility.

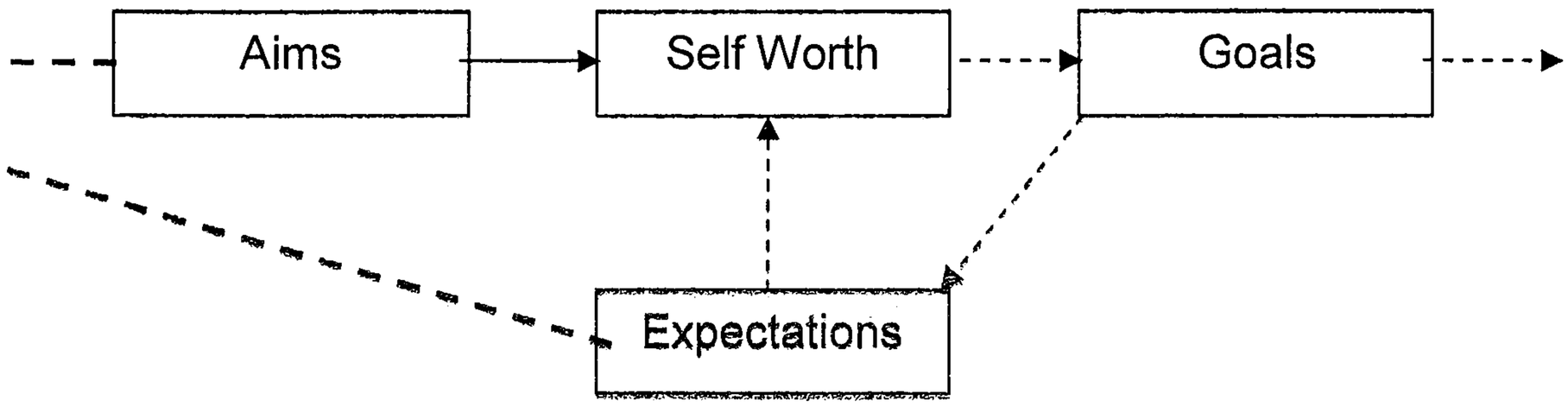
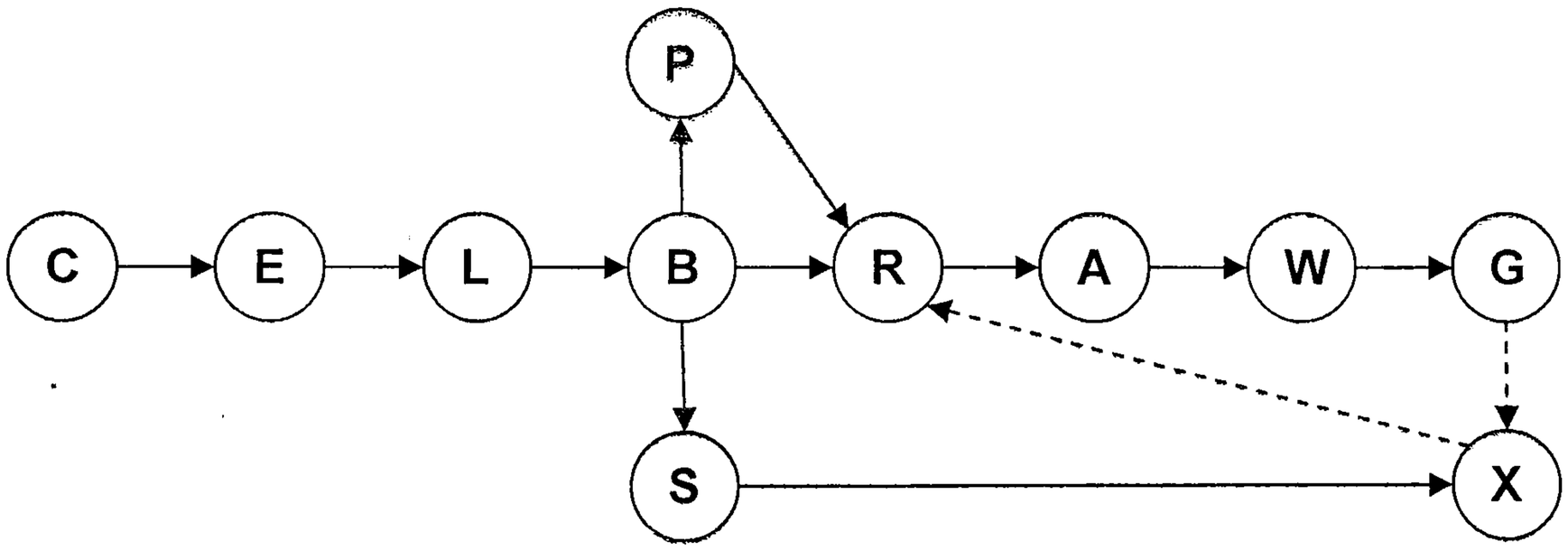



Figure 5: Relationship between goals and expectations.

It is now necessary to consolidate the individual elements of the discussion of choice into a schematic model of the route from consciousness to goals as in Figure 6:




C – consciousness
E – experience
L – learning
B - beliefs
P -personality etc
S - self efficacy
R - reason
A - aims
W – self worth/esteem
G - goals
X - expectations

Figure 6: Summary of process from consciousness to goals

In sum, the argument presented so far is that true choice begins with consciousness. Being conscious means people have experiences. Having experiences means people learn and form beliefs. These beliefs take a

number of forms and include specific beliefs about self (from which come identity, personality, ego and attitude), the world, and self in world (from which self efficacy arises in learning choices). The existence of beliefs about the world and self mean that people have intentions and are able to reason using this knowledge and form new beliefs as conclusions and expectations. Once reason emerges people have reasons for doing what they do which must be based, if rational, on an expectation of achieving something of value (such as a sense of self esteem from learning). To achieve a feeling of value means that specific goals need to have been set as a criteria for reference. Self efficacy is important because it can act as a regulatory feedback by influencing expectations in context.

Before moving on to consider how goals result in the choice to do something, the two concepts that are clearly important in student choice are self efficacy and expectations. Both appear to work at a number of levels in influencing choice behaviour. Expectations work alongside goals and are thus concerned with an outcome of value. Expectations influence reasoned choices because they are connected to value and value is assessed in relation to goals. Self efficacy, on the other hand, is a belief that helps form an expectation of achievement. Self efficacy is a belief that influences expectations in context. In other words, self efficacy is a belief that influences the expectation of achieving something of value. Bandura (1998) would take this much further. He believes that self efficacy is an all embracing belief that works at the cognitive level in influencing how individuals process information, and as explained earlier, at the affective level in generating feelings of anxiety or

enjoyment where contexts are perceived as threatening or attractive. Self efficacy is also influential on motivation in a way that will be considered later, and because of all of these ways in which self efficacy is part of the process of decision making, it is directly influential in the choices people make in all aspects of their lives, not just in learning. In making these choices new experiences occur and new beliefs about self efficacy are formed. Again from Bandura (1994: 4):

> *…. beliefs of personal efficacy can shape the course lives take by influencing the types of activities and environments people choose. People avoid activities and situations they believe exceed their coping capabilities. But they readily undertake challenging activities and select situations they judge themselves capable of handling. By the choices they make, people cultivate different competencies, interests and social networks that determine life courses. Any factor that influences choice behavior can profoundly affect the direction of personal development.*

Self efficacy is a major influence on all aspects of human existence and how people learn and develop.

*Goals, thought and motivation:*

Following from the above, individuals form multiple goals under the influence of their expectations and their sense of self efficacy. These goals may be distant or proximate, core or subsidiary, difficult or easy (O`Neil, 1994). In learning, the goals that have been suggested as important at the macro level are mastery and performance (Dweck & Leggett, 1998). The goal to master

learning of a subject, for example, is based on an expectation of some intrinsic satisfaction, whereas a performance goal is extrinsic and is focused primarily on a sense of outcome and perception of performance relative to others (Seifert, 2004). For example, a student who believes that their ability in a particular subject is constrained and limited, rather than open to development and improvement, thus forms a belief that the subject cannot be mastered in class and is likely to set a performance goal that then influences how s/he approaches that subject in class. This student will not in all probability seek to master the subject because of these beliefs as suggested by Bandura earlier (Bandura, 1998). A performance goal may, for example, result in cue seeking behaviour by that student (Miller and Parfitt, 1974). Students with performance goals are also likely to take a more strategic approach to the way they study and will see learning in outcome terms. Those students, on the other hand, who because of their beliefs have formed a goal to master what they are being taught, will study differently. They are likely to enjoy studying for its own sake and gain an intrinsic satisfaction from learning activities. They are likely to see connections across the subjects they are studying and be able to apply what they are learning to other contexts. For them learning in itself has relevance and their approach to learning tasks is therefore different.

After goals of whatever type and number have been formed, the behaviour which results emerges from the introduction of one final important concept – motivation. Motivation is a concept of some dispute in the psychology

community[13], but at its core it suggests the existence of a willingness to commit energy to an activity (Dornyei, 2001). It is needed in behaviour in order for a goal to be acted upon. A process for how this might work is hypothesised by Schutz (in Pintrich, 1994). Schutz argues that the existence of goals simultaneously results in two outcomes. The first is the actual thought to do something and the second is the motivation to do it. Goals are described therefore as being transactive in generating both motivation and thought – each are essentially expressions of different outcomes resulting from having goals. These goals, as explained, are formed from the deeper beliefs and the shaping of these beliefs in context through expectations and self efficacy that have been generated for an individual to think about their choices in a particular way and at the same time be motivated toward them differently.

Motivation is more, however, than simply the thought to commit energy. Motivation is also directional in that it establishes what specific activity will be undertaken. Motivation is argued to direct activity both in terms of what to do and how long to commit to doing it. Motivation is therefore a regulator of behaviour. The mechanism for how this works returns to Kuhl (1992) and Bandura (1998) earlier, in that individuals will be motivated to avoid contexts which they perceive as a threat to their self worth (because of their self efficacy beliefs) and this then influences their goals in context. Motivation simply directs an activity in a particular way by regulating the level of

[13] This is referred to in Dornyei (2001) as the debate amongst the membership of the American Psychological Association in 1999. Some members felt motivation was not a useful concept because it was too broad ranging. They wanted the concept deleted from the Associations list of official terms. It was decided in the end to keep motivation on the list.

commitment to the chosen activity in order to try and achieve the goal. Motivation is thus very low for certain tasks where there is no expectation of success even if the goal is valued, and may be higher towards other tasks where there is an expectation of achieving a less valued goal. The once dominant expectancy-value models of motivation developed since Atkinson introduced the theory in 1957 (see Covington, 1984) are clear in arguing that it is the cumulative assessment of expectancy and value which determines how motivated an individual is toward a task (Pintrich, 1994). The amount of motivation a person has in turn ultimately determines the choices s/he makes.

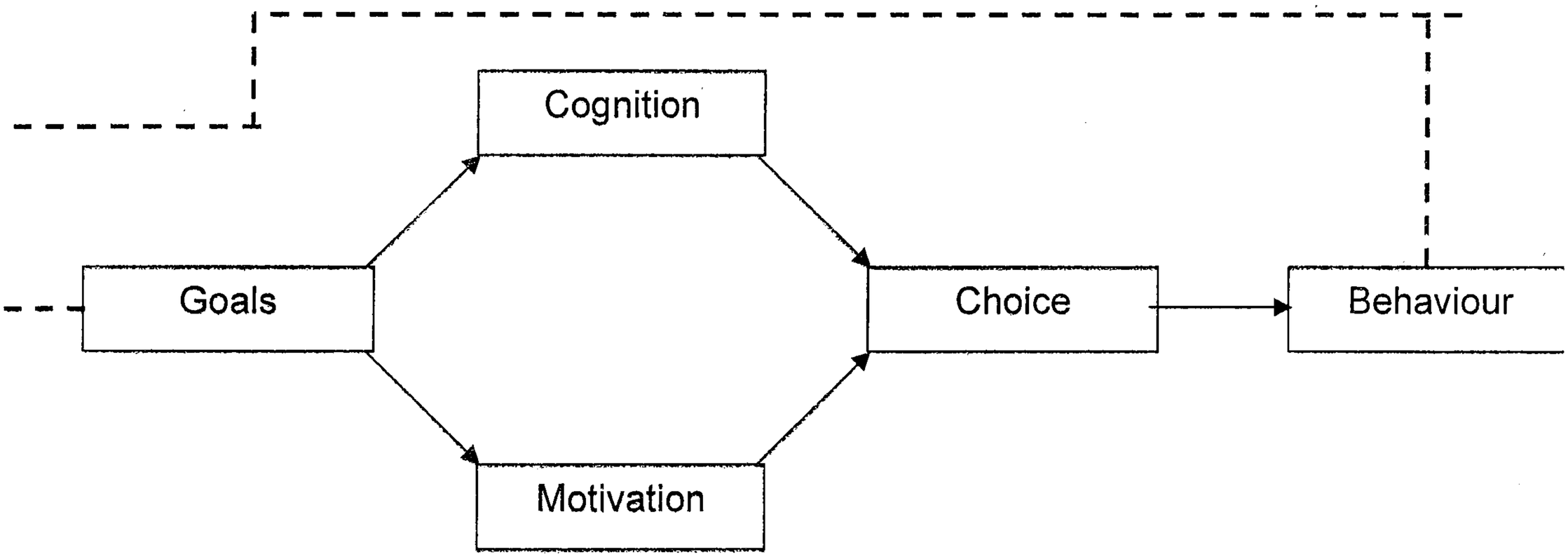



Figure 7: From goals to motivation and behaviour as a recursive system

Behaviour following on from the formation of goals can thus be presented as in Figure 7 above:

Thus, the choice of what to do is based after goals on what a person both thinks and is motivated to do. A person is then able to choose to behave in a particular way. This choice to behave in a particular way means the person

does something and has an experience. This experience feeds back and leads to new learning, beliefs and so on as earlier. Choice behaviour is thus a recursive and continuous process that is adaptive through which people learn and form new beliefs about themselves and the world.

*Choice as a reasoned action:*

A well known model of choice behaviour which may help bring the analysis so far together by using beliefs, reasoning and motivation, is planned behaviour by Azjen (1985). The model is well known to psychologists and has strong empirical support, and is founded, as Azjen suggests, on choice behaviour resulting from beliefs as follows:

> *`at the initial level (volitional) behaviour is assumed to be determined by intention. At the next level, these intentions are themselves explained in terms of attitudes toward the behaviour and subjective norms. The third level explains these attitudes and subjective norms in terms of beliefs about the consequences of performing the behaviour and about the normative expectations of referents. In the final analysis, then, a person`s behaviour is explained by reference to his or her beliefs. Since people`s beliefs represent the information (be it correct or incorrect) they have about their worlds, it follows that their behaviour is ultimately determined by this information` (Kuhl & Beckman, 1985: page 14)*

Ajzen explains choice in very similar terms to earlier. Three core beliefs are suggested that create an intention and then a behaviour. These beliefs are related to attitude toward the behaviour that is about personality and character, beliefs about how referent groups value and will respond to the behaviour that is normative, and beliefs about the resources available to do

the behaviour, which is a control. What is interesting and different from the earlier discussion is the way in which goals are used in the model. Whereas planned behaviour recognises but offers no explicit role for goals, the argument earlier is that goals, for the reasons given, are crucial in how choices are made, particularly in learning contexts. Not having an explicit and separate role for goals in planned behaviour may be a mistake. Evidence to support the need for goals in the model, particularly applied in a learning context, is in a study that adapted planned behaviour by using goals as a differentiator in choices made by students (Sideris and Rodafinos, 2001). The evidence presented in this paper is that the inclusion of goals in a planned behaviour model improved the model`s ability to predict the choices made that were significant statistically. The other difference between planned behaviour and the argument earlier because of goals is the way planned behaviour explains motivation. The earlier proposition was that motivation is a result of having goals that can be based on either intrinsic or extrinsic expectations of satisfaction. In planned behaviour, motivation is presented as resulting from a belief in response to external normative influences with control beliefs having an influence if there is doubt about whether the resources are available to achieve the behaviour. This is similar to earlier because this latter influence is really an expectation based in part on self efficacy that Azjen does recognise is important in ensuring that motivation is sensitive to context. Planned behaviour, in the context of the argument above, is a model of goal formation. It explains how people form the goal to behave in a particular way when they have choice.

## Style

Another psychological concept that has shown itself in various studies to be influential in understanding student behaviour which adds to the previous discussion is cognitive style. Cognitive style is ` *an individual`s characteristic and consistent approach to organising and processing information*` (Tennant in Riding – 1997: 24). If it exists, cognitive style may be influential in how students choose to behave because of the way it interacts with how students perceive learning contexts and experiences. The model by Riding (1997), for example, places cognitive style between the `*primary sources*` that are the personal and acquired memories of the individual, and their perception of the current experience they are having (based on intelligence) and their learning strategy.

Cognitive style is argued by Riding to influence the exchange between short and long term memory arising from an experience because it determines the way information from the experience, stored first in short term memory and understood intellectually, is then merged with deep memory (primary sources of an individual) to form a new perception. This new perception of the experience leads to the formation in students of a learning strategy which is the basis of how they choose to behave next. A strategy for learning arises because students have preferred ways of processing information (a cognitive style) and therefore behave in part depending upon the way information is presented to them in context. Cognitive style thus works as a control or

regulator in behaviour. Riding argues cognitive style will raise anxiety levels when a learning situation is considered threatening (in much the same way as self efficacy was argued to function earlier).

In the discussion earlier, cognitive style would probably work as a mediator between experience and belief formation. Cognitive style would inhibit or enhance the ability of an individual to learn from certain experiences. If the information from the experience was not aligned to a person`s cognitive style, the person would not be able to learn as much from the experience and their belief formation (knowledge) from the experience would thus be different to someone with a different cognitive style. This in turn would reduce their ability to reason using this information. Cognitive style is used to explain why holist thinkers, for example, are considered better at art based subjects, and serialist thinkers are better at scientific subjects (Pask, 1976). Holist thinkers are able to reason better in art subjects because art is an holistic subject; scientists learn better when information is presented in a more staged and logical way because this is the method of science. The inclusion of cognitive style as a concept used specifically by educational psychologists is largely a recognition that individuals may have innate intelligences that influence how they learn and behave.

Style is a more general concept than simply a form of cognitive intelligence in student learning and behaviour following the work by Marton & Saljo (1976). What Marton and Saljo did was to make important contributions to both how learning behaviour might be studied as a method, and to what learning means

as an experience. They argued that the research method should be to focus on the outcomes of learning rather than taking a hypothetical approach to learning processes and testing them as the earlier discussion suggests - outcome being defined as students` perceptions of the content of what has been learned, not how much the students perceive they had learned. Because of this emphasis on perceptions of content and outcome, they argued that their approach was a `*second order*` phenomenology (Marton, 1981). At the second order level, the claim of the researcher is that there are categories of description of perceptions of the experience that are shared and stable. Marton (1997) reflecting later on this earlier work suggested that, as in planned behaviour earlier and orientation (below), students base their learning approaches on intentions that they bring to learning tasks which is why their learning approach, rather than their behaviour, can be considered context free. At this second order level the research aim is to try and identify a small number of concepts that represent a phenomenon in differing ways (such as learning being deep or surface) rather than considering the idiographic meaning of individual experience as a first order phenomenology.

The other important influence that the paper by Marton and Saljo has had is on the learning styles literature. Although a literature on student `styles` of learning has been around for many years prior to the paper (Entwistle, 1987), what many educational researchers have done is use the paper to argue that these stable perceptions of learning outcomes (arising from intentions) are associated with particular learning styles (see Lucas, 1990; Riding 1997). In turn, learning styles are seen to be an important influence in how students

approach learning tasks and thus behave. A learning style may be associated with personality, cognitive style, or a preferred approach to studying, but at its core it suggests in learning that there is ` *...a distinct notion of a singularity in a variety of contexts*` (Rayner & Riding, 1997: 22). Students in effect have preferences to studying that suit their style. The outcome of learning and learning choice is thus dependent upon these preferences or styles. One important style of learning in behavioural terms by Biggs (1999) is to see learning strategy as a style. Learning strategy as a means of achieving goals has been mentioned earlier in respect of cognitive style, but in the context of learning style, learning strategy is argued to be a stable extrinsic intention of students to achieve certain outcomes (certain grades for example). Students will take a strategic approach to how they study that is based on these extrinsic aims and in response to their study context. Adopting a learning strategy is their intended style of learning and it is behavioural.

**Orientation**

The existence of learning styles as a factor in understanding learning behaviour has a number of critics largely because of its fixed and rigid interpretation[14]. This rigidity is, however, partly ameliorated if orientation rather than style is used. An orientation according to Taylor (1983) is the way

[14] This ranges from Laurillard`s (1993) concerns about the way context is effectively ignored in style, to Reynolds (1998) worries about learning styles validity, naivety and potential to cause discrimination by categorising students in such rigid ways. The review by Coffield et al (2004) of the literature on learning styles raised a number of concerns about the proliferation of concepts based on learning styles. As a tool for getting individuals to think about their learning they felt that there was some value in presenting learning in the form of a style. However, as a concept and theory of learning, learning styles were considered to be unproven.

students behave in response to their learning aims and attitudes, but it is adaptive to context. Orientation begins by arguing that students go to university for reasons related to their orientation which like style is based on an intention. Taylor suggested that these learning orientations can take four forms (academic, social, vocational, and personal) which means that learning style is adaptive to context and takes account of multiple goals. Students` orientations and intentions when learning therefore depends on the context and their goals at that time. Thus, for example, some students with social rather than academic goals will choose to socialise more which will influence their learning choices and behaviour in learning contexts. In addition, as Taylor (1987:3) explains, learning orientation is based on the perceived relationship that a student has with their course of study:

> *`By orientation we mean all those attitudes and aims that express the student`s individual relationship with a course and the University. It is the collection of purposes which orientates the student to a course in a particular way. Orientation….is a quality of the relationship between student and course rather than a quality inherent in the student`)*

In the case of the famous study of student orientation by Clark and Trow (1966) the relationship as an orientation was at the level of student sub-culture. Taylor (1997), on the other hand, argues that the relationship in orientation is more personal and is between the student and their personal intentions which she argues to be a form of personal contract. In behavioural terms, the importance of orientation is that students have intentions, even preferred styles of learning, but they are also strategic and adaptive in their learning (as suggested by Biggs earlier), responding to context in a much

more flexible way than learning styles suggest. This is because, as the quote highlights, learning behaviour is based on the relationship students perceive they have with their course in the context of a number of purposes. Learning orientation emerges from this relationship and can be seen in what students do (a verb) rather than what they are (a noun). Learning orientation is what learning is for the student as an activity in context, it is not how a student is learning which is more cognitive and processual as earlier. Because of this Taylor, like Marton & Saljo, argued for a second order phenomenology in her work in order to identify the four orientations she believed captured the range of learning activities in terms of what they mean as a learning experience. Entwistle (1987) believed that seeing learning as a relationship and an orientation, after the work by Taylor, might be a fruitful area for further research.

**Chapter Summary:**

This chapter has introduced some important ideas about student behaviour. From a theoretical perspective student behaviour can be explained as a rational choice. Choice is determined by experience and various beliefs held by students. Self efficacy is a particularly important belief that is influential in choice. Goals are also important in the choices students make. In behavioural terms, the idea of students having innate cognitive styles may also be influential. Student learning behaviour can also be understood as an outcome rather than as a process using the concept of learning as a style, or

as a more adaptive orientation. In this case, the behaviour is interpreted from the perspective of those experiencing it. The former approach to interpreting behaviour as a choice is positivist and deterministic, the latter approach is based on outcomes and the interpretation of meaning.

## Chapter Three: Methodology

Research is variously described as a method of enquiry, the systematic search for knowledge and understanding, and the solving of problems or puzzles (Burton, 2000). It is necessary in any research to outline in detail that the method adopted was chosen correctly and was undertaken properly with a view to demonstrating that the research process was systematic and coherent. This is what Arksey & Knight (1999) refer to as the researcher demonstrating that what he or she did was fit for purpose. The challenge for the researcher, and the purpose of this chapter, is to explain in detail the research method for the thesis and how the findings presented in the next two chapters were generated.

This chapter first considers the arguments that were considered in the research design. This is followed by an outline in detail of how the research was undertaken. An explanation of how the data used in the next chapter were interpreted from the research is given in the third section. Finally, the chapter reflects on the method chosen for interpreting the data and discusses some of the pragmatic and philosophical issues involved.

### Research Design

The research design initially was developed by considering the minutes of the subject field meetings and the four empirical papers mentioned in the

Introduction and in Keane (2001b). In other words, the first stage in the design was to examine secondary sources which is a quite common first step in research (Saunders et al, 2003).

The composition of a typical lecture in the Faculty as comprising degree and Higher National Diploma (HND) students was explained in the Introduction. In Keane (2001b) an apparent difference in lecture attendance between HND students and degree registered students was identified on a large first year module in the Faculty[15]. HND students attended only 59% of lectures in comparison with the degree students who attended 71%. Other evidence to support this was also found in the minutes of the subject field meetings mentioned in the Introduction. An example is given in item HT[16] 99.44 of a meeting held on Friday, 15 September 2000 of the Human Resources Management Field. The chair of that meeting (SD) states in relation to concerns about the fact that HND students were not attending lectures as much as degree students that:

> *`....SD reported that HND students within the Scheme are performing less well than degree students and this will be addressed by teaching all HND students as a group on each module. <u>Poor attenders</u> will be advised and requested to meet with her to solve the problem....`*

The minutes also highlighted another pattern relating to students missing lectures. They suggested that there are differences in attendance at lectures between third year and first year students that the paper by Morgan (2001)

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[15] There was no obvious difference in numbers of students missing lectures by gender. Females attended 69% and males 65% of the lectures monitored. This is different to that reported by Woodfield et al (2006) discussed in the Introduction.

[16] HT refers to human resources. The other relevant acronyms for the four subject fields outlined in the Introduction are: MM (marketing), FM (finance) and BM (business management)

earlier also found. Of the 44 items where attendance at lectures was mentioned in these minutes, only four were about final year modules, whereas all seven of the main first year modules and 14 second year modules were mentioned at least once in these minutes[17]. The understanding that first year students miss lectures more regularly than third year students was also supported by interview data in Keane (2001a) in which two of the tutors interviewed for that piece of work respectively commented that:

> *`First years don't appreciate the importance of attending……`*
>
> *`Final year students seem to be there a lot more which could be down to a number of reasons ……`*

The obvious conclusion from these sources is first, HND and degree students are different in the number of lectures they miss, and second, final year students attend more lectures than those studying in earlier years suggesting that there may be an important difference between the two student groups. The design of the research therefore needed to take account of both course of study (HND versus degree) and year of study with respect to missing lectures.

A second source of information considered in the research design was, of course, the empirical studies mentioned in the Introduction and the seven themes that were identified as factors in student absenteeism. These factors, despite the reservations highlighted, needed to be integrated into the design.

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[17] There are only seven major first year management modules which for most first years are compulsory and each were mentioned more than once in the minutes. In the second and third years there are many more modules for the students to choose from. The large absolute difference between first and second year modules may in part be due to the larger number of modules available in the second year.

With some evidence that different cohorts of students miss lectures in particular ways, and with the insights from the papers about the factors that may be involved in the decision to be absent, the design of the study in terms of the samples to use and the broad factors to guide the work were quite clear.

The next stage was to reflect upon Mason's (1998) question about what should be considered in designing any study. Her question is to ask:

> *What is the nature of the phenomenon, or entities, or social `reality`, which I wish to investigate? (page 11)*

This is a simple, but powerful question, because it makes researchers think clearly about what they are seeking to study and importantly where the research should be focused. For this thesis, it asks the question what method(s) will allow for the study of a complex behaviour like missing lectures taking account of the pattern of missing lectures and known factors associated with student absenteeism.

From the discussion of choice, style and orientation in chapter two, student behaviour like missing lectures can be studied as a rational choice, or as a behaviour in outcome terms from a phenomenological perspective. Both offer results that can be of value depending on research aims. The former method is positivist and is designed to yield confirmation of the importance of the variables in the choice, but importantly, it offers little for developing understanding at a conceptual level. Using these ideas to design a framework

and to confirm the intervening variables would be possible, but this is not the aim of this thesis. The numerous factors that are believed to be relevant to student absenteeism have been identified in other studies as outlined in the Introduction. Adding to this list in the context of lectures would have little value. The second approach, on the other hand, is an interpretative method that considers behaviour as the outcome and as an experience from which deeper more conceptual interpretations can be offered. Using Mason`s terminology, this is the `*nature of the phenomenon*` that this thesis is seeking to answer. A phenomenological approach is thus preferable.

All phenomenological approaches to research ask questions about how people experience the world (Matsoukasis, 1994). The phenomenological method as a discipline thus seeks to uncover the structure and patterns of particular experiences (Silverman, 2001). These patterns are what Patton (2002) calls the essences of experience that are assumed to exist in all experience as suggested by the founder of the phenomenological method - Husserl (Moran, 2001) The identification of these essences is the common aim in phenomenological methods, although the claims made about what they mean can be debated[18].

[18] Patton (2002) actually avoids this debate on the basis that the phenomenological movement itself cannot agree certain fundamental philosophical issues such as whether phenomenology is in effect an epistemological philosophy concerned with the essences of experience, or concerned more with the ontological nature of being.

The usual phenomenological method for understanding experience is an interview[19]. Interviews have a number of advantages as outlined by Arksey & Knight (1999: 32) . They allow, *inter alia*:

1 access to a persons perception potentially revealing things that cannot be observed directly.

2 for ways of exploring meanings that underpin behaviour.

3 for the examination of understandings and meanings in-depth

4 exploration of complicated patterns of thought, feelings and actions often revealing tacit understandings.

5 for research to be conducted in ways which are relatively less expensive and more practical than other methods

Thus, the approach of this thesis was phenomenological and the method was an interview, Taking into account the discussion of the observed pattern of missing lectures earlier, the interviews were broken down into the following sub-samples:

First year degree

First year HND

Second year degree

Second year HND

Final year degree

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[19] There are other methods of course that allow insight into students` experiences. One might be to ask students to keep diaries of their experiences of missing lectures and use these as the basis of the data analysis. Using diaries, for example, was one source of data used in the study considered in the Introduction by Woodfield et al (2006). As a method, using diaries has a number of practical issues that were discussed at a residential. It was decided that diaries were not a practicable approach for this thesis because of the difficulties in ensuring they would be done correctly and honestly by students.

The interviews with each sub-sample were structured around the seven factors highlighted from the empirical work on absenteeism. The design decision was thus a semi-structured interview using these factors as themes or prompts. How this was done is explained in the next section. The use of the seven factors as prompts was important because, as Stroh (in Burton, 2000) explains, using prompts in an interview ensures that the range of likely factors associated with a phenomenon will be effectively covered. As a result all interviews discussed each of these factors, but were flexible enough to allow the students to offer and explore more wide ranging ideas based on their own experiences.

The final decision was to interview groups of students in the five categories identified above rather than individual students. This was based on the understanding that the aim of this thesis is to derive meanings of the experiences of the phenomenon that are more likely to emerge in a group setting. Following Morgan's (1997) concerns about the vulnerability of interviewees, care was taken to ensure that the interviews were arranged and managed in a way that was sensitive to the potential concerns of the students. Interviewing students in groups mitigated many of these potential problems, but it meant that a more phenomenographic approach to analyzing the data was not possible as discussed later. The interviews were managed in ways described below. The sise of the groups was targeted at 6-8 as advised by Flick (2002).

## Research Process

The first question considered before commencing the five interviews was resources and access. What resources were needed and how was access to the students going to be obtained?. There were also ethical issues to consider in undertaking this type of research both for the students and the Faculty. The decision was taken to obtain permission and to request resources and access.

The Faculty at the time had a Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee (FTLAC) which was formally approached about resources and access. In return, the Committee was offered a brief report outlining in broad terms the reasons why students miss lectures. The Committee supported the proposal and a request for administrative support was also granted for assistance in arranging and transcribing the interviews.

One member of the Committee, Dr Robert Willis, asked if he could sit in on some of the interviews. He was interested in what had been proposed and felt he might be able to help. This was agreed because Dr Willis is an experienced researcher and his involvement provided an opportunity to discuss some of the ideas about interpretation of the data[20].

[20] It needs to be made clear that Dr Willis did not take any advisory role. His involvement was based on an interest in the research, and not in participating formally in the work. The author and Dr Willis are friends as well as colleagues.

The administrator assigned to assist was Sarah Folks. Two meetings were held in which it was explained at length exactly what was needed from her in order to properly arrange the meetings and the need for transcription. She was advised to create student lists for the five discrete groups. It was suggested that she ask a colleague to call out numbers and then choose the students to contact which corresponded with this number on her list[21]. Her contacting the students rather than a tutor also meant that the students would feel more able to refuse to participate if they wanted. It was important ethically and practically that student participation was voluntary because students being interviewed who had not volunteered to be there were less likely to engage in conversation in an open and honest way. When contacting students, Sarah said she preferred first to call them and then write a follow up letter which was agreed. When calling the students she was advised strictly to make sure that the students were being asked voluntarily to participate, explain that their comments would be treated confidentially, that their anonymity would be protected and that the results would be used for this thesis and the report for the Committee. Sarah was also advised that she might mention the benefits of the work to future students in the Faculty. She was provided with a checklist of what to say on the phone. The aim was to get a group of eight students for each interview and she was advised to call as many times as it took until eight had volunteered. Her experience she said was that about half volunteered and so she made around sixteen calls per interview on average initially.

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[21] This was done to ensure randomization. On reflection, a more rigorous method using a random number generator should have been used.

The next task was to write to the students confirming the details of the phone call and asking for dates when they were free for the interview. This was a very time consuming part of the arrangements and a few students dropped out at this stage meaning Sarah had to call others chosen again at random. Sarah then identified an appropriate day and time and booked the room and the recording equipment. On the day she also called the students to confirm that they were still coming.

In order to test the schedule and the arrangements it was decided to have a practice interview with some part-time students. A lecture that five part-time students were expecting to attend was identified and it was decided to hold the interview after this lecture. Despite all five agreeing, in the event only three students turned up for the interview.

The practice run with these part-time students was useful as it helped clarify the whole process from arranging the meeting, ordering the equipment, booking the room and managing the interview itself. Improvements from the exercise were learnt, such as the way that offering tea and coffee with biscuits seemed to put the students at ease. It turned out that the topic was actually quite emotive for these particular students who in the interview were very critical of their full time counterparts who tend to be much younger. Steering the conversation so that all the themes were covered was quite straightforward and opening and closing the interview properly as suggested by Morgan (1997) was successful. The seating and the general environment of the room used also worked well.

There was no specific order to the five interviews. They were arranged for times when Sarah could get the students. The first interview was with the second year HND group in June 2002. The eight students arrived on time and seemed at first to be ill at ease. The first task, and at this Sarah showed great skill, was to offer the students coffee or tea, and invite them to sit down. The offer of a drink, as with the part time students, and the act of bringing it to the students helped the students relax. A few minutes were then spent talking about what the interview was trying to achieve and why. The author also made a point of saying hello to the two students of the eight that were known to him by sight, and then asked each of the other six students how they were and so on, even making a joke about biscuits and his addiction to them. It is difficult to tell, but it appeared that the students after these first few minutes were ready to proceed formally with the interview. The interview began by inviting everyone to sit around the table[22] set up in the room beforehand. Before commencing the following was done. It was:

1 Reiterated that the meeting was confidential and the anonymity of those present would be protected

2 Confirmed that the results of the interviews would be used in a report for the Faculty and for this thesis.

3 Mentioned that the research should help future students in the Faculty.

[22] It might have been better not to have used a table in this way which could be viewed as a barrier.

4 Emphasised that the objective of the meeting was to discuss why students in the Faculty miss lectures.

5 Confirmed that the meeting was about lectures and not tutorials[23].

6 Clarified that permission from the students was needed to use the tape recorder and a student could at any point ask for it to be turned off or for part of the tape to be erased

7 Asked if anyone had any questions.

Permission to turn on the tape recorder was then requested.

Each interview began with the following:

> *`Who is going to start?. Who is going to tell me why students in this Faculty miss lectures?`*

In the case of the first group, a female student responded with the following:

> *Sometimes it's like the syllabus. My background is the fact that I haven't had any business, I went from a GNVQ in leisure and tourism and that's why I'm doing a HND so I'm kind of motivating myself and learning myself as well as going to the lectures and sometimes I probably prefer to do it myself.*

After this the interview progressed quite smoothly. There were points when the discussion deviated from why students miss lectures and it was necessary to steer the meeting back towards the topic and the themes. An example of this taken from the second year degree student interview is below:

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[23] The Faculty delivers the majority of modules in lectures followed by tutorials. Students interviewed understood the difference between a lecture and tutorial. There is a definition in the Hale Committee Report (1964) that was available if needed. It was used only once.

*Yes, that`s the opposite isn`t it?. If you`ve done it at A`level or whatever, so one other reason is that there is just too much detail and you`re not taking it in. What else, tell me a lecture style that you really don`t like because we (tutors) have all got different personalities which affects what we are like. Are there certain styles that put students off attending lectures do you think?*

The discussion prior to this had been about problems with the material of the lecture and nothing had been said about the tutor. Attitude toward the tutor was one of the themes. The discussion of whether students were struggling with the content of the lecture as a reason for missing lectures had been largely completed, so the opportunity was taken to steer the discussion onto how the tutor influenced lecture attendance. The next three comments, taken from the transcription, show it had the desired effect in shifting the focus of the discussion in this way:

*Student 1:* *Last semesters XX teacher I can't remember her name.*

*Student 2:* *YY*

*Student 1:* *That's the one. She was really, I don't know what it was but I think it was you got a sense of incompetence. Not being rude or anything but I swear she should have been committed.*

The interview then moved onto a discussion of attitudes to tutors and whether it had an influence on why students miss lectures.

The first interview with the second year HND students lasted 65 minutes. When the range of factors had been adequately considered, the meeting was closed with two questions. The first was:

*`Would each of you now tell me the most important reason why students in this Faculty miss lectures?`*

And after each student had done this, the meeting closed with the question:

*`Does anyone wish to raise something else before we close the interview and I turn off the tape recorder?. Anything at all you feel has not been mentioned?`*

After this permission to turn off the tape recorder was obtained and the students were thanked for their support, reiterating that what they had said would be used confidentially and that their anonymity would be protected.

The other four meetings were managed similarly. Three were attended by Dr Willis who the students agreed could sit at the back of the room[24]. Although it had been hoped to keep sizes within 6-8 students, only five final year degree students turned up of the eight that said they would. The five students in attendance said this was probably because the day of the interview was also dissertation hand-in day. They suggested that the three missing students were likely to be either in the bar celebrating or drowning their sorrows. In any event, they were not there and the meeting had to go on without them. Other problems included the meeting with second year degree students, when one student said he had to leave early and he left after 40 minutes. In that meeting as well, another student used some of the interview to vent certain frustrations he had been having with the University over a case of plagiarism

[24] There was a concern about whether his being there would disrupt the students. Dr Willis is a highly regarded member of staff and is popular with the students. The students were asked for permission for him to be there. The advantages of his potentially being a sounding board, as mentioned earlier in the chapter, outweighed this potential issue with him being in the interviews. His attendance did not appear to affect the three interviews as far as it is possible to tell.

which needed careful management. The meeting with the first year HND students did not start very well either as they seemed nervous and it took them a while to relax and talk openly.

On the whole the interviews went well. A check was made that every student attending had spoken more than once, and the friendly environment of the interview, in part facilitated by Sarah, had made the students feel at ease and they seemed to be prepared to say what they really thought. The fact that some of the students commented very critically at times (as will be shown in the next chapter) confirmed this. Some actually mentioned how much they had enjoyed the interview afterwards (one final year student said it was the best thing she had done in her four years at the University). Further conformation was provided through the very positive feedback received from Dr Willis.

During the interviews notes were taken which appeared to help some of the students feel that what they were saying was important. Note taking can have this effect (Stroh in Burton, 2000). The students responded positively when they saw what they were saying being written down, as well as the more usual cues such as nodding and friendly eye contact which were used as a means of encouraging a student to comment (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). The note taking had another important advantage. It allowed a degree of analysis before the transcription from Sarah arrived which was normally one week later. The notes were used to sketch various ideas about what the students had said and were also referred to in the discussions with Dr Willis immediately after

the three interviews he attended. More detailed notes and thoughts were then summarised as an aide memoire before the transcription arrived. The notes helped in suggesting themes and keywords to analyse the interview data which is discussed in the next section.

**Interpretation of Data**

There is no universally accepted methodology for interpreting the content of interview data (Silverman, 2001). The process, however, is generally the same with some important variations depending on research aims. The first stage is to disaggregate the interview script into categories that have meaning for the purposes of the research questions being asked (Dey, 1995). This in practice means that the data being utilised from an interview is specific to the research and that not all the interview script is therefore likely to be used. Once the data has been identified and categorised, the next phase is normally to unitise the data in some way, looking for patterns that form sub-categories or themes from which further insights are possible. This is followed by a reappraisal of the data, creating new meanings through drawing the data together across categories and looking for insights that are more conceptual (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). This stage also involves using other evidence and arguments derived from the literature (Saunders, 2003). This is the process that was adopted in this thesis. The initial categorization and interpretation of the data are the attributions reported in the next chapter. The more conceptual analysis is in chapters four and five.

A critical aspect in this approach to interpreting data is to be clear that the method being undertaken is consistent with the research aims. Grounded theory methods, for example, are one variation that argues for a purely inductive methodology aimed at substantive theory generation derived from data. Developed by Strauss & Corbin (1990), this method of data analysis gains much of its credibility from the strict and often narrow coding structures it derives using a constant comparative approach in which the researcher returns repeatedly to earlier data and interrogates it in light of the current interpretation. A narrowness of focus is also often found in critical discourse studies where the aim is to gain understanding of the linguistic relationships in the data between the interviewee and the topic being discussed. Discourse analysis, for example, often focuses on understanding the role of power in relation to how a given phenomenon is experienced as expressed through interview (Stevenson in Burton, 2000).

Another method, phenomenography, is an approach to research first outlined by Frances Marton in 1981 (Marton, 1981) following on from his work with Saljo on learning approaches discussed in chapter two. Phenomenography is now an established method in educational research (Tight, 2003). As a method it seeks to capture the shared ideas about a phenomenon and then explicitly looks for qualitative variations in experience which is why interviews tend to be one on one rather than in groups (Marton, 1994). The aim of the method is to uncover the variation in the content of a phenomenon rather than the shared ideas about the experience itself which could be specific to that group (Marton, in Shermann & Webb, 1988). The basis of phenomenographic enquiry is to understand perceptions of experience in order to find ways of

improving practice. It does not therefore concern itself specifically with questions of whether interpreted variations in experience represent variation in conceptual beliefs, perceptions or phenomena (Marton, 1981).

The interpretation of the interviews in this thesis is not seeking to build grounded theory, discourse or variation in experience. The aim is to gain insight into what the experience of missing lectures means in order to allow for the construction of deeper explanations. The method of interpretation simply seeks to identify the shared ideas of the interviewees about students missing lectures, by first grouping the data into initial attributions that had a common element, and then assessing them for relevance. How this was done is explained below. The broader meanings behind these attributions are considered in chapters five and six.

The first level interpretation of the interview scripts in chapter four and the constructed interpretation in chapter five, therefore reflect first, the shared ideas of those being interviewed and second, the meaning of the experience of missing lectures. Although these meanings by definition are clearly subjective for individual students, the assumption is that it is possible as a researcher to work on the basis that interviewees can offer similar ideas about phenomenon even if individual experiences of it are unique[25]. In addition, good phenomenological interpretations should offer some insights into the

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[25] According to Marton (1981) this is based on Popper's argument that consciousness takes three forms. First, one can be conscious of objects, second of self and third of ideas. This third level means that when a new idea such as a theory of the existence of gravity is presented, that idea can be understood by others even though they have not had the experience that Isaac Newton had. In the case here, students can communicate their ideas about why students miss lectures based on their own experience which as an idea about the experience of missing lectures can be understood by others who have not had the exact same experience of missing lectures. The key concern is to ensure that those being asked to describe their experience have some legitimate relationship with the phenomenon they are describing.

influences associated with the meaning of the experience which can be used in further study.

Thus, the method for generating data in this thesis first seeks to derive shared ideas that are attributed to the experience of missing lectures. This is done in chapter four. In chapter five, these attributions are interpreted at a more phenomenological level in order to construct what students missing lectures means. Other research evidence is also offered in support of these constructs. Three qualitatively different interpretations will be suggested in chapter five that parsimoniously capture the meaning of these experiences as suggested by the attributions. In chapter six these three interpretations are then discussed in more detail and more holistic possibilities are debated.

The initial categorisation of the data in chapter four involved the straightforward division used in phenomenology between the individual and the conditions associated with the phenomenon (Patton, 2002). The interview scripts were thus organised into comments in relation to students missing lectures that fell into three categories

1 student influences

2 lecture influences

3 context influences

The next stage of the analysis was to identify patterns or themes within each of these three broad categories that had a common element. These were

separated into separate attributions within the three categories. Nine attributions in total were identified as presented in the next chapter. Each of the attributions within the three categories were also briefly discussed separately and then assessed in three ways – for deviant cases, reliability and statistically.

The stages involved in interpreting the data in the next chapters followed a standard process. The actual `doing` of the analysis, however, was not so straightforward. It took many hours of contemplation, visiting and revisiting the data and then its interpretation. Reference was made to the handwritten notes from the interviews as well as the scripts and the summary memos, and lengthy discussions with Robert Willis about the data took place. The first attempt at working with the data was actually to use NUD*IST which the Faculty bought specifically for the project. It felt a little clumsy as a tool and there was a concern about becoming distanced from the data in much the same way as described by Stroh (in Burton, 2000). It was thus decided to get into the data again manually by reverting to the notes and by scribbling codes and ideas on the transcripts. The first analysis of the data was in fact the report produced for the Committee which proved a very useful first step in getting an overview of what the data were suggesting[26].

This working and reworking of qualitative data as an hermeneutic cycle to try and make sense of it in the context of the research question is widely reported on within the methodology literature (for example, Miles & Huberman, 1994).

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[26] This report led to a Faculty meeting to discuss the issue of why students miss lectures. The meeting was arranged and led by the author. The University Vice Chancellor attended the meeting along with nearly 50 colleagues in the Faculty.

The quality of the interpretation that emerges is based on both the rigour underpinning the process described above, but also on the creativity and imagination of the researcher (Marton, 1997). The relevance of the interpretations derived from interview data is judged in part on how persuasive it is to others who will base their views on how the interpretation of the data was justified (Arksey & Knight, 1999). With this in mind, there is a detailed example in Appendix A which highlights how one section of transcript from the interview with the final year student group was interpreted as including five of the nine attributions that are presented in chapter four. Chapters four and five also contain significant data with an explanation of how they were interpreted.

The next chapter offers a more detailed evaluation of how the nine attributions were derived, chapter five then presents the analysis of the nine attributions as they offer insights into the meaning of missing lectures. Just over one half of the comments in the interviews were not, however, used in these chapters because they could not be interpreted as falling within any of the three categories or supporting indirectly any of the attributions. This is discussed in the next chapter as are a small number of potential deviant cases that are looked at. The interview data not used were made up of statements that were considered to have no meaning in the context of this study. These comments though had been made by the students, and were therefore saying something of meaning to them. They were therefore counted as items of data in part for completeness of the analysis in the next chapter. Examples from three different interviews are offered below:

First Year Degree:

*Yeah definitely I'm enjoying both subjects I've chosen so, yeah I'm doing psychology and financial services.*

Second Year HND:

*And you can't do it at home, I tried to do it from my computer and unless you've got the relevant programmes it will just crash.*

*Yeah, unless you've got the right player you can't do it.*

*Unless you've got the exact same programmes as they've got in the computer labs you can't do it.*

*Yes, so you end up spending a fortune printing it out from here because you can't save it onto disk or anything.*

Third Year Degree:

*You've got to put books on hold and wait and be 25th in the queue and never get it before your assignment and you get charged to get a book sent here or a journal sent here and I don't think that's particularly fair, particularly now when people are paying fees why they should be charged £2 a journal to get some information.*

The first was a student mentioning that she enjoyed her course choices, the second was a mini discussion by the HND group about using WebCT during their interview, and the final extract was a comment about problems with the availability of library books. None of these could be attributed directly to student, lecture or context factors in relation to students missing lectures.

**Reflections on Methodology**

No research method is perfect in design or implementation and it is therefore a requirement on those involved in research to reflect on the process and the

philosophy underpinning what they did. These reflections are mostly rhetorical discussions relating to the relevance of the work undertaken. In other words, in qualitative research in particular, it is important that the researcher asks questions about the fallibility of the method they used (Lincoln & Guba, 1989). Patton (2002: 39) calls this a debate about methodological appropriateness in qualitative methods in which the researcher reflects upon `*whether one has made sensible methods decisions given the purpose of the inquiry, the questions being investigated, and the resources available*`. The detail of the previous sections reflects this debate in the context of this thesis and as (Moustakas, 1994) argues, is really an attempt to allow the reader insight into the process, and not just the outcome. of the research.

Reflecting on the research described earlier begins with the philosophical issue of using interviews as a method of generating an understanding of how phenomena are experienced. Even though the existence of language in and of itself might be considered evidence of an intersubjectivity through which shared ideas about experience can be communicated (Silverman, 2001), at a philosophical level, Pring (2001) outlines five well known concerns with interviews as a research method:

1 Understanding what someone says about their behaviour is difficult if we know nothing about the intentions behind that behaviour. The act of doing something is full of intent, but this may not be apparent in the words people use to explain or justify their behaviour.

2 Individuals have a `life history` which means that their words and statements have particular meanings for them. Statements can only ever be fully understood if something is known about the personal context of the person making them.

3 Words, although public property, are a limited and imperfect language and can therefore only ever provide a partial description of the world.

4 Words are then interpreted by others who are subject to personal contexts and the limits of language.

5 Language is specific to a moment and place. Its meaning outside that place may be difficult to establish.

In sum, these concerns mean that interview methods can only ever, like any method, offer a partial understanding of the experience of social phenomena. To make claims for complete understanding based on interview data is simply not possible.

Pring`s first concern is actually very similar to Polanyi`s (1959) understanding that consciousness is based on focal awareness that people can talk about, and other comprehensive awareness that they cannot and which is held in gestalt form, but is still part of their *`terrain`* of consciousness. Polanyi argues that there is a level of understanding that is more holistic and comprehensive than the structure and patterns of experience that individuals describe in words. People, for example, have an experience of their friends in more ways than they are able to say if asked to describe them. Their knowledge of their

friends is more than can be put into words. Pring's third concern is that individuals are similarly limited in what they can describe about any of their experiences. This limitation is not only because of the limits of their awareness, but it is also to do with concerns about the structure and syntax of language itself. Words, as they are used everyday, are an imperfect form of describing the world according to Wittgenstein (see Hacker, 1997). Accurate and logical communication requires that language must have a logical correspondence with the facts of the world which Wittgenstein argued they do not. Stevenson (in Burton, 2000) elaborates on this limitation in a different way, as the distinction between personal contexts of interviewers and interviewees which is Pring`s fourth point. Using an example of a discussion of a tennis match being observed by two people, he suggests that the one who has actually played tennis will discuss the match from a very different perspective to the person who has not. The understanding of the other`s meaning in the conversation will be limited because of this difference in experience even though from each person`s point of view, a conversation is taking place about the same experience – watching the tennis match. Words from this perspective are not simply objective tools for communicating, but have an individual context that reflects personal histories and beliefs. In linguistics this problem is referred to as the distinction between an etic objective outsider interpretation of language and the insider emic understanding that is culturally and historically bound. The interview data in this thesis of necessity is based on an outsider objective interpretation of words.

The second and fourth issues raised by Pring are in fact the well known recognition of the limitations of hermeneutics. The double or even triple hermeneutic is a limitation on the meaning that can be taken from interview data (Alvesson & Skolberg, 2001). Any interviewee chooses the words they use to describe their experience which is the first hermeneutic (that will be subject to personal context as above). These words are then subject to a second interpretation by those receiving them (in this case the researcher). The third level hermeneutic is the interpretation made by those reading the researcher`s words (examiners and others). Thus, presenting research findings using interview data are subject to three levels of interpretation which is why assessments of relevance are crucial (see chapter four). What this means is that assessing the results of research using interview data is a triple hermeneutic.

The remaining concern of Pring is that any interview can be seen from a constructivist perspective of knowledge. Knowledge that is generated in interviews is specific to a time and place and cannot be generalised.

In response to these concerns, this thesis takes the following view. As a study using an interpretative methodology, the research is presented on the basis that all research has similar problems as above, especially all qualitative interpretative methods which are actually in one form or another an interpretation of another person`s experience as a phenomenology (Mason, 2002). However, in order to do interview based research that has relevance in a professional context and to practice, the judgment of the research should

be based on practical value. Pragmatic research does not focus on ontological and epistemological issues of truth in a realist sense, but on whether there are good reasons for the methods adopted and the findings presented (Cherryholme, 1994). This thesis grew from a professional concern with students missing lectures and is presented in response to these issues in light of theoretically informed outcomes. Good research used in this way should always have practical value in helping understand how to respond to phenomenon, and the data and meanings derived and interpreted should be judged on this basis. A non-educational example of this focus on practical value is economics which is a very positivist orientated subject. The Nobel Laureate Milton Friedman actually suggested that economic theory was not necessarily about understanding economic behaviour which may or may not be real, but in finding good ways of predicting economic outcomes because it is these that are valuable (Friedman, 1953). The ability to predict rather than to reveal whether there is such a thing as `*real*` economic behaviour is the value of economic research even within this most positivist of disciplines. This is a pragmatic perspective on how economic research is conducted from one of the most influential economists of the last century.

The outcomes of research designed to understand and explore the experience of phenomenon using qualitative methods as in this thesis are not, however, about prediction. They are about illumination based on negotiation and persuasion from which further research should then be possible (Mason, 2002). In the case of phenomenology as explained earlier, they are principally about interpreting how something is experienced, or what it means to

experience it, rather than what causes the phenomenon to occur. This understanding is based on interpretations about what are the shared perceptions of an experience of the phenomenon which may or may not be real and then, if possible, considering associated influences. From a pragmatic point of view seeking to improve practice, whether the meaning derived from student perceptions are or are not real in many ways is irrelevant since an understanding about how students perceive and experience phenomena should reveal something about how they might be influenced practically by them (Weiner, 1994).

This thesis thus seeks to investigate students missing lectures and illuminate understanding of it from a practitioner perspective. This thesis sees the results presented in the next two chapters as being an interpretation of shared ideas about the experiences of students missing lectures that has potentially practical outcomes for how the Faculty might respond to these findings that are considered in chapter six. In the next chapter, the interpretation of the interview scripts reveals nine main attributions that is the relevant database of the interviews. Chapter five then seeks to identify the underlying meaning of the experience as suggested by these attributions. Chapter six then, inter alia, discusses how these meanings might be interpreted as an holistic process. Two different possibilities are considered.

This thesis is sympathetic to the view of Lincoln & Guba (1989) that presenting the results of qualitative research is about constructing negotiated meanings about a phenomenon. The practical orientation of the research

means the negotiating position of the thesis is pragmatism. In studying the results of the next three chapters, the practical and intuitive logic of what is being proposed is the basis on which the data and meanings should be judged. This is why the previous sections of this chapter are so detailed in explaining the processes and problems involved in designing and then deciding how to undertake the five group interviews, how they were arranged and conducted, and how relevant data have been generated. In total within this thesis, data with full explanation about how they were interpreted is offered 58 times (including appendices). These data are from 22 students.

Although based on pragmatism, there are some mediating factors that improve the outcome of the research for this thesis that should be recognised. For example, the fact that interviewer and interviewees share similar experiences at the same university means that there is likely to be a degree of intersubjectivity that Stevenson (in Burton, 2000) believes to be important in reducing interpretative bias. At some level, because interviewer and interviewees share experiences of being at the same Faculty, albeit in very different ways, it is possible to gain insights into what the students mean in ways someone from outside the Faculty may not be able to achieve. In addition, an assessment of the relevance of the attributions in the next chapter is undertaken at the end of the chapter, first through an assessment of potential deviant cases as suggested by Silverman (2001) and second, by comparing interpretations of some of the data against those of two tutors in the Faculty using an approach suggested by Arksey & Knight (1999). A further supplementary evaluation of the data is a chi-square test of whether

the nine attributions discussed in the next chapter capture the main patterns of missing lectures as outlined earlier. The results of these three assessments support the relevance of the attributions. A final mitigation is the fact that the students met in groups and were able to tease out underlying tacit understandings. Interviewing students in groups was an advantage here in relation to Polanyi`s concerns about the limits of focal awareness.

The argument for using the approach presented in the previous three sections is thus based on an attempt to persuade others of the appropriateness of the process adopted from design, through implementation and interpretation. The view that the research undertaken for this thesis is a process of negotiation means that it is left for others to judge the quality of the research. This is what Eisner (in Hammersley, 1997) refers to as recognising that social knowledge which is universally accepted as being objective and identifiable is not achievable through research. What researchers do need to do and can demonstrate, is that the processes the research undertook were, as far as it is possible, rational and were applied with due diligence. His view is that the results of these processes may not be knowledge, but he agrees with Toumlin (cited in Hammersley, 1997:55) that `*...belief, supported by good reasons, is a reasonable and realistic aim of enquiry*`. The `*good reasons*` Toumlin alludes to were outlined earlier in this chapter. Research undertaken in this vein should be persuasive and it should present a `*recognizable reality*` for the reader that Miller and Parfit (in Entwistle et al, 1997) suggest as being crucial in qualitative research. Thus, the methodological question is really whether the thesis contains good reasons for the way the research was designed, how

it was done and if the results presented in the next three chapters offer a reality that has some practical relevance to those reading this thesis.

## Chapter Summary

The analysis of why students miss class from the literature, and the understanding derived from work undertaken by Keane (2001a, 2001b & 2002) and an analysis of the minutes of meetings, informed the design of the research for this thesis. Semi-structured interviews with five sub-samples of students chosen at random were undertaken. With the approval and support of the Faculty Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee, interviews took place between June and July 2002.

The interviews were conducted in strictly ethical ways and although not perfect, all the indications were that the students participated freely and openly. A detailed description of what was done and why was presented in this chapter. Full text transcription was provided by a Faculty administrator and a tutor, Dr Willis, sat in on three of the five interviews.

The data were derived based on an interpretation in light of the student, lecture and context factors. A detailed example of how this was done is in Appendix A.

The chapter finally reflected on the philosophical issues involved in interview based research. It was argued that there are doubts philosophically about interview data. The argument presented was that all social research is subject to these concerns and that scholarship is about presenting good reasons for the research method. The act of presenting research is thus to persuade others about the appropriateness of what has been done. The aim of this chapter was ultimately to have so persuaded others about the scholarship underpinning the research supporting this thesis.

## Chapter Four: Interpretation of Data

The approach to generating relevant data is a process of deriving meaning in the context of the research being undertaken as discussed in the previous chapter. The meaning taken from any database will be determined ultimately by the questions being asked of it. The purpose of this chapter is to present in detail the way that data and meaning were interpreted from the interviews. The interpretation of the data was largely inductive, but each category includes a discussion of what the data might suggest which includes reference to some relevant literature. This discussion was helpful in interpreting the meaning of the experience suggested by the attributions presented in chapter five.

This chapter presents a first level interpretation of the interview data and then assesses the relevance of these interpretations.

### Attributions 1 - 9

The script of the five interviews yielded nearly 200 pages of text. In total, the five interviews lasted nearly 6 hours, involved 37 students of which 20 were female and 17 were male; 22 of the students were degree and 15 HND registered.

The interpretation of the interview scripts began by asking how the individual (as the student) and relevant conditions of their experiences (lecture and context influences) were associated with missing lectures in the transcripts. The allocation of the data to one of these three categories required an assessment of whether the comment fitted with any one or more of these influences[27]. Therefore, in order to be attributed to student influences, for example, the comment had to demonstrate that it was saying something about the student in relation to missing lectures. Comments revealing aspects of attitude, character or expectation on the part of the student as a reason for missing lectures were therefore sought. If the statements, as they often did, also made reference to the lecture or a context influence, that part of the comment was allocated to another influence. How this was done for all the database was explained in the previous chapter with a detailed example in Appendix A. Numerous further examples are presented in this chapter. In total, 905 items of data[28] were identified in the database of which 263 contained specific comment about why students miss lectures that could be related to the student, the lecture or to context influences. The remaining 642 items were made up of various comments, 164 of which could be interpreted as indirectly saying something in relation to students missing lectures that supported these 263 items. Examples of these are considered below.

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[27] Looking at the factors in this way does run the risk of missing important associations say between students and the lecture, or between student and context factors. The next chapter of the thesis seeks to reinterpret the data conceptually and brings the data together again albeit in a different way. Interview analysis always disaggregates data in some way, be it through looking at individual words, lines, sentences, paragraphs or pages. In all cases there is a choice in seeing certain words as being relevant and others as not (Dey, 1995). The choice of the words chosen needs to be meaningful in the context of the questions being asked of the data as discussed in the previous chapter. Phenomenological analysis, as explained in chapter three, usually begins by separating the data between the individual from the conditions associated with the phenomenon they are experiencing. (Patten, 2002).

[28] Item of data is defined as a comment by a student which made a particular point. A comment was counted as containing as many items as points made by the student. An example of how this was done is in Appendix A.

The 263 items of data were organised into groupings according to the three categories. 38 of the items referred to student, 127 to lecture and 98 to context influences. Each of these is now presented in turn.

Student Influences:

The 38 items of data suggesting student influences were associated with the experience of missing lectures were striking in the number that referred to students miss lectures if there is a perception that there is nothing tangible gained from being there. The interviewees in this part of the database were often expressing expectations that lectures need to be perceived as offering something that helps them get better marks in assignments or examinations, or their final grades. There were 28 items in this category which for reference are in appendix B.

A colleague called out three numbers at random between 1 and 28. He chose the numbers 6, 13 and 20 and the items of data in Appendix B corresponding to these three numbers are given overleaf[29].

[29] Although a random number generator could have been used to ensure full randomness, the tutor asked had not seen the data and had no idea how it was arranged. He therefore had no idea which items would be chosen based on the numbers he called out. In hindsight, not using a random number generator was a mistake.

***Interview Y3**
***Degree**
***S1**
***F:** I dare not miss a lecture because I won't understand it if I don't go and I haven't missed a lecture in three years so I'm probably not your ideal person ask why people miss lectures. *I think if I don't go I think I might miss something* and if I think if that's probably put across more then people will think, oh I've got to go to this because *I might miss a tip for the exam or a tip for the assignment.*

***Interview Y2**
***Degree**
***S7**
***F:** You've got the same problem though if you have done business before you feel as though *there's no point going to the lectures because you know what they are talking about.*

***Interview Y2**
***Degree**
***S2**
***F:** *If I found out that it was something useful, like towards the assignment, from like fellow people in the lecture, then they will get the notes and not go.*

The reason each of these can be grouped together is because of the words highlighted in italics and underlined. In the first item of data, the word `I` refers to self (student) and her concern about missing something, which later in the item she identifies as tips for the assignment or exam. This is evidence that some students may miss lectures if they feel the lecture will not help them in assessment. This is quite specific and rational for a student who perceives lectures in instrumental terms. It is therefore a comment about the student and their perceptions principally, rather than about the lecture itself. The interpretation of the second item of data is that the perceived benefit here is not stated in assessment terms, but there is an obvious expectation that the lecture must offer something new to students that they have not studied

before. In other words, the student has to believe that there is an explicit return of some kind for being at the lecture. The third item is about attending to get the notes. If certain students have the notes relating to the assignment, then, according to this student, they may not bother going to the lecture.

The first attribution concerning students missing lectures therefore is:

**Attribution 1:** *Some students will miss lectures because of their perception that certain lectures offer little tangible benefit.* (TANGIBLE)

The other 10 items of data on student influences are in appendix C and refer directly to aspects of a student`s personality or attitude as a reason for missing lectures. Again, a colleague called out three numbers (2, 3 and 5) and the corresponding data from the appendix is presented below:

***Interview Y2**
***Degree**
***S1**
*F: I think probably *laziness is a factor and finding any excuse not to go to lectures.*

***Interview Y2**
***HND**
***S2**
*M: ..... possibly your conscience comes in and *you feel a bit guilty*. If I missed a lecture I'd probably think well, should have gone to it, try and find another run then if I don't go to it then I'm thinking if I get a bad grade now then it's my fault. I paid to come here so I'm wasting my money. *Other students who miss probably feel differently and don`t feel guilty like me*

***Interview Y2**
***HND**
***S2**

***M**: I think there is always going to be, not a *split but certain sort of people who will and won't go* and I think it will always be the same wherever you go.

Laziness and the finding of excuses reflect a particular characteristic of the student in the first case. These students, according to this female student, are missing lectures because they are `*lazy*` in relation to study. In the second item of data, students who do not have the sense of guilt this male student is expressing, are likely to miss lectures more. The students he is referring to feel differently about missing lectures in comparison to him and miss more lectures as a result. A similar view is also being suggested by the third student. Some students are, as she says, the `*sort of people*` who will tend more than others to miss lectures. It is an expression of the type of person they are.

A second attribution about the students who miss lectures is therefore:

**Attribution 2**: *Personality type and attitude of some students can influence whether they attend lectures regularly. (ATTITUDE/PERSONALITY)*

**Discussion:**

The number of items of data in Attribution 1 suggests the perception of getting something tangible in return for attending lectures is important for students missing lectures. Some students missing lectures may simply, as far as they are concerned, be making rational choices about lectures. If they feel that

certain lectures should offer an instrumental value of some kind, and they perceive that these lectures are not doing so, it is probably reasonable and rational for them to choose to miss them. The problem is on what basis these decisions are being made and what does it imply about the students doing it?. If some students are simply interested in assessment, for example, it may be rational for them to miss certain lectures, but how is it that they are able to identify which lectures to miss?. That some students actually attach a value to certain lectures and make decisions about which to miss on this basis is an interesting possibility from student influences.

In economics the term bounded rationality suggests that in value terms, the ability to make decisions is bounded by the ability to process information effectively (Petress, 1996). The existence of professionals is explained, inter alia, in agency terms using bounded rationality as the reason. In an educational context, bounded rationality did form part of an argument for making lectures compulsory in a debate between academics in the US (Brauer, 1994). The view was that professional tutors` know why it is important for students to attend lectures, even if the students do not, and lectures should therefore be compulsory. There was also an Irish study looking at the association between attendance at lectures and performance in examinations (Maloney et al, 1998). The researchers found in this study that final year students attend less lectures than second year students. The authors argued, without offering supporting evidence, that final year students may be making more informed choices about which lectures to miss, and they could do this because of the greater experience they had of lectures in

comparison with second year students. In any event, Attributions 1 and 2 suggest that some students make explicit judgments about the value of lectures and choose to behave accordingly.

Value in learning terms may be about the goal to succeed or avoid failure as explained in chapter two. Desire to succeed and fear of failure are two specific, but very different, influences on students (Covington, 1984). A success-oriented student would be one who gains satisfaction in how a lecture meets a particular need to be successful; a failure avoiding student will perceive the lecture in terms of how the lecture reduces their fear of failure. Value as an indicator of goals in relation to students missing lectures may suggest differences in what students` goals are for lectures. That a lot of this is about assessment directly or indirectly also suggests a high degree of instrumentality in the attitudes of some students missing lectures.

The inference from Attribution 2 is that there are certain students who will almost always miss more lectures than average. It is part of their attitude to study, although the relatively small number of items of data suggests this may not be a major influence. What this attitude represents is not clear from the data.

The keywords from these two student related attributions are: goals; expectations; return; instrumentality; personality; attitude.

Lecture Influences:

The next stage in interpreting the data are the 127 items of data identified as referring to some aspect of the lecture as an associated influence in missing lectures. These items of data refer to comments attributed to aspects of the lecture as a reason for missing them. The data were interpreted as falling within three groupings.

1 The style, pace and content of the lecture (76 items)

2 The tutor giving the lecture (27 items)

3 Specific negative experiences or observations in lectures (24 items)

The style, pace and content of the lecture was conflated into one item for missing lectures, although each might have been separated. They were included as one item because broadly they say something about what is being done in the lecture by the tutor in relation to students missing lectures. The numbers suggest that this is a major attribution for students missing lectures in the Faculty. As before, the same tutor called out at random three numbers and these items are presented overleaf.

These three items of data suggest that the way the tutor presents the material to the students may influence some students in the decision to miss lectures. The key words are again in italics. The first student is focusing on the way this male tutor lectured as stated at the end. The second student is clearly telling a contrasting story of the atmosphere created by the lecture style that

she considers to be putting her and others `*to sleep*`. The third comment is about the style of teaching as a reason for missing lectures.

***Interview Y2**
***Degree**
***S8**
***F:** I'm a student rep for business and I've been approached because we had problems with one of our modules last semester and it came up in the field meeting, and spoke to XX about it and she went and sorted it out and this semester apparently it's running a lot better than it did last semester but that was because of the tutor, *the way he lectured which was a big reason why people weren't turning up.*

***Interview Y1**
***Degree**
***S6**
***F:** It's just such an atmosphere he makes and everybody just starts contributing a little bit on what he does, and there are some lectures when you just sit there *and you think God there's no point, you just go to sleep ten minutes afterwards, your brain just switches off so you can't take in and you're just sitting there.*

***Interview Y2**
***HND**
***S1**
***M**: I was speaking to one of my friends earlier, I was saying I was coming to this meeting and she was saying, *well certain tutors would put me off*, *like the way they teach or what have you*.

The third attribution from this analysis is:

**Attribution 3:** *Lectures may be missed if the student is finding difficulty with the pace and style of the tutor. (STYLE etc)*

The next attribution concerns how students missing lectures relates to experience in lectures with reference to the tutor as the influence, not how s/he is lecturing. This was mentioned in 27 items of data. Again, three

numbers were offered at random by the tutor and an analysis of these is below:

***Interview Y3**
***Degree**
***S3**
***F:** The thing is by the time you get to the third year *you know which tutors you like and you know which tutors you do like and their style and which ones you don't*, I think you generally have a preference and you will always attend the ones you do like, because as you said the pack gets given out and you know who's teaching which lectures and normally you can decipher which ones you like.

***Interview Y2**
***HND**
***S2**
***M**: I think some people might take tutors the wrong way because I mean, I thought XX was quite good as a tutor and I really enjoyed his lectures, but I know some people did make comments and thought the way *he put himself across* was, they didn't like it. I think it's the way some people take a tutor, whether you take them at face value or whether he's being sarcastic, I don't know I really enjoyed his lectures but then *I know other people really didn't and missed some because of it.*

***Interview Y1**
***Degree**
***S3**
***F:** *I've actually changed my lecture run because I don't like the tutor*.

The first comment is by a student in her final year. She is stating clearly that by the final year students, because of the past experiences they have had of lectures, know which tutors they `*like*` and whose lectures they are likely to attend. Some final year students even target their module choices on this basis. The second comment is a clear description of how some students experiences of certain tutors affects their views about the tutor[30]. The final comment is self explanatory.

[30] This is a good example of how close the attributions are in some cases. Although the comment is about the approach of the tutor, it could also be included in student factors under Attribution 1 earlier because the comment suggests that for some students it is also about how they respond to a particular

A fourth attribution from the analysis of the data is therefore:

**Attribution 4:** *Students are more likely to miss certain lectures if, for whatever reason, they have come to view the tutor negatively. (TUTOR)*

The final attribution in this category refers to comments relating to an experience or an observation made by a student in a lecture. This is not the same as the tutor in the previous attribution because the comments here are about specific experiences in lectures that are related to context influences in the lecture itself. There were 24 items of data in this attribution. Three chosen at random using the colleague are considered below:

***Interview Y1**
***Degree**
***S3**
*F: Especially like the big lecture studio downstairs, *you sort of walk in and everyone turns around and there are no seats so you've got to walk all the way down and around the front*, and if they have already given out sheets, that's another thing some tutors if you come in late and they have given out sheets, they won't give you a sheet and you just sit there going what *and you might as well of not bothered going* because it doesn't mean anything to you.

***Interview Y2**
***Degree**
***S5**
***M:** Yeah, they (part-time students) are irritating, they really are they like work so they think they are so much better and they always start going on about some incident at work, which is totally not relevant. Yeah, I did one last

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style. The extracts from the quote that make it potentially relevant to Attribution 1 are : `I think *some people* might take tutors the wrong way I....think it's the way *some people* take a tutor...`, However, the `some people` are associated with the style of the lecture. It is their perception of the style that is the key attribution here.

semester with some part-timers and *they just got right on my tits and I couldn't be arsed to go.*

***Interview Y2**
***Degree**
***S6**
***M:** ....., I put my name up at the beginning of the lecture and I didn't get seen to. *What's the point of me going if I'm not going to get any help anyway? Why should I bother turning up? And I didn't for the next few weeks and it's as simple as that, I just sat at home and plugged away at it on my own*[31].

The three examples here are of specific experiences or observations that may put some students off attending certain lectures. The first student is expressing an experience of discomfort when arriving late. The way she feels people will *`turn round`* and look at her, or that she may not get the handouts like the rest in the students, are all concerns about having a negative experience in certain lectures. This is a comment about certain lectures being threatening to her which then increases the chances of her not going. The second student is much more specific about not wanting to attend lectures because of very negative feelings towards the part-time students in the lecture. His reasons for being so negative are not given in the comment, but were revealed later in the actual interview as being related to the fact that part-time students are older and in tutorials often make comments and raise questions which this student felt as a dominating behaviour. The outcome for him of these feelings was his decision not to attend some of those lectures as a result. The final student is expressing feelings of not being helped because of this overcrowded lecture. A particular negative experience that meant he decided not to attend a number of lectures on that module.

[31] This was a lecture in an IT management class in which the tutor was helping the students go through a particular problem. In reality, this was a lecture, but in approach it was probably more like a tutorial.

A fifth attribution is therefore:

**Attribution 5:** *If students have a partlcular negative experience in a lecture, or observe others having such an experience, it may mean they miss certain lectures if they feel the probability of another such experience is high.*

*(NEGATIVE)*

**Discussion:**

The number of items of data in this section is quite significant, particularly in relation to Attribution 3. What actually happens in lectures and how this is perceived by the student is crucial in understanding all of the data in this category. What the tutor does is important in explaining attribution 3, and the importance of the relationship students establish with tutors through the lecture is implicit in attribution 4. Terms such as like, dislike, tedious and so on which were included in many of the 27 items of data for this attribution are very emotive and suggest that something has gone wrong here between certain tutors and students. How can the students form such strong negative emotions with people they do not really know?. Attribution 5 again suggests that some tutors may be insensitive to how what they do in the lecture with one student (say arriving late) has consequences both for the student involved, but also on the other students in the lecture who feel discomfort and intimidated. Why it appears some tutors are unaware of this may be something to do with their skill and sensitivity to students needs in the lecture.

These data may, however, also reflect the changing context in which these tutors are trying to lecture. Weinstein & Mayer (1986) show clearly how organizational context can have a major influence on the motivation to teach. Larger classes, a more diverse and demanding student body, and greater assessment and teaching loads in the Faculty, may explain why certain tutors are perceived in the way they are by some students missing lectures. These tutors may be reflecting their own lack of motivation to teach students in these more difficult conditions.

Much of this may also be understood by the expectations students have about what lectures and tutors are there to do for them. These expectations may not be being realised for some students who then choose to miss some lectures because of this. Students, particularly first years who enter University with high expectations (McInnis, 2001), may be expecting that lectures should be more like the classroom teaching environment they came from[32]. They may also feel, as some of the comments in the database suggested, that lectures should inspire or entertain them in some way. They then go to certain lectures and feel unable to keep up or are uninspired because of the way the material is being presented to them. If their expectations are not being met, these students may begin to lose motivation, feel negatively towards the tutor (i.e. begin to dislike him/her) and these perceptions may then make some students feel discomfort in the lecture itself, which is then reinforced by observing or interpreting particular lecture experiences in negative terms. There may actually be a circularity at work here based on some implied

[32] In one of the examples earlier and in some of the data for the three attributions, students regular use of the term `*teach*` would support this suggestion.

psychological contract that the student perceives is not being met in certain lectures. Some students missing lectures are simply dissatisfied with their experience of lectures.

Much of the data may, of course, simply be explained by the fact that some tutors are poor at lecturing. Their style and pace is poor, they do not present a very likeable persona to the students in their lectures, and some tutors may even abuse their position by being rude and offensive to some students, which then reinforces the problem.

The keywords for Attributions 3-5 are: student expectations; dissatisfaction; dislike; style; pace; bad tutors.

Context Influences:

The final part of this section are the data presenting the evidence for the role of context in students missing lectures. In other words, the circumstances that students find themselves in that are associated with missing lectures. There were 98 items of data within this category suggesting that outside context influences are a very important influence on students missing lectures. The data is presented as falling into the following four areas:

1 Socialising the night before (14 items)

2 Influence of peers and friends (34 items)

3 Time in relation to curriculum, assessment and administration (26 items)

4 Random events (24 items)

As previously, three examples from each of the above were identified through the tutor and are considered below, beginning with socializing.

***Interview Y2**
***HND**
***S1**
***M**
Possible, more so in the first year because*, I know this isn't an excuse not to go to lectures, but they`re all early lectures and there's a lot of socialising* that tends to go on the first few months that you get here. So to go out on a night out and get up really early doesn't go together too well generally.

***Interview Y1**
***HND**
***S2**
***F:** *I always miss lectures if I'm partying the night before I can't get up in the morning.*

***Interview Y2**
***Degree**
***S4**
***M:** Yeah in the first year I think as most people do, *I missed a few just from going out the night before.* If I didn't go out or if I wasn't sort of hung over or ill then yeah I'd make the effort and go but otherwise if you are feeling pretty groggy *you don't want to be sitting in a lecture for two hours*.

These are quite straightforward accounts of students missing lectures because of going out the night before. Socialising is defined as a nighttime activity in these accounts and there is an association here with late nights and alcohol. The low numbers of items of data actually mask the strength of

support for the importance of socializing that was expressed in the interviews, and the emphasis placed on it as a reason particularly for first year students missing lectures. Attribution 6 is therefore:

**Attribution 6:** *Socialising is a significant reason why some students miss lectures (SOCIALISING)*

The influence of peers and friends was the next context identified in the data.

The three examples here are:

***Interview Y2**
***HND**
***S1**
***M**: Yeah I know someone, just some girl mate of mine and *she wouldn't want to go to a lecture on her own*, she wouldn't want to walk into the room, just an insecurity thing I guess. She wouldn't sit on her own or just go and sit next to someone else, but I don't have that problem.

***Interview Y2**
***HND**
***S7**
***M**: Another thing that I noticed, some of the people I lived with in halls who *didn't go to lectures or didn't go very often, they tended to group together as well.* So when they're in that sort of situation *there's no motivation to go*.

***Interview Y1**
***Degree**
***S9**
***M**: You stay in as a group so, normally it's a Tuesday and *everyone's just like, you going to go to this? No lets stay here.*

The interpretation here is of students missing lectures because the activity for some is experienced as something done with peers and friends. The first comment is interesting in suggesting the support that the female student he is referring to gets from being in lectures with friends and how she feels insecure

if she does not know anyone in a lecture and may not then attend[33]. The other two comments are more about students working in groups. The first of these is a very interesting observation of how students behave in the context of a group, the second in some ways is an explanation of why some students act in this way when in these contexts.

The attribution from this data is therefore:

**Attribution 7**: *The friends some students have at university may influence whether they miss lectures at times (FRIENDS)*

The next context was the way administration, timetables and assignment deadlines were considered important in students missing certain lectures. Three items of data from the 26 that included this, chosen again at random, are explained below:

***Interview Y2**
***Degree**
***S7**
***F**: *I think people who miss a lot lectures are people who have got an assignment to do.*

***Interview Y3**
***Degree**
***S1**
***F:** But if people had a choice if you had two different runs, say you've got a 9:15 run in the morning some people will want to go to that and some people definitely won't want to go to that. *If people had that bit of flexibility and a bit of choice, cause things do come up and you can't always make that lecture.*

[33] Again, this comment can be interpreted as reflecting her attitude to study as a student factor and as a lecture factor in the sense the comment means that the context of the lecture in terms of who is there is part of the experience of missing lectures, as it was for some students (such as part-timers). It is presented here because the influence occurs before the lecture and therefore is an outside context factor.

***Interview Y2**
***HND**
***S6**
***M:** I've had quite a lot of problems personally with administration in the first few weeks, *I've been thrown left, right and centre from different offices and with that you miss the first few lectures. I've missed a couple of lectures this semester through sorting out*, spending a week sorting out my timetable, just basically being thrown from office to office and I've had that quite a lot over the last few years due to a few reasons. I mean well you go and try and get things sorted from time to time and *it's not always possible to catch up or go to the lectures you've missed and I find that sometimes the administration has made me miss the first few weeks.*

Here the students are offering experiences relating to assessment deadlines, lecture times and administration as contexts that influence lecture attendance. These are all specific activities that students need to do as part of their studies which it seems have an affect on their attendance at lectures. Assignments are influential to attendance as the hand in date gets near according to the first student. Some students feel that they need to use lecture time to finish their assignments. The second student is using the timetable itself as being relevant to missing lectures some of the time, especially those lectures timetabled in the morning. The third student makes specific reference to students having to manage their studies and deal with the administrative functions of the University, and the fact that his experience of this resulted in his falling behind in his studies and missing lectures.

The penultimate attribution from this analysis is therefore:

**Attribution 8**: *Students who are having difficulty with organizing their study time, may miss some lectures as a result. (TIME MANAGEMENT)*

The final context is about having no choice but to miss lectures. These data were included for completeness because they provide insights into wider context influences in general. The three examples chosen randomly overleaf were:

***Interview Y2**
***HND**
***S3**
***M**: Yes, I mean this semester *I haven't been able to go to any of them through work or something* and I had to change my shift around to be able to go to one. So the amount of runs throughout the week, maybe?

***Interview Y2**
***Degree**
***S8**
***F**: Yeah for placements, cause when people have got the interviews they can't be that picky about when they have them and a lot of companies phone up and say can you do it on such and such a day and even if it's just in the afternoon *you've got to miss morning lectures to get to the interviews*.

***Interview Y1**
***Degree**
***S1**
***F**: That's fine for people in halls but I live in student accommodation near the train station and luckily most of us have cars but there's still a few, you know you can't get to Park, *you can't get to FCH there's no buses provided*. *So you've got to walk 25 minutes to get to Uni for a 9.15am lecture*, you're stuck if no one else is driving and miss some lectures.

Work commitments are significant for some students and according to this student can mean lectures are missed[34]. Interviews for a placement might also affect lecture attendance according to the second student, whilst the third

[34] This is another good example where there is a fine line between the data in some of the attributions. Work commitments may mean that study time is reduced which would make it relevant to attribution 8 as well. It was included here because work is a separate context. The comment is not directly about study time and deadlines for assignments or timetables as in attribution 8; the student is talking specifically about work. This comment was therefore interpreted as being a different context factor to study time.

student felt not having a bus to catch, and therefore a 25 minute walk, was sufficient reason to miss some morning lectures.

The final attribution from this analysis is therefore:

**Attribution 9:** *There will be events which mean that students miss lectures. (EVENTS)*

**Discussion:**

It appears that some students missing lectures are unable to manage the two aspects of university life; socializing replaces lecture attendance in Attribution 6. There is a lot of evidence about how inappropriate socializing is related to some of the difficulties students have at university (Tinto 1987; Yorke, 2000, Ozga & Sukhnandan, 1998) and it may be similar processes which affect lecture attendance. The evidence here is that for some socializing has a particular influence on first year students and on morning lectures which is also consistent with the problems (first year) students appear to have in managing their time in Attribution 8. The number of comments in the data about how peers and group norms may be related to both students missing lectures and socializing in Attribution 7 is a significant finding possibly. Socializing into the early hours is a choice in Attribution 6, but some students may also be being influenced into missing lectures because of the friends they have made. This inability to regulate and manage academic and social life is interesting because it is also a way of explaining Attribution 8. A more

autonomous and independent learner should, in theory, manage their study time better. This argument would also help explain some of Attribution 9 since some of the reasons offered for students missing lectures (weather, buses, morning lectures etc) suggest a certain lack of organization and time management by which may also reflect a lack of motivation.

Keywords here are: independent; autonomous; friends; socializing; time management; assignments; timetables; organised.

**Evaluating the Attributions**

This section presents the results of the assessments undertaken on the nine attributions. The intent here is to demonstrate the levels of confidence in the claims being made about the nine attributions which is important in a study using qualitative interpretations. This section thus seeks to establish whether there is a robustness in the nine attributions.

The first evaluation is an assessment of how much of the database is explained by the nine attributions that Silverman (2001) suggests is good practice in qualitative research. A second evaluation relates to Silverman`s other suggestion about the importance of looking at data that could cast doubt on the analysis which involves an assessment of some potential deviant cases in the data. The final evaluation of this section looks at how the

interpretations of the data agrees with two tutors in the Faculty as a way of considering reliability as advised by Arksey & Knight (1999)

How Much of the Database was Used?:

The aim of this first evaluation is to assess how much of the data were used in arriving at the nine attributions. In other words, in addition to the 263 items that were directly included in deriving the attributions, this is an assessment of how much of the other data in the 642 remaining items might also indirectly support the nine attributions. The interpretation then is how much of these 642 items of data could be argued to be in support of one or more of the attributions. The reason for doing this is simply to assess how well the database as a whole supports the nine attributions.

This assessment of the data required an analysis of how many of the 642 items of data remaining outside the nine attributions might be interpreted as being related to, and therefore implicitly in support of, the nine attributions. An example of data that were used to do this from the 642 is given below:

***Interview Y1**
***Degree**
***S9**
***M:** And I'm doing like HT101, which is like human resources theories and stuff and marketing I'm just like useless. I'd rather just work out something than do all this reading and stuff. We get given about seven chapters of reading and after that I was like well I've taken in about a page of that, and I've wasted about three hours of my time. So I'd rather just do some exercises or some questions or something that they give you do know what I mean, rather than have to read up on it because it's so easy to just put it aside.

***Interview Y1**

*HND
*S5
*M: Well it sounds really bad but in that actual lecture if you don't do the work or if you miss the week before he will pick on you big time

*Interview Y3
*Degree
*S1
*F: I think if you've done placement you're a lot more disciplined and are more able to manage your time better.

The first item refers to this students opinion about the subjects HT101 (a human resource management module) and marketing. He feels that he is not strong in these subjects which he has little interest in anyway. He states that he would prefer to do something else and then, as he puts it, put the topic to one side. His lack of interest in these subjects, the belief that he is therefore wasting his time, suggests that this student`s perception is likely to be that he is probably gaining little from HT101 or marketing lectures. His preference for simply being left to read and do specific tasks suggests that he will miss some HT101 and marketing lectures because of this. This recognition of gaining little is an indirect way of saying that there is no tangible benefit from his point of view in these lectures. His comment can therefore be interpreted as implicit support for Attribution 1 (Tangible).

The second item of data can be interpreted as being indirectly supporting both Attributions 3 and 4. The concern this student expresses about being picked on is likely to be consistent with his having either negative feelings about certain lectures or about certain tutors. This comment can thus be associated with these two attributions.

The final example is related to Attribution 2. In this comment she is referring to being more organised and disciplined in the final year after having been on placement. This is consistent with this student having a more mature attitude to her studies because of this experience. Her attitude has changed as in Attribution 2 (Attitude), and she is less disorganised as in Attribution 8 (Time management), which means she is likely to miss fewer lectures than before.

This analysis of the database resulted in 164 items of data that could be indirectly associated with one or more of the nine attributions in this way. What this means is that 263 + 164 = 427 out of the 905 items of data can be argued to support the nine attributions in some way. The remaining data are other comments that could not be interpreted as falling into any of the nine attributions. These items of data in the database were mostly made up of parts of the interviews which had moved into discussions not related to the experience of missing lectures. Examples of these were considered in the chapter three. This part of the database included, for example, one final year student who felt the need to mention a number of the problems he had with the Faculty and a particular tutor. The second year HND group also talked at length at one point about their experience of using the software package WebCT at the University. The first year degree group during their interview also debated for some time why they had decided to study at University.. Although these topics took place in the interviews they could not be assigned to an attribution.

Deviant Cases:

The intent of this evaluation is to interrogate the database for examples that could cast doubt on the nine attributions. Potential deviant cases are not chosen at random. The examples here are presented because they might offer reasons for students missing lectures that have been overlooked.

Only six items of data were interpreted as being potential deviant cases.

Three of these are highlighted below :

***Interview Y1**
***HND**
***S6**
***M:** Sort of, if I go I go if I don't I don't, I don't really care what anyone else is doing

***Interview Y1**
***HND**
***S2**
***F:** A little bit yeah if you're not prepared you're not going to be able to answer the questions so well it's probably better not to go.

***Interview Y2**
***HND**
***S1**
***M:** Not always, cause if someone's on their own they're going to be more focused and attend more.

The first student is a potential deviant case because he could be offering a view that is in direct opposition to Attribution 7 (Friends). He states categorically that he is not influenced in attending lectures by his peers and friends as that attribution suggests. However, there is some relevance in his statement to Attribution 2 (Attitude) and the influence of personality on attending or missing lectures. His comment could be interpreted as

suggesting that it is his personality, rather than his peers, that will determine whether or not he attends lectures. His independent attitude is therefore dominant for him over what his friends are doing with respect to attending or missing lectures. If this is true the comment does not raise serious doubts about Attribution 7 (Friends) because it is showing the importance of attitude and personality in the decision to miss or attend lectures which is broadly consistent with Attribution 2.

The second possible deviant case suggests that this student misses lectures if she feels she is unable to contribute which on the face of it does not relate to any of the nine attributions. However, this again can be interpreted as saying that either being unprepared means that for her it is better not to go to a lecture because she is likely to get little from being there (Attribution 1 - tangible), or that because she feels that she may not be able to contribute this could make the lecture a more intimidating environment for her (Attribution 4 - negative). Again, this comment does not warrant a sufficient concern about the relevance of the nine attributions.

The final comment again refutes the influence of friends and peers on students missing lectures as Attribution 7 (Friends). However, the context to this comment was how social life influences study habits. His comment could therefore be interpreted as supporting Attribution 6 because if social life is a distraction from attending lectures for some students, by contrast, a student on their own, as he comments, removes this distraction and may actually encourage lecture attendance. What he is saying is the opposite of arguing

that social life may cause some students to miss lectures. A lack of a social life because a student has not made friends may encourage lecture attendance as he says.

The three deviant cases can thus be reconciled with the nine attributions.

Accuracy of Interpretation:

This is the evaluation undertaken on the accuracy of the interpretations of the data across the nine attributions. Given that these data are based on an interpretative method, it was important that the interpretations deriving the attributions were assessed independently. There are a variety of ways of assessing the accuracy of interpretations, but the aim according to Arksey & Knight (1999):

> ` *...is concerned with two things. First, with establishing that your categories are fit for the purpose of analysis and secondly, with establishing the accuracy of your indexing.....What you are looking for at this point is confirmation (from others) that the categories you have chosen are workable ...(page 166)*

The assessment using these `others` was organised as follows. Twelve of the items of data were chosen that were used to support the attributions. Two tutors[35] were asked to assign each item of data to one of the nine attributions.

[35] It did occur to ask students to do this who might be better placed to interpret other students comments, or to go back to the interviewees as is often used in grounded theory methods of analysis. The first idea was discounted because of concerns that the students approached may not feel able to refuse or might feel they were being tested in some way and then not approach the evaluation in the way required. There was also the added risk that the students asked might recognise the interviewees from the comments which would be a violation of the promise that had been made in the five interviews

The two were briefed fully on the background to what they were being asked to do, but they were not in any way advised that the comments were only taken from data allocated to six of the nine attributions. A memo accompanying the assessment given to both of them is in Appendix C[36]. The assessment was to compare which attributions these tutors allocated the data to with how they in fact had been attributed in this thesis.

Table 2 below presents the results of this evaluation. Actual refers to how the data were attributed followed by the distribution suggested by the two colleagues. Differences are identified by **.

Table 2: Results of Two Tutors Interpretations of the sample of data

| **Item of data:** | **Actual** | **Tutor One** | **Tutor Two** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Quote 1 | 1 | 2** | 1 |
| Quote 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| Quote 3 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Quote 4 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| Quote 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 |
| Quote 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 |
| Quote 7 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| Quote 8 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| Quote 9 | 4 | 4 | 7** |
| Quote 10 | 5 | 5 | 5 |
| Quote 11 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| Quote 12 | 6 | 6 | 6 |

Arksey & Knight (1999:166) state that there `*is usually some disagreement amongst the different people who use the categories and there are no rules for resolving that disagreement*`. As the table shows, however, there was

about interviewee confidentiality. The other idea of going back to the original interviewees was considered, but again rejected, because it would violate the promise made to them about their participation being voluntary and based on the interview only.

[36] A lot of explanation accompanied the note in Appendix C. The two tutors were also very fully briefed and were asked to spend some time looking at the data before allocating them to one of the attributions.

actually only a minor level of disagreement. There was a discussion about quotes 9 and 10 in Appendix C. Quote 9 was quickly resolved in discussion. Tutor Two had attributed this quote to Attribution 7 (Friends) he said because he thought it was about team work and working with friends and therefore about Attribution 7. On rereading the quote and after discussion, he accepted that the reference in the comment to not liking the tutor made it in broad terms more relevant to Attribution 4 (Tutor) even though part of it could and was, allocated as he suggested. Tutor Two was thus in full agreement with the allocation of the twelve quotes even though quote 10 he said he had found difficult to attribute. Tutor One had some difficulty with quote 1 which he allocated to Attribution 2 (Attitude) whereas it had been placed in Attribution 1 (Tangible). Again after discussion, he agreed that it was probably more closely related to Attribution 1 (Tangible) since the student`s main comment was about getting something (tips for exams) for attending lectures rather than a comment about her personality.

In the discussion of the relevance of the attributions, the only important point made by the two tutors was that attributions 6 (Socialising) and 7 (Friends) might overlap a little in interpretation. Socialising, and the influence of friends, could be viewed similarly since the influence of friends may be to socialise more rather than miss lectures per se. It was explained that the data in the attributions all made reference to students missing lectures and thus in attribution 6 (Socialising), the comments allocated all said something about socializing and how it is associated with students missing lectures in its own right. Similarly for attribution 7 (Friends). That there was logic in the

relationship between the two attributions was, however, accepted. It was explained that this potential relationship would, in part, be addressed in the analysis in the next chapter.

The strength of agreement from these assessments was reassuring. The assessments supported the relevance of the nine attributions.

Chi -Square Analysis

The categorization and numbering of the data into gender, year of study and course registration offered the possibility of a statistical analysis to test whether the attributions had in fact captured the phenomenon of missing lectures as outlined in chapter three[37]. This assessment was to test, therefore, if there is a statistically significant relationship between the attributions with respect to whether the student is in the first or third year, an HND v degree student, or is male or female. The test is simply asking whether the attributions have captured what was suggested in the minutes of the subject field meetings as reported in the Introduction and chapter three.

The test used was the standard chi-square statistic. An example of how the data were organised for the test is that the first item of data in Appendix A was

[37] This use of statistics from qualitative data analysis is unusual. Quantification has some relevance where the results are supplementing the analysis rather than being presented as accurate measurements of the phenomenon being tested (Saunders et al (2003). For this thesis the use of the chi-square tests is simply viewed as offering supplementary support that the attributions capture the three main characteristics of the phenomenon.

classified as being a third year student, studying for a degree and male. All 263 items of data were categorised in the same way.

The database of actual data for the 263 items of data is below:

| Attribution | A1 | A2 | A3 | A4 | A5 | A6 | A7 | A8 | A9 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 7 | 3 | 43 | 14 | 15 | 5 | 17 | 11 | 13 |
| 2 | 12 | 7 | 23 | 5 | 5 | 6 | 14 | 10 | 7 |
| 3 | 9 | 0 | 10 | 8 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 5 | 4 |
| Degree | 25 | 3 | 49 | 23 | 16 | 10 | 17 | 14 | 22 |
| HND | 3 | 7 | 27 | 4 | 8 | 4 | 17 | 12 | 2 |
| Female | 16 | 4 | 34 | 18 | 12 | 7 | 23 | 14 | 18 |
| Male | 12 | 6 | 42 | 9 | 12 | 7 | 11 | 12 | 6 |

The data were then allocated to the three broad influences as below[38]:

| Attributes | A1-A2 | A3-A5 | A6-A9 |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 10 | 72 | 46 |
| 2 | 19 | 33 | 37 |
| 3 | 9 | 22 | 15 |
| Degree | 28 | 88 | 63 |
| HND | 10 | 39 | 35 |
| Female | 20 | 64 | 62 |
| Male | 18 | 63 | 36 |

Three tests were undertaken with the following null hypotheses:

H1: Students missing lectures is independent of whether the student is in the third or first year.

H2: Students missing lectures is independent of whether the student is studying for a degree or an HND.

[38] A1+A2 are attributions 1 & 2 which refer to student factors. Similarly, A3-A5 are lecture and A6-A9 are context factors.

H3: Students missing lectures is independent of whether the student is male or female

*Results of Chi-Square Tests:*

H1: $\chi^2 = 188.9$

H2: $\chi^2 = 8.1$

H3: $\chi^2 = 20.9$

$\chi^2$ at 5% level of significance (2 degrees of freedom) is 6.0.

Each of the hypotheses are therefore rejected. The nine attributions broadly support the three main patterns of students missing lectures. That is, the attributions are in support of the perception that students missing lectures is influenced by year of study, gender and whether the student is degree or HND registered.

**Summary of the Chapter**

The interpretation of the five interviews of 200 pages of text yielded 263 items of data related to student, lecture or wider context influences. These 263 items of data were used to derive nine attributions about missing lectures. A

further 164 items of data were interpreted as supporting these attributions, but in a less direct way.

The interpretations were subject to specific evaluations. The first evaluation was to assess how much of the database had actually been used. It was estimated that approximately half the items of data supported the attributions.

The second evaluation considered possible deviant cases of which three were considered. It was demonstrated that all three examples could be shown to be in agreement broadly, but indirectly, with one or more attributions. The reliability of the interpretations was assessed with two tutors in the Faculty. It was shown that there was strong agreement with the way the data had been allocated into the attributions. Finally, a chi-square test confirmed that the attributions support the view that missing lectures is influenced by gender, course (HND v degree) and year of study.

## Chapter Five: Constructing the 3Ds

This chapter now seeks to deepen the results of the previous chapter by interpreting what missing lectures means using the attributions. In bringing the data and the discussion of the previous chapter and supporting literature together, three broad meanings of missing lectures will be suggested in this chapter. The first is **disquiet**. This is derived from the experience of lectures in terms of feelings of being ill at ease. This is the `*Don`t like it!*` meaning of missing lectures. The second meaning suggested by the attributions is ***disinterest.*** This is the `*Can`t be bothered*`` meaning of missing lectures. The final meaning is interpreted to be **disengagement**. This is the `*What`s the point?*` meaning of missing lectures as a rational assessment of certain lectures.

### The 3Ds of Missing Lectures

The three important concepts that emerge in this chapter as explained above are disquiet, disinterest and disengagement (3Ds). It will be suggested that these constructs are the meaning behind the experiences of missing lectures that help explain why final year students miss lectures less than first years,

why HND students miss more lectures than degree students, and why lecture attendance falls as the semester progresses[39].

For reference, the nine attributions from the previous chapter were:

Attribution 1: Tangible

Attribution 2: Attitude/personality

Attribution 3: Style etc

Attribution 4: Tutor

Attribution 5: Negative

Attribution 6: Socialising

Attribution 7: Friends and peers

Attribution 8: Time management

Attribution 9: Events

***Disquiet `Don`t like it!`:***

The first meaning interpreted from the attributions is based on the emotional influences in the experience of missing lectures. Feelings are generated which make the lecture experience unpleasant and uncomfortable for the students. In the data, evidence that the lecture experience was unpleasant at times for some students missing lectures is in Attribution 5 (*Negative*), in Attribution 7 (*Friends and peers*) and in Attribution 8 (*Time management*). In different ways all these attributions contain data relating to the uncomfortable feelings that arise in lectures. Exploring this affective response to lectures led to the idea that disquiet is a relevant meaning of missing lectures. The fact that students expect lectures to not only be intellectual experiences, but

[39] The suggestion that gender may be a factor in students missing lectures is not supported in this chapter. The discussion of immediacy with tutors considered later in this chapter might be more influential on female students from the data, but the evidence for this is limited.

emotionally satisfying with respect to their being enjoyable, entertaining and pleasant, is supported by Jin et al (2001) and in the data[40]. Students need to be supported affectively as well as intellectually in lectures.

Examples of data which suggests that feeling uneasy in lectures may arise because of feeling `*sh*y` and worries about being `*picked on*` in Attribution 5 include:

***Interview Y3**
***Degree**
***S4**
***F:** That another deterrent definitely if *you dread every lecture because you know you're going to be picked on, especially someone that's really shy*.

***Interview Y1**
***HND**
***S5**
***M:** Well it sounds really bad but in that actual lecture *if you don't do the work or if you miss the week before he will pick on you big time*

However, feeling uneasy in lectures also occurs for other reasons, such as the need to feel related to other students in the lecture. Perceptions of how other students in the lecture are associated with missing lectures are in Attribution 5 below:

***Interview Y2**
***Degree**
***S7**
***F:** In the evening ones there are a lot of older students there, *which does put of some of the younger ones who don`t go because of it.*

***Interview Y2**
***HND**

[40] This data largely is taken from the 164 units.

***S2**
***M**: Only sometimes when you have actually gone to a lecture *and you don't know anyone who's there, or if you're not 100% sure who everyone is*, you may recognise them by face but if you don't know them by name, *you might sit there and think oh, and not be very enthusiastic and not go so much*

The words `*put off*` and `*not be very enthusiastic*` demonstrate the affective experience here for some students. Feelings of isolation and of not knowing others is an affective response for some students missing lectures. The need for students to feel that they are with friends in lectures, or who prefer to be with people they know or are similar to in terms of age, is thus important[41]. There is a lot of literature supporting this idea and its influence on how students approach learning tasks. Students, for example, have a sense of group identity which influences how they study (Weiner, 1992, Ehram & Dornyei 1998). Students who feel alienated and isolated will have a lower motivation to study (Mann, 2001).

Having a close connection with other students in the lecture is one motivating factor, but another very important factor from the data was the relationship in the lecture between students and the tutor. Here some of the data from Attribution 4 (*Tutor*) is about some students having poor perceptions of some tutors:

***Interview Y1**
***HND**
***S1**
***F:** *If you don't like the tutor you don`t go as much*.

[41] The data in Attribution 6 and in some of the 164 items also suggests that there is a group identity for some students who study and socialise together which reinforces this point.

***Interview Y3**
***Degree**
***S3**
***F:** *If you like the tutor and you like the way they teach and you get on well with them you are more likely to attend.*

***Interview Y1**
***Degree**
***S9**
***M:** *No one turns up to her lectures XX last semester and no one actually went to it, I think I went to two altogether, no one could actually stand her.*

***Interview Y2**
***HND**
***S2**
***M:** I think some people might take tutors the wrong way because I mean, I thought XX was quite good as a tutor and I really enjoyed his lectures, *but I know some people did make comments and thought the way he put himself across was, they didn't like it. I think it's the way some people take* a tutor, whether you take them at face value or whether he's being sarcastic, I don't know I really enjoyed his lectures *but then I know other people really didn't and didn`t go because of it.*

The words `*like*`, `*enjoyed*` and `*annoyed*` demonstrate that these are affective experiences.

There is a considerable literature on the importance to students of having close learning relationships with tutors. Immediacy is a concept developed by US educational researchers that refers to an assessment of how close students feel toward a tutor and is one of the ways students judge a class (Christophel, 1998). A tutor who is perceived as approachable, who maintains good eye contact and is organised in the way material is presented, will be seen by students in more favourable ways (Ehrman & Dornyei, 1998). The study in the UK by Hodgson (1997), for example, showed how vicarious connections between students and tutors in the lecture can be significant in how students are motivated to study. Students were shown to not only come

to gain a better understanding of the material, but come to view the tutor in more personal terms and feel able to relate to these tutors in different ways.

The importance of communication and to vicarious connections as a lecturing style is in Attribution 4 (*Style etc*) and some of the 164 units of data as below:

***Interview Y2**
***HND**
***S2**
***M:** That's in a way *XX makes it quite good because he's had the previous experience and tells us these stories* when he was doing this and that and *it makes it more enjoyable.*

***Interview Y2**
***HND**
***S3**
***M:** *It's the examples; he's always giving example and relating it to things*.

Underlying perceptions of how enthusiastic a tutor is, the effort tutors appear to put into their lectures, is also a factor in communication that is known to be important to students (Brown et al, 2001) and is also in the data below:

***Interview Y1**
***Degree**
***S3**
***F:** My group as a whole we didn't really get on very well with her, *we got the kind of feeling that she was doing it because she had to not because she wanted to sort of feeling.*

***Interview Y1**
***HND**
***S2**
***F:** You can see *because they're bored themselves, how are they supposed to keep you entertained if they're bored themselves* and they don't know why they're teaching.

***Interview Y2**
***Degree**
***S1**

***M:** That's the one she was really, I don't know what it was *but I think it was you got a sense of incompetence not being rude or anything but I swear she should have been committed. A lot missed her lectures.*

Expressions about not getting on `*well*`, feeling `*bored*` and perceptions of `*incompetence*` and needing to be `*committed*` are associated here with students who feel distant from these tutors. How tutors approach a lecture, not just the content, thus has a disquieting influence on these students and results in a poor communication with certain tutors. The relevant concept again for this is immediacy.

There are other reasons for students feeling disquieted by a lecture and therefore lacking motivation to attend. Data in Attributions 8 (*Time management*) and 9 (*Events*) suggests that feeling discomfort in certain lectures may also be related to the context for how students are attending lectures. These contexts for students arise both from the physical environment of the lecture and the wider outside context factors influencing how the student is able to study.

There is considerable literature in support of the importance of context factors on the way students study. It has been shown, for example, that department and faculty environments are part of the learning environment that students respond to because they determine the teaching and assessment contexts of students (Ramsden, 1997). The work by Moos (1979) on learning environments also suggests that the broader environment of a university, with its systems and practices, both social and academic, are part of the learning experience that students are influenced by. Finally, a more recent review of

the literature on student motivation hypothesises that certain context factors are similar to hygiene factors[42] for students (Elton, 1996). It is argued in this model that some of these context (or hygiene) factors have the potential to dissatisfy students and affect how they then behave. Hygiene factors are normally associated with the physical environment which in the case of students missing lectures is to do with the lecture theatre itself. The influence of heating, seating, lighting and so on in the classroom have been shown in numerous studies to influence student behaviour and motivation (Ehrman & Dornyei, 1998).

The most important context factor in relation to feeling disquiet and students missing lectures in the data is the number of students in the lecture. How this then influences students missing lectures is demonstrated overleaf:

***Interview Y2**
***Degree**
***S4**
***M:** *I think It (attending) would depend on the sise of your lecture*, I've got a HR module with XX and there's about eight of us in the tutorial so I kind of got to know XX a lot better than I did originally, so if you have like module ZZ which was. *There was quite a big lecture so I didn't get to know ZZ as, I did get to know XX but not perhaps as well as I could have if it was smaller.*

***Interview Y2**
***Degree**
***S8**
***F:** .....so they don't come to the right runs which make students who are normally there *think oh I don't want to go to that one 'cause there are too many people*. So everybody jiggles around because *a lot of people don't go if there are too many people in the lecture.*

***Interview Y3**

[42] Hygiene factors are those environmental influences that have the potential to dissatisfy. The idea of hygiene factors is taken from the organisational behaviour literature as originally formulated by Herzberg. A good overview of recent thinking on hygiene factors is in Behling, (2001).

*Degree
*S1
*F: *I was going to say in the lecture sizes they are just so huge for business* that me coming from two different parts of the business school I don't know anybody hardly on my business side *because I don't think we're enough focused to get people coming together and that will deter people from coming to lectures too*, because people don't get a chance to meet other people and make friends and speak to someone about the assignment. *It's very difficult for people if you haven't got lectures and you don't know people and it's very hard.*

The first comment is about the fact that the larger the numbers in the lecture the more some students feel it affects their relationship with the tutor (immediacy earlier) and attendance. The other comment suggests that some students feel less comfortable in large lectures and try to attend lectures that they feel will have less students in them. In the case of the third student, large lectures create a sense of isolation and distance in the lecture as mentioned earlier for some students, increasing the chances of those lectures being missed.

The concept which it is argued emerges from this process is **disquiet,** a feeling that could be paraphrased as the *`Don`t like it!`* meaning of students missing lectures. Feelings of disquiet from the discussion above are important in relation to whether some students miss certain lectures. Disquiet is defined as a feeling of being ill at ease in a lecture. The influence of disquiet is significant across the attributions and means that certain lectures will in effect be avoided. The factors that appear to be important are the way the student feels about the tutor which has been presented as a sense of closeness (immediacy) arising from the verbal and non-verbal cues taken by students in lectures. Other important factors are number of students in

lectures, and composition of lectures in terms of the other students there that are felt as isolation and discomfort.

Whether disquiet arising from these influences is short or long term will be dependent on whether a student is able to cope with low immediacy, discomfort and isolation. Some of these influences may in fact be managed by module option choices and the friendships students in time establish[43]. Students who are able to adapt in this way are demonstrating an ability to cope by making adjustments as necessary to their study programmes and their social life. These students will in time likely find lectures that do not cause them the same levels of disquiet and their lecture attendance should improve which helps explain why final year students attend lectures more than first years. Final year students may be able to identify those lectures and tutors they feel closer towards. Disquiet with the physical environment of the lecture can similarly be managed in time by choosing modules with fewer students studying on them, the opportunity for which occurs as students begin to specialise in their second and final years of study.

A concern about disquiet is that it could be a circular process in that the three main influences may be interconnected. There is logic in suggesting that low immediacy, for example, may also make students feel more isolated or uncomfortable in lectures; or, feeling isolated and disquieted may lead to a reduction in immediacy with the tutor and thus increase disquiet. Students experiencing disquiet for any reason may become more disquieted over time

[43] There is data which supports this.

which is worrying because this may change the way they think and their general attitudes to lectures and tutors. This possibility is discussed further in chapter six.

Disquiet means that there is an important affective element to the experience of missing lectures. Disquiet arises from the lecture experience which includes the tutor. Disquiet might be interpreted as an avoidance behaviour.

If this analysis is correct the following propositions can be made about students missing lectures in the Faculty:

Proposition 1: The more distant (as a low immediacy) a student feels from the tutor, the more of that tutor's lectures s/he will miss.

Proposition 2: The more students are affected by a tutor`s lack of enthusiasm or skill as a lecturer, the more students will miss their lectures.

Proposition 3: The greater the number of students in a lecture, the more students will miss that lecture.

Proposition 4: The more students struggle to cope affectively with the presentation of the lecture material, the more they will miss those lectures.

Proposition 5: The more problems a student has with studying effectively at university, the more lectures s/he will miss.

Proposition 6: The fewer students who know one another in a lecture, the more students will miss those lectures.

***Disinterest: `Can`t be bothered`***

Consider the following data taken from attributions 8 (*Time management*) and 9 (*Events*):

***Interview Y2**
***HND**
***S5**
***M:** Last semester I had one like 9.15am and nothing until 5.15pm and you think do you wait around or do you go home, or what?. *Some people go home because they can`t be bothered to wait.*

***Interview Y2**
***Degree**
***S3**
***F** .....whereas like last semester, it is raining you think *why should I bother getting out of bed*, I might as well sit and watch TV all day.

Reference to not being `*bothered*` to wait to attend lectures later in the day is the key word above. There is no suggestion for either student that not being bothered is based on a particular assessment of the lecture itself, or how it is perceived in affective terms. This is simply an attitude which suggests that this is primarily about the student which is supported by the data in attribution

2 (Appendix B: *Attitude/Personality*). Some students are simply more disposed to miss lectures. More data supporting this is below.

***Interview Y1**
***Degree**
***S1**
***F**: I think probably *laziness is a factor and finding any excuse* not to go.

***Interview Y2**
***HND**
***S6**
***M**: It's the whole *attitude, if you want to come in and learn, you came in and learn if you don't want to come into the lecture*, you don't come in to the place at all.

Disinterest here is about having little motivation. The inference is that students are either low in motivation or may even be amotivated toward attending lectures. This low motivation may be due to having low goals in relation to lectures which is more of a factor in the first than in the final year:

***Interview Y2**
***Degree**
***S7**
***F**: *I think the first year it's pretty much you just have to get 40% to pass it and if people think that when they don't go.*

***Interview Y1**
***Degree**
***S3**
***F**: *It depends how hard you have to work to get to pass, if you were thinking well I could get 40% easily I could easily get 70% if you lose 2.5% every lecture that's nothing in comparison.*

That students' goals and what they value in relation to lectures is different in the first and final years is also supported indirectly by attitudes towards socialising and how this affects lecture attendance in Attribution 6 (*Socialising*). Some first year students missing lectures are orientated toward socialising rather than academic study. Missing lectures can be interpreted in

this sense as the opportunity cost of socialising. The data below suggests that final year students and first year students view this cost differently:

***Interview Y1**
***HND**
***S1**
***F:** Only the first semester, well I don't know it's swings and roundabouts really but it's a honeymoon period *you get here you want to settle in you want to go out, you really enjoy the nightlife* and you're just exploring XX, so I think probably the first semester you know people do miss lectures .....

***Interview Y3**
***Degree**
***S1**
***F**: I haven't been out this semester; I have not been out on a student night this semester because *I feel so much pressure. If you go out you feel guilty* and that is not just me saying that, *that is other people in their third year here*. You go out and have a good time and you think `*Oh Christ I should have been at home*`.

The idea that the attitudes toward attending lectures are different between the first and final year is interesting and needs an explanation. The evidence from the data is that goals in relation to grades are more important in the final year and less important in the first year when for some students just passing is sufficient. In other words, the instrumental value of lectures becomes more of a factor in how students behave in the final year. Many students missing lectures may, as Kuhl (1992) argues, simply be regulating their behaviour in light of their goals. They have proximate and distal goals that motivate them differently in the first and final year. In the first year proximate goals are orientated toward socialising and taking advantage of the fact that the first year is one that, in their terms, needs only to be passed. Failure and success are not important goals at this stage. Longer term goals in relation to overall grades and degree classification is only a factor in the final year.

Sideris & Radefonis (2001) referred to in chapter two would interpret the difference in behaviour between first and final year students as a reasoned action or a planned behaviour where goal importance is the differentiator. The intention of some first year students is to behave in a particular way which will include missing lectures and aiming to pass with the minimum of effort. Some students' intentions are instrumental in both the long and short term and their behaviour reflects this. In the final year, many of these same students take a more mature and strategic approach to their studies and are much more motivated to manage their time effectively[44]. A difference in lecture attendance between first and final year students is for many largely about an instrumental approach to the lecture and their learning goals. Missing lectures is thus for them about being disinterested in lectures at that particular stage of their studies.

Further support for the way lack of interest may be relevant in the interpretation of missing lectures is based on the concept of amotivation which is a general lack of interest in an activity because of a belief that there is a perception that there is nothing of value in doing it (Vallerand, 1997). An attitude of amotivation toward an activity is suggested from Deci & Ryan (2001) if regulation or compulsion is needed in order to get an individual to do something over which they have choice.

Consider the following data from the 164 units about how the Faculty might increase lecture attendance:

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[44] There is some data here in Attribution 8 (Time management) about final year students managing their time differently (and in the 164 items of data) than they did in the first year.

***Interview Y2**
***Degree**
***S2**
***F:** As we said earlier you know *I think if it was compulsory for the students to go then they'd go …*

***Interview Y3**
***Degree**
***S1**
***F:** *I think one way to encourage people to go is almost scare mongering* in that they're going to miss something if they don't attend these lectures or *reward them* for going there if you see what I mean. ….

This, and the previous data, supports the interpretation that disinterest is an important meaning of missing lectures. Some students simply `Can`t be bothered` to attend. This influence may be different in the first and final years when goals are different. Disinterest here is about some students' amotivation towards lectures which is supported directly by the data showing that some students are not bothered at times to attend lectures, and to other references in the data about making attending lectures compulsory in order to get students to attend. Missing lectures means in some cases an attitude of relative disinterest in the lecture being missed.

The following propositions about students missing lectures arise from disinterest:

Proposition 7: Students who have little interest in academic study miss more lectures than students who have greater interest.

Proposition 8: Students who are required to attend lectures because they are compulsory will probably miss more lectures when they are not compulsory.

Proposition 9: Instrumental students will miss more lectures in the first year in comparison with the final year.

***Disengagement: (What`s the point?`)***

This third meaning is based on the way a lack of concern about failure appeared as a feature of the data in Attributions 1 (*Tangible*) and 6 (*Socialising*) in particular. What emerges from these data is a clear indication that expectancies in terms of failure/success and the higher value placed on socialising for some students are associated with missing lectures. Unlike disquiet and disinterest, this next meaning is based on an assessment of a lecture by the student, not on affective or attitudinal responses. Disengagement below is a rational outcome of an assessment of the lecture as an expectation of value.

Consider the following data taken from Attribution 1 (*Tangible*) in relation to a perception of value of certain lectures as expressed by two final year students:

| |
|---|
| ***Interview Y3**<br>***Degree**<br>***S4** |

*F: *I mean I've been to every lecture of this semester* but I could be living proof that you can still go to every lecture and still fail. But largely I think definitely there is a difference in the third year cause you take it a lot more seriously cause you are more mature *and think more about your grades and* that sort of thing.

***Interview Y3**
***Degree**
***S1**
***F**: Because you know that *it's (attending) going to count towards your degree,* to whatever your final grade is and *you just know*.

These final year students are describing lectures in very instrumental ways and assessing them in a not too different way to disinterest earlier. The difference here, however, is that these students as they say `*think more*` and `*just know*` more about what they are doing with respect to lectures and are making implicit assessments of them. Disinterest is an attitude toward lectures, the above quotes are an assessment of them.

The data presented next supports the fact that this assessment is based on expectations for some lectures. An expectation, for example, of how much is likely to be learnt will have an influence on the decision to miss lectures. Taking data from attributions 3 (*Style etc*) and 5 (*Negative*), the learning that is expected to be achieved in the lecture for some students is revealed in the following data:

***Interview Y1**
***HND**
***S3**
***F:** I do find though, the lectures particularly one module it's very fast and its you know very quick, so you walk out of there and I find that *sometimes it confuses you more than clarifies what you've learnt.* That's what I've found .....

***Interview Y1**

***HND**
***S2**
***F:** Yeah, he just comes out with so much stuff, *it`s like wow really confusing*

***Interview Y2**
***HND**
***S3**
***M:** ....I sit there in that lecture and listen and try, *I can't take it all in*. Finance is really hard, especially when you get the amount of people that you get there and *I swear that more than two thirds do not understand what they're talking about and a lot probably miss because of it* .....

***Interview Y2**
***HND**
***S2**
***M:** sometimes it's just like boom, boom, boom *and your there just thinking brain overload*, your taking in the first thing they`re on about the forth thing and you're miles behind, *you're just thinking well I'm not taking anything in here so why am I here*, and I can see why people would give up.

References to thinking the material is not being understood and to experiences of confusion for the first two students, and to not being able to take it in and to thinking about `*brain overload*` for the third and fourth students, are specific experiences for students of certain lectures that they are more likely to miss. What was apparent in the data is that HND students have these experiences more than degree students. HND students have traditionally taken a more vocational route into the Faculty and are required to have the equivalent of one A level rather than the minimum of two required of degree students. It is known, for example, that HND students do not perform as well as degree students which has been a source of concern within the Faculty[45]. The suggestion here is that HND students may be more sensitive to what they experience in lectures in terms of learning which helps explain the difference in levels of attendance between the two groups.

[45] In this regard, the decision that HND students should be allocated to different lectures and personal tutors than degree students was taken by the Faculty in 2004.

**Disengagement** is a way of expressing what missing lectures means from these data. Disengagement is the expectation that nothing is being gained from attending the lecture. Students decide that there in effect is no point in attending certain lectures, not because of disinterest, but because they expect the lecture itself to be of little worth. The term disengagement here is defined as a rational assessment of outcome based on gain as an expected value. Disengagement is used here because it describes specifically the rational decision of some students to withdraw from the activity (the lecture) after having experienced it and made some assessment of it in outcome terms. Disengagement is thus about the judgment students make about how much they are likely to gain from a lecture. The experience may be associated with an instrumental attitude to learning and even low learning goals as in disinterest, but the meaning here is that the decision to miss the lecture is based on an assessment of the lecture itself, not as a result of an attitude of disinterest. Disengagement means having an experience of lectures and then making assessments of them. The process of disengagement is likely to occur over time as students come to learn which lectures are likely to be of little value which helps explain why lecture attendance falls as the semester progresses.

The analysis of this section means that certain propositions can now be made about students missing lectures as follows:

Proposition 11: The more a student assesses lectures in outcome terms, the more lectures they will miss.

Proposition 12: The less a student believes s/he is likely to gain something from lectures, the more lectures s/he will miss.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter has suggested that there are three broad meanings that can be constructed to interpret the experience of missing lectures taken from the attributions in chapter four. The following are the key points of the chapter:

1 The meanings of students missing lectures are disquiet, disinterest and disengagement. These are the 3Ds of missing lectures.

2 A lack of an expectation of gaining something from a lecture results in disengagement. A sense of distance and resulting dislike of tutors, a feeling of isolation from other students or discomfort with the general environment of the lecture, are important influences. Students are disquieted and avoid these lectures. Finally, there is disinterest towards lectures in relation to indifferent attitudes toward academic success or failure, and/or an instrumental approach to learning that is important.

3 The 3Ds are consistent in explaining the pattern of students missing lectures in the Faculty. Disquiet is probably more of a factor for HND

students, disinterest helps explain the differences between first and final year students, and disengagement helps explain why students missing lectures increases as the semester progresses

4 Disquiet, disinterest and disengagement have been labeled as the `Can`t be bothered`, the `Don`t like it!` and the `What`s the point?` meaning of students missing lectures.

Although the 3Ds have been presented as the separate meanings of missing lectures, in the next chapter the question is considered whether they may, in fact, be looked at in more holistic terms.

## Chapter Six: Discussion.

This final chapter of the thesis reviews the overall results of the research and considers the need to take a more holistic interpretation of missing lectures as suggested through the 3Ds. Two different possibilities for interpreting the 3Ds holistically will be presented. The first possibility is to interpret the 3Ds from an overall etiological perspective which considers the 3Ds in process terms. The second is an individual psychoanalytical interpretation of the 3Ds using a neo-Freudian theory of the ego known as Transactional Analysis (TA). Although very different, both possibilities are offered. How the 3Ds can be used to guide future research into missing lectures will then be considered briefly. This is followed by a discussion of how the 3Ds might be responded to by the Faculty and some of the wider implications for the Faculty are then outlined. The chapter is concluded by returning to the aim and objectives of the thesis to confirm that these have been achieved.

### Overview

The research set out in the previous chapters suggested that the pattern to the behaviour of missing lectures warranted an approach based on interviews of a sub sample of students who were interviewed in groups. The transcripts of these interviews were interpreted according to student, lecture and context

factors from which nine broad attributions in relation to the behaviour were suggested. These attributions were then looked at again in terms of the meaning of the experience they suggested from which certain influences were highlighted as being important. The 3Ds as they imply what the experience of missing lectures actually means were constructed.

This process is summarised in Table 3 below:

Table 3: Summary of Research

| **Perspective** | **Attribution** | **Influence** | **Meaning** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Student | Tangible | Immediacy | Disinterest |
| Lecture | Attitude | Isolation | Disquiet |
| Context | Pace, style etc<br>Tutor<br>Negative experience<br>Socialising<br>Friends and peers<br>Time Management<br>Events | Discomfort<br>Instrumentalism<br>Ambiguous Goals<br>Expected gain | Disengagement |

At one level missing lectures as a phenomenology is thus simply each of the 3Ds. The main influences which appear to be associated with these experiences are low immediacy, isolation, discomfort, instrumental attitudes, ambiguous goals, and expected gain.

In research terms these findings are interesting, but there is another more holistic level to the 3Ds that can be considered. As Harvey et al (2006: 136/7) have recently argued in relation to understanding and responding to the challenge of improving the student experience:

*`There is a need for a more systematic attempt to explore and theorise the totality of (the first year) experience .....We also need more holistic research that reflects the complexity of the student experience and that makes links between the separate strands that form the basis for most of the existing studies....What is needed is the encouragement of approaches that go beyond empiricism and the positivist search for definitive factors`*

The view being expressed is that educational researchers need to be prepared to consider the whole of the student experience in order to deal with the student as a whole, because focusing on specific motivating factors simply sheds more `*heat than light*` (Leo & Gallagher, 2001). From a practitioner point of view, it is important therefore to consider the whole of the experience in relation to the whole of the student and debate these without expecting to develop simple straightforward solutions.

Two different ways of interpreting the 3Ds in answer to this call can be offered. The first is to see the 3Ds from an etiological perspective in which the logic of a relationship between them will be suggested to specifically explain disengagement. This holistic interpretation is about seeing the experience as suggested by the 3Ds as separated at one level, but as an interconnected whole with respect to disengagement. There is also an argument that the 3Ds may be influential upon one another in the long run if disquiet is significant.

The second approach is a more unusual psychoanalytical interpretation. In this case the 3Ds are seen as the individual phenomenological realities of the students. This second interpretation of the 3Ds allows for consideration of the student in relation to the behaviour.

*The 3Ds: An Etiological Perspective?*

The question of whether the 3Ds can be interpreted etiologically rests on whether they can be argued to be causally related with one another. In other words, even though each of the 3Ds has individual meaning in the context of missing lectures, is it possible that the 3Ds are also influential upon one another?. In evaluating and exploring this possibility, three factors about the 3Ds that were considered important are:

1 Disengagement as a low expected gain will in etiological terms be based on specific beliefs.

2 Disquiet must be perceived as an expectation before a lecture if it is associated with why students miss lectures (otherwise the lecture would not be missed).

3 The nature of disinterest is of a dispositional influence that is part of the student`s attitude and personality.

The discussion of choice in chapter two highlighted how an expectation of value (gain) is influential in the choices people make and that these expectations arise from rational beliefs in context. Disengagement must therefore logically be based on students` expectations and what they consider to be worthwhile gains in relation to specific lectures. From the data there were no obvious beliefs identified that may be generating these deductions.

Disquiet is not like disengagement in that there are some insights into the key influences. Disquiet is also different because it is an affective experience in relation to missing lectures. In order for disquiet to be associated with missing lectures, however, it must logically be an expectation or the lecture will not be missed. Students must expect to have a disquieting experience which is why the students miss the lecture. Disquiet is thus an expectation for some students missing lectures. The underlying beliefs of the students from the data is that they expect to experience either low immediacy, isolation or discomfort in these lectures.

Disinterest is different again in that it is dispositional in the sense it demonstrates a lack of commitment by the student towards lectures. Disinterest must be based on certain beliefs the students have which conditions their attitude towards these lectures. The suggestion in chapter five was that instrumental attitudes as well as ambiguous learning goals might be important influences in some cases. Disinterest logically reflects beliefs that lead to an attitude that there is little to gain in relation to lectures.

If the logic of these interpretations is accurate, there can only be one outcome in terms of presenting the 3Ds as an interrelated whole. This is that disengagement may be influenced by beliefs arising from disquiet (as an expectation in context) and disinterest (as an attitude of a lack of value). In other words, disquiet is an experience and disinterest is an attitude which may generate a low expected gain for a lecture. Disengagement may thus be the

result of the cumulative influences of expectations that a lecture will be disquieting, and/or that it is of little value.

In holistic terms the logic of this argument is that missing lectures when explained as a rational choice is to respond to feelings and attitudes in the context of specific lectures by disengaging. In other words, disengagement specifically is the result of disquiet and disinterest as in Figure 8 below:

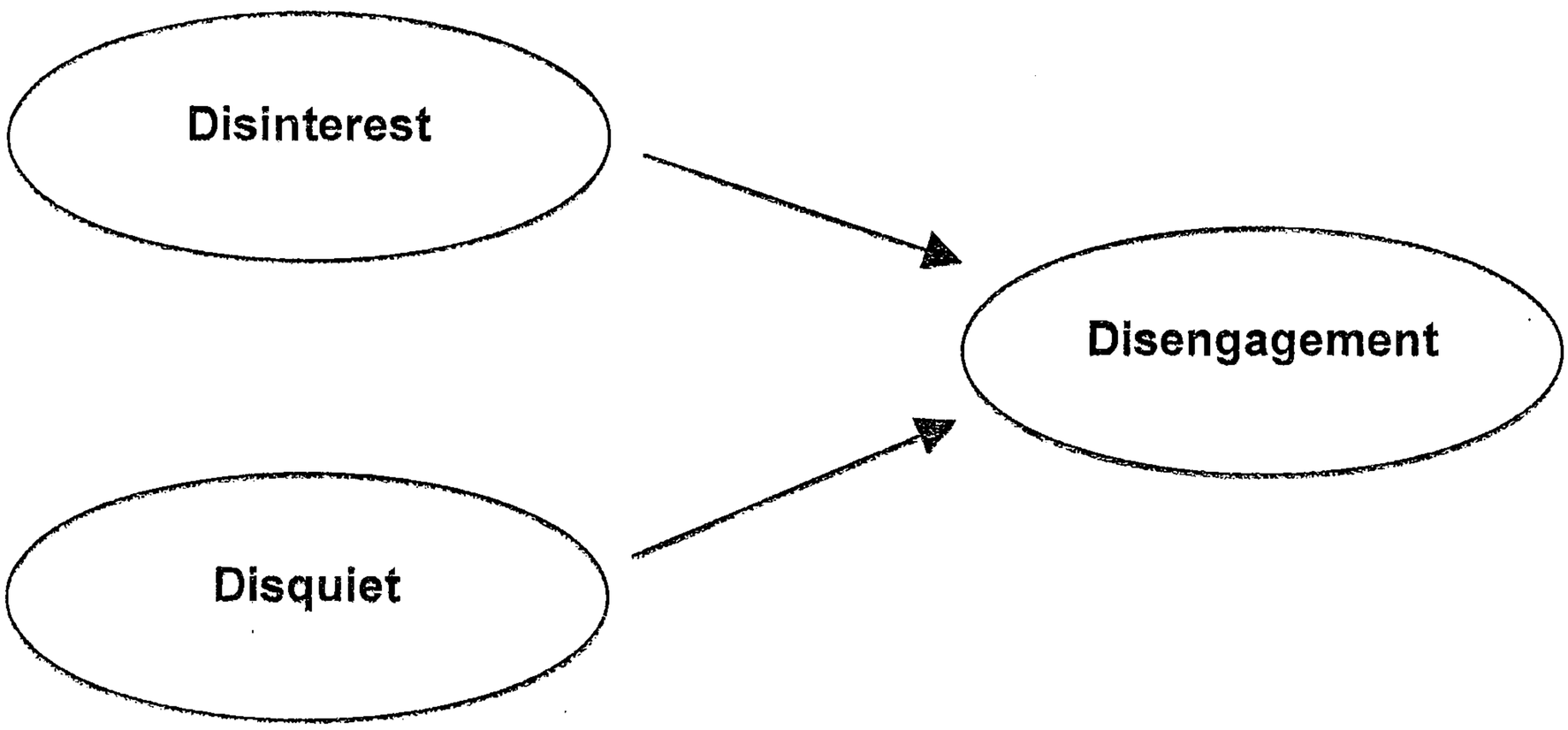


Figure 8: A Potential Etiological Relationship Between the 3Ds

Although this explanation of disengagement is based on the logic arising from interpreting the 3Ds in a particular way, there is some theoretical and empirical justification to support it as well. For example, empirical studies of immediacy show how pupils come to expect less from classes taught by teachers they feel a low immediacy (disquiet) towards. These pupils simply expect to gain less from these classes and this then affects their behaviour in class (Rodriguez et al, 1996). At a theoretical and empirical level, the well known holistic model of motivation by Vallerand (1997) also supports the

possibility of a relationship between the 3Ds. Vallerand`s research suggests that specific negative experiences (disquiet) over time reduce motivation for certain activities. If this disquiet continues the model predicts it will eventually lead to a change in the way an individual thinks about these particular activities (disengagement) in future and their attitude (disinterest) toward them. In the context of the 3Ds as a whole, what Vallerand offers is the worrying possibility that there may be a vicious circularity if disquiet is a persistent experience. This is because disquiet may not only lead to missing lectures in itself, but over time it could also result in increasing student disengagement and disinterest as well[46]. In other words, once a student begins to miss lectures because of disquiet, this increases the chances that future lectures will be missed[47]. What is even more worrying is that, as mentioned in chapter five, once students start to experience disquiet because, for example, they feel a low immediacy toward the tutor (perhaps due to lecture style etc), this may increase their feelings of discomfort with the lecture environment generally, further increasing their levels of disquiet. There may thus for some students be two worrying cycles. First, a vicious cycle of increasing disquiet in lectures which may, in time, lead to a second cycle of increasing disengagement and disinterest. These students over time will be seen to miss significant numbers of lectures.

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[46] Vallerand also shows that the relationship works both ways in that attitude over time may change the way a person thinks about certain activities and how they feel when undertaking them. One example would be a student missing lectures because of disinterest coming to the assessment that there is now less to gain from these lectures (increased disengagement), and that the expectation when attending these lectures is of a more disquieting experience (due perhaps to low immediacy or a sense of isolation).

[47] Some of the data in the 164 units did suggest that students who miss lectures are more likely to miss subsequent lectures. This possibility also helps explain why students miss lectures more as the semester progresses.

This etiological interpretation of the 3Ds not only therefore explains disengagement specifically, but it suggests that there may be circumstances where the 3Ds become a vicious circle. Students having these experiences may even become those that eventually withdraw (see later). What is not considered in this interpretation, of course, is the student actually doing the behaviour. A second holistic interpretation is to use the 3Ds to ask questions of the students who are missing lectures.

### *The 3Ds: A Psychoanalytical Perspective?*

This second approach to interpreting the 3Ds within an holistic framework recognises that the 3Ds represent the perceived phenomenological realities of the students. In seeing the 3Ds at an holistic level in this way, it is possible to interpret each of them not in connection to one another, but as revealing something about the student experiencing them. This second holistic interpretation was not based on anything written earlier in the thesis because it is not about how choices are made or approaches to learning. This interpretation is about the student as revealed through the 3Ds in relation to the experience.

The intuition that led to the idea of the 3Ds revealing something about the student came from reflecting on the three statements that were used to summarise each of them[48]:

[48] The reflections included a number of almost Socratic conversations in which questions about the 3Ds were raised and eventually the suggestion about ego and transactional analysis was made.

Disquiet – Don`t like it!

Disengagement – What`s the point?

Disinterest – Can`t be bothered

If these are accurate interpretations of the overall meanings of missing lectures, they infer that there are three qualitative differences to the experience. Disquiet in effect is the experience in affective terms, disengagement is a rational experience, and disinterest an attitude in relation to the experience. The 3Ds at this holistic level are therefore revealing the existence of three facets to the experience of missing lectures that in combination may suggest something about the students involved in this behaviour.

The following rhetorical questions were reflected upon further. When students are saying in different ways that they `Don`t like it!`, why is it that their feelings appear to be the dominant in this way?. When students in effect are asking the question `What`s the point?` in relation to missing lectures, the question is why students express the same behaviour, but this time as the outcome of a rational deduction?. The `Can`t be bothered` experience is different again in the sense it is a judgement of the lecture in abstract. This again leads to the question why students would communicate their attitude as being a meaningful way of describing the experience?

This rhetorical process led to a simple, but very important conclusion, which is that the 3Ds are in effect three different student voices in the data. In other words, the data when interpreted as the 3Ds suggests that there are three facets of the students being revealed. This was an important realisation because it eventually led to consideration of a well known theory based on the idea that the behaviour of any individual can be interpreted in one of three ways. The theory is Transactional Analysis (TA) developed by Berne (1984).

TA is a psychoanalytical theory widely used by therapy practitioners based on an adaptation of the neo Freudian theory that all individual psychologies are made up of three parts – the Id, the Superego and the Ego. Freud believed that the Id is the part of the subconscious made up of the basic instinctual drives everyone has which need to be controlled by the restrictive and controlling Superego. The Ego simply acts as a referee between the Id and Superego, imposing a rational but thoughtful response to the Id and Superego of the individual. The Ego in deciding on courses of action in light of the Id and Superego does so out of an enlightened self interest based on an awareness of self. The Ego is thus that part of the subconscious which makes someone self aware (Jones, 1981)

Berne used these ideas, but offered instead three basic ego states that he defined as `*...coherent systems of thought and feeling manifested by corresponding patterns of behaviour*` (Berne, 1984:18). These three ego states he suggested exist at one level in all individuals. In metaphorical terms they were labelled the parent, child and adult (PCA) ego states. Practitioners

of TA like Berne believe that it is useful to assume that these ego states are present during any social interaction (a transaction) and they are the way individuals communicate and behave in relation to another individual or to a group, although in each case what constitutes the child, adult or parent will be different. The specific nature of the three ego states are unique to the individual (Villere, 1981).

The parent ego in TA is the voice within that reflects the attitudes and values of an individual that have been inherited through those who were influential in the formative years in particular, such as parents. The parent ego state of an individual can be critical or nurturing. The child, on the other hand, is the ego state which reflects the feelings and non verbal internalised part of the ego developed in early childhood when an individual did not have the vocabulary or opportunity to communicate effectively. The child ego in theory can be rebellious or adapted, and whereas the parent is a source of their values to the individual, the child is a source of creativity and fun. The adult ego state works between the parent and child. The adult is the rational part of the ego in which an individual makes rational and reasoned choices. The adult ego in balanced individuals takes account of the parent and child influences, but it ultimately decides on appropriate courses of action. The adult decides about how to respond to others and may allow the child or parent to be influential when it is appropriate to do so. In all this, of course, the ego states are working at a subconscious level without the individual actively managing the process. (Harris, 1969) (see Appendix E for more background on TA) .

TA is a well established approach to studying personality and communication. The appeal is more pragmatic than theoretical, but in the context of the 3Ds, the theory does offer a framework for how they might be viewed holistically. TA argues that so long as communication during transactions (like lectures) is complementary and properly structured, then the communication and resulting behaviour will be effective and purposeful. Complementary forms of communication are considered mutual when the individuals communicating get back what they expect from the individual they are communicating with (Villere, 1981). In the case of a tutor communicating with a student in a tutorial, for example, a non-complementary communication might be a response from the student to a specific question in the form of a shrug of the shoulders and the comment `*dunno*`. This is not complementary because the adult ego of the tutor has asked a question of the student which requires an adult reasoned response, but in fact the tutor instead gets a comment which suggests the child ego of the student has in fact responded. This transaction structurally has failed to be complementary and is said to be crossed. Crossed communication is one that has failed to deliver a satisfactory outcome and may result in unsatisfactory behaviour (Harris, 1969). Thousands of potential forms of communication involving overt and covert ego states that can result in complementary or crossed transactions are possible (Berne, 1984). Berne suggested that there are nine main forms of complementary communication between people (3 for each ego: adult to adult - adult responds; adult to child - child responds, adult to parent - parent responds etc). In educational terms in lectures, the assumption is that the tutor is communicating in a rational and structured way from an adult ego

perspective, and is communicating at a subconscious level with the adult egos of the students. If this is not the case, the communication will be crossed.

The correspondence between the three ego states as described above and the 3Ds is actually quite compelling. Disquiet in ego terms can be interpreted as the affective communication arising from the child ego of the student. Don`t like it! is the child ego of the student responding to the lecture experience. Why the child ego of the student responds in this way and why feeling distant, isolated and uncomfortable arise from this particular ego state is not explainable, but from a TA point of view there is a subconscious need for some of the students missing lectures to feel close to the tutor, to other students and to perceive a friendly lecture environment, or the child ego in these students responds as a feeling of disquiet which results in their missing lectures. This is a crossed transaction because the behavioural response (missing lectures) is counter productive and is not the intention of the tutor. Similarly, the `What`s the point?` of disengagement is simply a rational deduction of the lecture experience of the adult ego of some of the students missing lectures. In this case, again for unknown reasons, the adult ego is deciding that there is little expected value in the lecture being missed. Whether this is in fact a crossed transaction is debateable since it is an adult ego response by the student to the lecture, but the decision to miss the lecture is clearly worrying from a teaching and learning point of view. The tutor does not expect students to decide to miss lectures and does not intend to communicate this. Finally, disinterest as a `Can`t be bothered` attitude has some similarity to the parent ego state in the sense it suggests a judgemental

view of the lecture which, from the data, is mainly influenced by attitudes of either ambiguous learning goals or instrumentalism. The parent ego of the student is in effect communicating that learning from the lecture has no value, or is only valuable if it has an instrumental outcome, and that this is how lectures need to be viewed. The parent ego voice is that the lectures being missed are not valuable or interesting which is against the purpose of the lecture. This is thus a crossed transaction and is not what is intended.

Figure 9 below presents the relationship as follows:

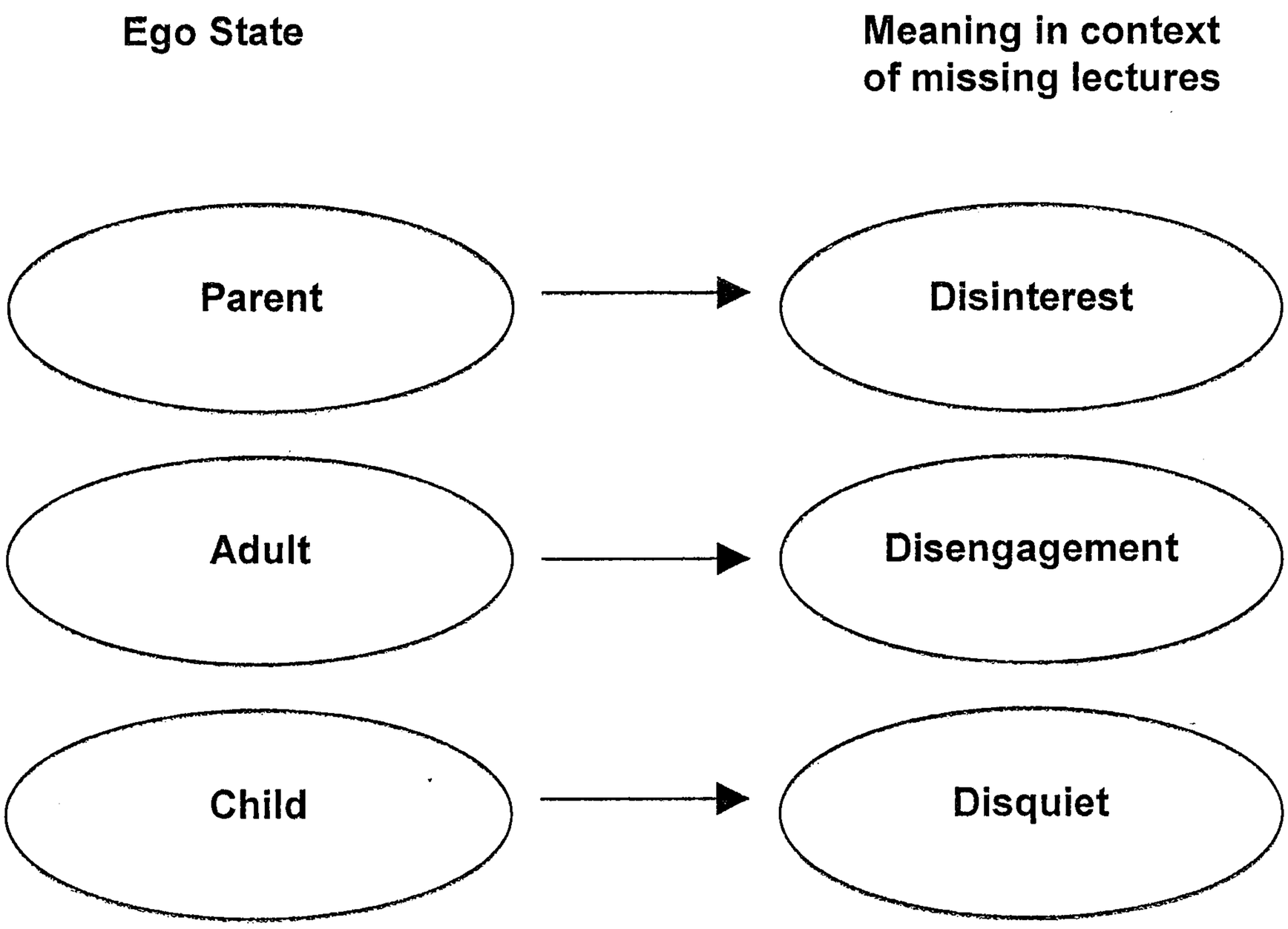


Figure 9: The 3Ds as different ego states

This psychoanalytical interpretation of the 3Ds is very different to considering the 3Ds in relation to one another, but the interpretation in broad terms is quite

appealing. TA is really a theory of psychology for practitioners. The appeal here is that when interpreted from a TA point of view, the 3Ds suggest a need to consider the egos of the students. The important conclusion from an ego state perspective is that the 3Ds suggest the students missing lectures are in effect struggling at some subconscious level to transact with lectures effectively. In a wider sense, this idea of struggle and ego in the existential context of individuals trying to be students has increasing support[49]. Missing lectures may in fact be an aspect of this struggle for many students in the Faculty related to the attack on the ego that learning represents (Todd, 2001). In effect, the 3Ds are the child ego of some students deciding that they do not like certain lectures, the adult ego of some students expecting to gain little from some lectures, and the parent ego of some students not valuing what lectures have to offer.

**Future Research:**

The 3Ds offer a level of understanding beyond those factors highlighted in the studies of absenteeism summarised in the Introduction. However, the 3Ds only represent a step forward in that understanding. A significant programme of research will be needed in order to take the ideas suggested by the 3Ds forward. In so far as an objective of this thesis is to frame how research might be directed, a brief outline of a programme of future research based on the 3Ds and the discussion above will now be suggested.

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[49] Professor Ron Barnett of the Institute of Education on a recent visit to the Faculty offered the view that the existential struggle of `being` students is the next challenge of his own research.

The first stage of the research using the 3Ds should be to verify the basic propositions outlined in chapter five. This is because verification is needed in complex educational research problems before deciding on more specific forms of empirical work (Clarke, 1994). Confirmation of the relevance of these propositions in respect of students missing lectures should be undertaken. Assuming these intuitively sensible propositions are supported, similar confirmation of the main influences on the 3Ds as highlighted in Table 3 earlier should then be considered. Again, the assumption is that these influences in relation to missing lectures will be confirmed empirically. It is intuitively sensible to believe so.

Confirmatory analysis of the propositions and the main influences are the first stage of the research, but the more important research challenge is to study the 3Ds more specifically in terms of how they develop. A programme of longitudinal research arising from each of the 3Ds should be undertaken based around a series of overlapping questions. These questions are an agenda for future studies into missing lectures and can be broken into two parts. First, there are questions about the 3Ds specifically that need to be answered, including:

1 Why is feeling that the tutor is approachable important to some students missing lectures in the Faculty? (immediacy)

2 Why is it that students missing lectures in the Faculty feel it important that more friends are in the lecture with them? (isolation)

3 Why do some students missing lectures feel uncomfortable if there are, for example, too many students in them? (discomfort)

4 How are conclusions arrived at for what a lecture will be like by students missing lectures? (expectations)

5 How are the longer term aims of students missing lectures considered in relation to lectures? (goals)

6 In what ways are students missing lectures able to assess what they will gain from a lecture? (instrumental)

Finding answers to these questions will improve understanding of the process of forming the 3Ds.

The second set of research questions using the 3Ds are based on the holistic interpretations discussed above. From the earlier etiological interpretation, an empirical analysis could be undertaken using each of the 3Ds as interdependent variables. With accurate and valid methods for estimating each of the 3Ds, it should not be difficult to confirm or repudiate whether disengagement is an outcome of disquiet and disinterest, and if there is an overall circular relationship between them in the long run for students missing a lot of lectures. The method for doing this is a structural path analysis. If such a relationship was supported, the worry about a vicious circularity for missing lectures would be confirmed. The students caught up in this circle might then be studied separately.

The research arising from the 3Ds as reflecting three ego states is, however, a different challenge. The research questions that need to be answered in light of this interpretation of the 3Ds include:

1 Do students communicate different ego states (parent, child and adult) in relation to how they transact with lectures?

2 (If yes to 1) On what basis do the child, parent and adult ego states emerge in the lecture?

3 What are the particular influences associated with these ego states and missing lectures (outside those already suggested by the 3Ds), and why do these influence the three ego states of the students?

4 Why is the lecture crossed in the sense students do not respond in appropriate adult ego terms to what the tutor is trying to communicate?

A programme of research arising from the 3Ds can thus be summarised as follows. First, it is necessary to verify the relevance of the main propositions and influences associated with the 3Ds. A more longitudinal study into how the 3Ds are formed should then be undertaken. The possibility of the 3Ds being deterministic can also be assessed by statistical analysis. Finally, what the 3Ds suggest in terms of the lecture being a crossed transaction with students missing lectures can be explored.

**Implications of the 3Ds for the Faculty.**

A significant motivation for undertaking this thesis was to offer informed ideas for how the Faculty might respond to missing lectures. What is clear from the 3Ds, is that there are no simple homogeneous solutions. There are, of course, some specific interventions that may induce greater attendance at lectures. One obvious example from appendix B would be to only give handouts in lectures. Another would be to more actively monitor attendance as other universities mentioned in the Introduction are doing, or to penalise non-attendance in some way. These and other interventions are inducements to attend, but increasing attendance for these reasons alone will have little long term benefit. The better response needs to be based on the main influences highlighted, but at the same time have some relevance to the needs of the students involved. Attendance to be effective and beneficial for the students needs to be for the right reasons.

The Faculty needs to recognise that the lecture experience is not a simple transmission of knowledge to improve learning and understanding. What disquiet shows quite clearly is that the lecture is an affective as well as an intellectual experience for some students that influences how they behave. In order to respond to the 3Ds, the Faculty needs to work at the affective level recognizing the vulnerability of the student that is inherent in disquiet, and the possibility of a vicious circularity arising from disquiet. In psychoanalytical terms, this is about recognizing that some students struggle with what is being experienced in lectures. This idea of students struggling needs to be

understood in the Faculty. Increasing numbers of students entering the Faculty in recent years may be struggling with lectures as a learning activity.

Disquiet in the case of missing lectures is associated with low immediacy, discomfort and isolation which need to be targeted first by the Faculty. A significant context factor behind these feelings is numbers in the lecture. The Faculty needs to be aware that large lectures are experienced in this way by some students missing lectures. If disquiet is the child ego communicating, it is in effect the subconscious child ego of the students responding to these influences. It is the child ego of the student that presumably wishes the communication in the lecture to be more intimate, friendly and comforting in a way that smaller lectures would provide.

Immediacy is in many ways the most important professional issue for tutors from the 3Ds. If students in the Faculty feel distant from tutors in the way highlighted, this raises questions as in chapter five about why it is occurring and what tutors need to do in response. Immediacy is a communicated perception as explained. Immediacy is not about the subject, it is about students (child ego) perceptions of how tutors are communicating with them and disquiet is the affective response of low immediacy. The reasons for low immediacy were not explained in the data. One source of immediacy is known to be the response of tutors to the way students are communicating with them (Titsworth, 2001). If, as suggested in the 3Ds, some students are disinterested in lectures, this disinterest will be communicated to tutors. The result of this may be a lack of immediacy on the part of tutors towards

students. Tutors feel distant from students who they believe are not interested which then results in these tutors communicating to students in ways that reduce immediacy from the student perspective[50]. In ego terms, this low immediacy might be perceived as a tutor communicating not as a rational and objective adult, but instead as a critical parent. The transaction therefore becomes crossed. This crossed communication may result in a vicious circularity if the tutor persists in showing disappointment in the attitude of students in lectures and the child ego of some students continues to respond negatively. The Faculty needs therefore to ensure that tutors recognise the importance of how they are perceived in lectures, not just what they teach, even if they are disappointed in the attitude of students in the lectures. Showing enthusiasm, friendly body language and being organised all improve immediacy and will appeal to the child ego as attribution 3 (style) in chapter five would certainly support.. One specific improvement in the way students view tutors in lectures is if tutors are more conversational in the way they present their material rather than read from a script (Maunder & Harrop, 2003). As highlighted in chapter five, Hodgson (1997) also suggests that using vicarious examples based on tutor experiences is one way of motivating students in lectures which may also improve how tutors are perceived. There is probably quite a lot tutors can do to improve immediacy with their students that the Faculty could integrate into professional development activities. Recognizing that the child ego of some of the students needs to be

[50] This suggestion is supported by Keane (2001b)

communicated with in some way is the challenge for the tutor in many cases[51].

The Faculty needs to consider making a long term commitment to improve self efficacy beliefs for some students missing lectures frequently. This is because it is a direct response to the need to improve the expectations of students and thus to address disengagement. Students with a greater sense of their own ability as explained in the chapter two, will expect to be able to perform better in lectures. The Faculty, for example, might put more effort into teaching students about their own learning which could be included in the Personal Development Profiles (PDPs) that universities are now required to introduce into the curriculum. PDP and similar initiatives aimed at increasing students self efficacy will appeal to the adult ego of the student at a subconscious level because they target the rational deductive part of the subconscious. It will also likely make the lecture more enjoyable and improve immediacy with the tutor and thus reduce disquiet. Students do not necessarily know how they learn and there may be benefit through the PDP, or in some other way, in teaching students about learning as a way of improving self efficacy in general. Dealing with questions of what students assume about their ability using Dweck & Leggett, (1998) or the learning process (such as cycles using Kolb, 1984) may allow some students the opportunity to think about their own learning and come to recognise what their learning is. Metacognition is an important element in learning that is often

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[51] In transactional analysis, techniques for overtly communicating with one ego state whilst covertly targeting another are possible. In the case of lectures, a friendly open approach as above, but coupled with a clear and logical presentation of the material, would probably engage the child ego overtly and the adult ego covertly.

implicit rather than explicit. Students in the Faculty who have a better understanding of how they learn may come to recognise when their own learning abilities are being improved and when they are not. Work by Abouisere (2000) in the UK is in support of the benefits of students being educated about the way they learn as part of an overall teaching strategy. In the US, particular learning strategies based on coaching, imaging, summarizing and note taking techniques have been shown to improve self efficacy of schoolchildren (Weinstein & Mayer, 1996). The Faculty might need to think about investing significantly in something similar for students who may have come to expect that they will learn very little in lectures.

In practice, good tutors will be doing much of the above already (Brown et al, 2001), but in the changing context of more instrumental students, low learning goals, low immediacy and larger lectures, more students will miss lectures according to the 3Ds. What the 3Ds in essence are demonstrating could be a specific behavioural outcome as a consequence of the changing nature of higher education for many students and tutors. The Faculty has seen a significant fall in the unit of resource per student[52] as have many faculties probably, and the context in which students attend larger lectures and have less individual contact with tutors is an underlying reality for many students in the Faculty[53]. From the perspective of TA, it is actually hardly surprising that more students may be struggling. Increasing numbers of students arriving at

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[52] HESA data on unit expenditure per institution (Table 1: Higher Education Management Statistics, HESA, 2003) shows that spending per FTE student on business and management students fell from £2408 to £1693 between 1998/9 and 2001/1. This was in contrast to the UK average for business and management students which grew from £2589 to £2848 per FTE over the same period.

[53] This is supported in Keane (2001b) where a tutor comments how she sees less students in her office than she did 10 years ago, even though she estimated she teaches about twice as many now as she did then. A recent survey of contact hours at UK universities also supports the view that contact time between students and academics is much less than many believe.

university of parents with no formal background in higher education will likely have formed subconscious ego states that are significantly different to those of students in the more distant past. The superficial interpretation is that the more recent students entering the Faculty are not ready for university. A more informed view from the 3Ds is that these backgrounds mean that these students need a lot more support in adjusting to the context of higher education so that they can transact effectively with it, including when in lectures. In simple terms, this means finding ways of communicating more effectively with the students.

Students missing lectures has been a noticeable behaviour for so long in the Faculty that it could have become a cultural as well as a behavioural phenomenon. The message at the level of the student from the 3Ds is to build student self efficacy beliefs and to improve immediacy with tutors. In time, positive motivating lecture experiences will improve student attendance. Making students feel less isolated and more at ease, as well as more immediate, are the particular challenges for many tutors giving lectures.

In a wider context, the 3Ds offer insights into other student behaviour in the Faculty that may be associated with students missing lectures. The lack of immediacy in disquiet combined with an instrumental attitude may have another important implication for how some students behave. In combination they may generate passive aggressive behaviour for some students towards certain tutors in lectures. Passive aggression arises when a person seeks revenge on another who has power over them (Jarvis & Seifert, 2002). They

show their passive aggression in a number of ways, including by not cooperating. Passive aggression is a factor in schools when children feel trapped and unable to avoid classes and tasks they dislike (Baringer & McCroskey, 2000). In much the same way, students in the Faculty who feel distant from the tutor and thus experience a low immediacy, or are feeling uneasy in lectures, but are in lectures because of an instrumental need (especially in the final year) to be there, may become passive aggressive. Passive aggressive behaviour in learning situations is refusing to show effort, not answering or being enthusiastic when answering questions, not volunteering answers, not doing the preparatory work, and a general body language of negativity. Many lectures might have passive aggressive students in them. This is a wider issue that the Faculty may need to address because passive aggressive behaviour results in students not being prepared for lectures and thereby gaining little from being there. These students will in turn have a negative effect on the lecture in general and on the tutor. This kind of behaviour may also spill over to other situations, such as tutorials and in the supervision of projects. In TA terms, passive aggression can be interpreted as the rebellious child of the student.

A second behaviour which the 3Ds shed light on could be withdrawal from the Faculty by some students. Withdrawal rates are actually quite high in the Faculty and, although there is still no strong empirical evidence of a direct relationship between withdrawal and missing lectures, a review of the literature on student withdrawal suggests that one way of identifying students at risk of withdrawing is by monitoring attendance at lectures and tutorials

(Morgan, 2005). Morgan cites studies which suggest that a sense of self esteem (self-efficacy), problems with time management (attribution 8), and perceived quality of teaching (attribution 3) are influential in the decision to withdraw which the findings in this thesis would certainly support. What the 3Ds promote, however, is the importance of trying to understand withdrawal at a more holistic level. A proposition of the 3Ds is that students disquieted by the university experience may have particular attitudes to the courses they are studying and university life in general that may lead to a vicious cycle of increasing disquiet, disinterest and disengagement. Withdrawal from a 3D perspective also suggests that the values students have when arriving at university (parent egos) and how they interact with tutors and other students (adult/child egos) may be crucial. A lack of social and academic integration is known to be pivotal in withdrawal (Ozga & Sukhnanden, 1998; Tinto, 1987) and, in many ways, the 3Ds could be interpreted as an example of a lack of social and academic integration in the lecture. If missing lectures is an indicator of these types of problems as suggested by Morgan (2005), students missing a lot of lectures are very likely to be the ones that withdraw because they are struggling to transact effectively in TA terms with the demands of university life. Showing a more specific connection between the exact nature of a relationship between the 3Ds and withdrawal is not possible from the data. However, it is known that dissatisfiers arising from context factors, for example, were important for business students who decided to leave a post 1992 university (Bennett, 2001). Context factors at the 3D level are numbers in lectures, other unknown students in the lecture, and the tutor. Wider context factors outside the lecture in the data were found to be work

commitments, complicated timetables, and assessment loads. The 3Ds suggest that the ability to cope with these context factors is important for some students missing lectures. Withdrawal for some students in the Faculty may thus be because they are unable to adjust to the general context of Faculty life and missing lectures is one visible and early outcome of having these problems[54].

What the 3Ds may be suggesting is that the Faculty, and other faculties with similar students and contexts, is likely to have to work increasingly hard to engage with students in learning activities by recognizing that the students may be making choices that are contrary to what is expected because they may be struggling. To put forward the idea that there is a subconscious interpretation of the 3Ds is quite radical because the implication is that the Faculty may need to consider using psychoanalytical methods to help some students cope. This would be about promoting the adult ego of the student through identifying what Berne (1984) defined as the correct `*strokes*` to encourage the adult ego to flourish so that students engage rationally (rather than as an emotional child or judgmental parent) when involved in lectures. How the Faculty might seek to achieve this is not answerable here, but dealing with the main influences on disquiet would almost certainly be involved.

If the Faculty is successful in addressing the 3Ds and in so doing increases attendance at lectures, not only will this likely improve student performance,

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[54] The monitoring of student attendance by the two universities mentioned in the Introduction is based on an assumed link between attendance and withdrawal, although the paper offers no evidence to support this assumption (Bowen et al, 2005).

but it is also likely to be evidence that the students are having a better quality experience in lectures. Students attending more lectures will be experiencing less disquiet, are likely to feel closer to their tutors, have good study relationships with their peers and more confidence in their own ability to study effectively in lectures. They are also likely to be dealing better with the other outside context factors that appear to be influential in students missing lectures. These are all significant benefits arising from responding to the 3Ds. In TA terms, a reduction in the 3Ds means the students are transacting effectively. There is, however, likely to be a cost to the Faculty associated with this which may be fundamentally the reason why the Faculty has been unable so far to effectively deal with the behaviour. The 3Ds suggest resources, inter alia, need to be targeted on staff development initiatives to improve lecturing skills, to reducing the numbers in lectures, to greater control of student groups in lectures, to building self efficacy, and to a greater effort at managing students expectations such as through longer induction. More resources may also need to be focused on recruiting students with the right attitude to study who have a clear interest in the courses they are applying for, and to improving their learning skills. There is also a more radical case for considering using psychoanalytical methods for dealing with some students missing lectures in order to assess how well prepared they are for studying in a lecture context. Responding to the 3Ds, as suggested earlier, is not a simple homogeneous response, but a multifaceted long term commitment to improving the student and the lecture experience in a number of ways.

## Question and Objectives of the Thesis:

The principal question of the thesis was:

*Question:* *Why do students in the Faculty miss lectures?*

In answer, this thesis would argue that there are a number of influences involved in why students miss lectures involving a range of attributions. In sum, students miss lectures because of the experience they have of lectures, their deductions about the value of lectures and their attitudes towards lectures.

The objectives of the thesis have been achieved as below:

1 *To identify the key influences on why students miss lectures beyond the factors suggested by the empirical research on absenteeism already undertaken.*

The key influences that appear to be important are expectations, values, immediacy, isolation, discomfort, and instrumentalism. Behind these are likely to be a range of factors that will need to be the subject of further study.

2 *To construct a deeper understanding of missing lectures that is more conceptual.*

The three main concepts that were constructed to explain the meaning of missing lectures are the 3Ds of disquiet, disinterest and disengagement.

3 *To consider the behaviour of missing lectures at a more holistic level*

The 3Ds were considered from two perspectives. The first was etiological which interprets the 3Ds as a choice and processual. It was suggested that disengagement is an outcome of disquiet and disinterest, and that there may be a vicious circularity between them. The second was psychoanalytical based on the theory of Transactional Analysis seeing the 3Ds as they suggest the underlying ego states of the students involved. Missing lectures in the first interpretation is a process, in the second it is seen as a struggle to transact effectively with lectures.

4 *To outline the research that might be undertaken in future into missing lectures in light of the thesis.*

The influences and the relevance of the 3Ds should be confirmed empirically. The priority is first to study the development of the 3Ds

separately and then within an holistic framework. A number of research questions have been raised.

5 *To discuss the implications of missing lectures for how the Faculty might respond.*

The practical implications of the thesis for the Faculty and tutors are to see the lecture in affective terms in order to improve immediacy and to increase students` self efficacy and expectations. A number of interventions were suggested. The wider implications of the 3Ds for the Faculty in terms of what they suggest about passive aggressive behaviour and withdrawal were offered.

**Concluding Statement:**

As is often the case in research, there is a feeling that what is presented is both obvious and incomplete. However, if the purpose of doing research is to identify better questions than to giving spurious answers, then this thesis would certainly claim to be a success. Students missing lectures in and of itself is not that important, but in coming to understand why this behaviour occurs and asking questions of it, the real value of this kind of work becomes apparent. It is the study of specific behaviours like missing lectures that will help teachers in higher education come to understand their students better

and, in so doing, help them respond to the challenges that they, and their students, face.

This thesis is now concluded.

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**Appendix A:** Interpretation of an Extract from the Interview data

The following example outlines the approach taken to interpreting a section of a transcript taken from the interview with the final year students. The extract is from a female student at the beginning of the interview in which she is trying to summarise the various reasons why she thinks students miss lectures. Her comment is a good example of how a number of the attributions presented in chapter four were derived. This student had obviously been thinking about why students miss lectures prior to the meeting and her comment was a good beginning for that particular interview.

In response to the opening question she stated:

> *"There's loads that comes to mind, people think that if they get, in the business side of the school because I'm split between business and IT, business get given a pack of like the weeks work so people think right well I've got all the lecture notes why do I need to go. Other commitments when they've got a lot of work on, dissertations I should think you see a great dip in the attendance. People with other work on they don't want to take time out for lectures, sometimes lectures are boring so you may not go. Different tutors you just sit there and they just talk at you for two hours and that's not helping anybody, at the same time people don't like to participate it's very difficult to meet everybody's needs really, everyone's got different learning styles and some people don't just like to sit there and just listen and some people don't like to participate and sometimes you get picked on to participate so think why should I go."*

The first item of data attributed from the first part of this quote was:

> *`…..business get given pack of like the weeks work so people think right well I've got all the lecture notes why do I need to go….`*

The student here is making a direct connection between having the notes for a lecture and a student's decision to miss a lecture. The comment that `so people think` is important because she is making inferences about them and the way they think, not the lecture or context which may be secondary influences on the reason to miss lectures. This comment has a meaning in relation to what these students she is referring to think when they have the notes for the lecture. This extract was therefore attributed as a item of data to student factors because it was revealing something primarily related to the student as a reason for missing lectures. The extract was then allocated to a

particular attribution within student factors because of what the comment further suggests about the attitudes to learning and knowledge of the students she is referring to when they have the notes make them ask `why do I need to go`. 27 other items of data falling within this particular attribution were also identified and are explained in detail in the next chapter.

A second item of data taken from the quote is:

> ` *Other commitments when they've got a lot of work on, dissertations I should think you see a great dip in the attendance…`*

Here, she is making links to the time needed for the dissertation and how this can impact on missing lectures at certain times. The association here is thus to study time and the pressures that may come to bare on lecture attendance when preparing for assessment. This particular comment was thus attributed as being a context factor for missing lectures. When the context of lecture attendance is at a time when students are working on assessment (presumably because of deadlines), some students decide to miss some lectures. This quote was therefore included within Attribution Seven in the next chapter along with other comments in the database referring to time pressures as a reason for missing lectures.

The third item was interpreted from the following in the quote:

> `*….People with other work on they don't want to take time out for lectures…`*

The comment here to `other work` was later identified as referring to the paid and other work students may be doing which are affecting lecture attendance. This association is not about managing study time, but about the time needed for paid work that affects lecture attendance. The comment is therefore about the circumstances that influence some students who then miss lectures because of the contexts in which they are trying to attend lectures means they feel they have less time to attend. This item was another, but different, context factor and was thus added to Attribution Nine in the next chapter.

The fourth item of data taken from the quote was:

> `*…sometimes lectures are boring so you may not go. Different tutors you just sit there and they just talk at you for two hours and that's not helping anybody, at the same time people don't like to participate it's very difficult to meet everybody's needs really, everyone's got different learning styles and some people don't just like to sit there and just listen and some people don't like to participate…`*

The student was now beginning to make direct links to lectures themselves as a reason for not going. In this case, the comment is making connections between lectures being `boring` which she infers is about the way tutors `talk at you for two hours`, and the `learning styles` of some students that does not respond to this style of lecture. This comment though is principally about saying the lecture style is the problem for the students missing lectures and was interpreted therefore as a lecture factor and to Attribution Three concerning lecture style in the next chapter.

The final item of data taken from the quote was:

> *`...and sometimes you get picked on to participate so think why should I go`*

This part of her comment was not allocated to the previous item because of the reference to being `picked on`. The attribution is different because it has moved away from lecture style as a reason for missing lectures to suggesting that incidents in the lecture itself are what may cause some students to miss lectures. It is the students concern about the consequences of not participating, rather than lecture style, that she is suggesting as a possible reason for missing lectures. This comment was thus considered to be making a separate point about the perceived potential for having a negative experience in the lecture as a reason for missing lectures. It was thus another lecture related factor and was added as an item of data to Attribution Five in the next chapter.

END

**Appendix B:** Evidence in Support of Attribution One: Tangible Benefit

The items of data below are taken from the interviews. Those parts highlighted in italics and underlined demonstrate the part of the comment interpreted as relating to how a perception of a tangible benefit is associated with students missing lectures. The coding refers to year (Y3 means third year), whether registered for degree or HND (Degree or HND), the student who said it (S3 means the third student said this in the meeting) and their gender (M or F).

The key words are in italics and underlined. The explanation is in parentheses underneath.

***Interview Y3**
***Degree**
***S1**
***M:** I think after discussions with people at other uni's as well, a lot of other uni's have compulsory lectures, *taking marks off* if you don't go and I think if it was compulsory *then a lot more people obviously would go*.

(reference to being rewarded by marks is the tangible benefit here)

***Interview Y3**
***Degree**
***S5**
***F:**`.....business get given pack of like the weeks work so people think *right well I've got all the lecture notes why do I need to go*....`

(there is a return for attending here. Also infers a lack of interest in what tutor has to say.)

***Interview Y3**
***Degree**
***S4**
***F:** If you think *you're going to get something from the lecture* as well

(self evident)

***Interview Y3**
***Degree**
***S1**
***F:** I think one way to encourage people to go is almost scare mongering in *that they're going to miss something if they don't attend these lectures or reward them for going there if you see what I mean.* I was talking to my housemate to get some more ideas for you and he's like it's been mentioned before. Reward a mark at the end of the year, because some people attend every single lecture and alright they might get better marks, there must be some correlation between attendance and the marks they receive for the module, *but those people that do attend maybe should be awarded something.*

(mentions rewards and being awarded `something` as the tangible benefit)

***Interview Y3**
***Degree**
***S4**
***F:** *I mean I've been to every lecture of this semester* but I could be living proof that you can still go to every lecture and still fail. But largely I think definitely there is a difference in the third year cause you take it a lot more seriously cause you are more mature *and think more about your grades and* that sort of thing.

(association with grades the tangible benefit of attending lectures)

***Interview Y3**
***Degree**
***S1**
*F: Because you know that *it's (attending) going to count towards your degree,* to whatever your final grade is and you just know.

(about seeing grades as the tangible return for lecture attendance)

***Interview Y3**
***Degree**
***S2**
*M: And you've only got to get 40% in the first year and I'd say that for the majority of my friends 40% in the first year was what they worked towards, get 40% pass the first year *why bother doing any more or going to lectures more than you have to.*

(about simply passing as the reason for lectures. If expect to pass there is no tangible benefit in attending in this case. Infers lack of learning goals in terms of success and fear of failure)

***Interview Y3**
***Degree**
***S1**
***F:** Yeah, sometimes if the lecture isn't fun, *the lecture isn't going to add any value to somebody's learning.*

(learning as a value is the benefit in relation to lectures for this student)

***Interview Y3**
***Degree**
***S1**
***F:** I dare not miss a lecture because I won't understand it if I don't go and I haven't missed a lecture in three years so I'm probably not your ideal person to ask why people miss lectures. *I think if I don't go I think I might miss something* and if I think if that's probably put across more then people will

think, oh I've got to go to this because *I might miss a tip for the exam or a tip for the assignment.*

(assessment as the tangible benefit of lectures)

***Interview Y3**
***Degree**
***S4**
***F:** Yes because in one of my lectures they said well the assignment is based on this, this lecture is for the assignment and you'll need to go to understand what the assignment is and *you'll see a big difference in the attendance if you know it's going to be for your assignment.*

(as before, assessment as perceived benefit.)

***Interview Y2**
***HND**
***S6**
***M:** I can see why it (having guide) would discourage some people ..... *if you've got it, why go to the lecture?.* It's in front of you, if you understand it then fine....

(guides is a tangible benefit for some students missing lectures)

***Interview Y2**
***HND**
***S2**
***M:** He actually drops a joke now and then, I mean I've been to a couple of his lectures this semester and I think you sort of want to go because you know you're going to learn something, *you know your going to pick up some information.*

(`picking up` information is the benefit here)

***Interview Y2**
***Degree**
***S8**
***F:** I think people try and attend more in the second year well I know I have, I've got a compulsory Thursday 9.15am *and I haven't missed one yet* no matter what state I get in because I know that I've got to go, *cause I know I need to know what's in the lecture* but whether I'll make any sense of it when I'm actually there, I make an effort of sitting there.

(needing to know what is in lecture a perceived benefit here. Lecture has a benefit)

***Interview Y2**
***Degree**
***S7**

***F:** *I think the first year it's pretty much you just have to get 40% to pass it and if people think that when they don't go to the tutors.*

(benefit lecture related to assessment)

***Interview Y2**
***Degree**
***S7**
***F:** You've got the same problem though if you have done business before you feel as though *there's no point going to the lectures because you know what they are talking about.*

(about feeling lecture adding to knowledge the benefit here)

***Interview Y2**
***Degree**
***S5**
***M:** They make you listen..... *You think well if I don't go to the lecture then I haven't got the notes so I'm screwed.*

(notes are the benefit here)

***Interview Y2**
***Degree**
***S4**
***M:** Yeah one of my lectures I think it's HT, we've got a tutorial each week, which *we get 20% of our module mark and you have to go*.

(the marks for attending the benefit on this module)

***Interview Y2**
***Degree**
***S8**
***F** Ok even if I didn't like the *module I still went to every lecture because I knew I needed to* and at the end it I've passed the module sort of thing, so I think it's a good thing

(links benefit lectures to having passed here)

***Interview Y2**
***Degree**
***S8**
***M:** .....because he's finding it so easy but he hasn't been to any lectures because a: he finds it easy and b: because they're calling him in at work. He'd rather have the money, even though it's his choice to come here. Being easy he still manages to do the work so *he doesn't bother going to the lectures because he sees money as being more important.*

(opportunity cost of money considered in comparison with value lecture for student mentioned. Lecture considered in relation to other benefits)

***Interview Y2**
***Degree**
***S5**
***M:** I know the majority of time if I don't go I wake up in the morning, well no it is some other things, cause if I wake up in the morning I always set my alarm anyway with the best intentions but I wake up and think well that lecture is pointless anyway because they just rabbit and I just go back to bed. If I wake up and *it's like this lecture's worth getting up for* I will get up for so I think it's a combination of getting up but only if it's worth getting up for.

(assessment of benefit versus effort here. If benefit is low then do not get up!)

***Interview Y2**
***Degree**
***S3**
***F:** Well like the marketing communications one we have to go because we have to take notes cause we haven't got any, *if we don't go we miss the notes* and then we won't be able to revise them for the assignment.

(lecture notes are the benefit here)

***Interview Y2**
***Degree**
***S2**
***F:** *I think it's looking at the content of the lecture before and thinking you know it all.*

(benefit is whether lecture is considered to be adding to the existing knowledge of the student)

***Interview Y2**
***Degree**
***S2**
***F:** *If I found out that it was something useful like towards the assignment from like fellow people in the lecture then they will get the notes and not go.*

(assessment and lecture notes benefit here)

***Interview Y1**
***HND**
***S5**
***M:** *Cause you've already got the notes you don't feel that you have to go.*

(lecture notes the benefit here)

***Interview Y1**

***Degree**
***S3**
***F**: *It depends how hard you have to work to get to pass, if you were thinking well I could get 40% easily I could easily get 70% if you loose 2.5% every lecture that's nothing in comparison.*

(as previous)

***Interview Y1**
***Degree**
***S7**
***M**: I'd find it hard to believe I think because sometimes *I walk out of a lecture and I think was there any need for me to be there cause you could have learnt it all from the module guide if you just read that*. So and at the start of the modules as well I listen to the tutor at the start, and *I go in the beginning and they sort of tell you when the important lectures are going to be. Then I try and make those weeks cause it's more worthwhile but others if I miss it its not so bad.*

(benefit in two parts. In relation to existing knowledge and then with respect to assessment)

***Interview Y1**
***Degree**
***S2**
***F:** Yeah because if you find it difficult, well I worry that if I don't go to it then I won't understand it at all, because if you don't understand the reading then you *don't go to the lecture then you're not going to do anything in the exam,* whereas if you understand it before it's a bit different isn't it?

(benefit in relation to exam preparation)

***Interview Y1**
***Degree**
***S5**
***M**: Yes to a degree because they're probably thinking right I'm not there this week *there's going to be something they're going to miss that they wish they hadn't*, whereas all the other weeks they might be thinking well I know all that and it doesn't even make a difference, but when they do miss it they suddenly think perhaps I should of gone.

(benefit here in relation to something that might otherwise be missed. Infers assessment)

***Interview Y1**
***Degree**
***S9**
***M**: Yeah you miss one week what's that going to be? Two or three questions *so if I miss that lecture I won't know those two questions* but if

there's a hundred questions you're only going to miss out on a few marks so……..

(benefit lecture to do with assessment of how it relates to chances of failure)

**END**

**Appendix C:** Evidence in support of Attribution Two: Personality/Attitude

Key words are again in italics and underlined with an explanation in brackets below.

***Interview Y1**
***Degree**
***S5**
***M**: I think more so to do with *the dedication to what you do*, because I enjoy working and I enjoy like the people I work with like I work a Thursday night and go out after work and we'll all go in to town or wherever and have fun, I'll still turn up 9.15am Friday morning so.

(dedication a personality trait)

***Interview Y1**
***Degree**
***S1**
***F**: I think probably *laziness is a factor and finding any excuse* not to go.

(laziness about attitude)

***Interview Y2**
***HND**
***S2**
***M**: ..... possibly your conscience comes in and *you feel a bit guilty*. If I missed a lecture I'd probably think well, should have gone to it, try and find another run then if I don't go to it then I'm thinking if I get a bad grade now then it's my fault. I paid to come here so I'm wasting my money.

(feelings of guilt reflects this students personality in relation to missing lectures)

***Interview Y2**
***HND**
***S6**
***M**: Yes, *the guilty conscience kicks in whether you can help it or not*, whether you're caught in traffic or you just can't make it for other reasons, you still feel, I mean I'm this semester I missed a couple purely because of my timetable, I felt really bad and really guilty about it. *You feel like you should be there*...

(as previous)

***Interview Y2**
***HND**
***S2**
***M**: I think there is always going to be, not a split *but certain sort of people who will and won't go* and I think it will always be the same wherever you go.

(sort of people implies certain types of attitude)

***Interview Y2**
***HND**
***S6**
***M**: It's the whole *attitude, if you want to come in and learn, you came in and learn if you don't want to come into the lecture*, you don't come in to the place at all.

(self evident)

***Interview Y2**
***Degree**
***S4**
***M:** I still personally *feel bad that I have missed* a lecture so I would make an extra effort to make the next week ……

(feeling bad about missing is a reflection of his attitude)

***Interview Y1**
***HND**
***S1**
***F:** …..I went from a GNVQ in leisure and tourism and that's why I'm doing a HND so I'm kind of motivating myself and learning myself as well as going to the lectures and *sometimes um I probably prefer to do it myself rather than in lectures.*

(having a preference infers he has a certain attitudes that influence his decision)

***Interview Y1**
***HND**
***S1**
***F:** I think it's all to do with the person that you are, if you enjoy a subject your more likely to go to the lectures than if you don't like something. *I don't think it's down to HND people and Degree people I think it's probably down to the person you are.*

(the person you are suggests attitude)

***Interview Y1**
***HND**
***S1**
***F:** ……here I'm driven by guilt, *I am constantly guilty if I haven't done work or if I miss a lecture. I feel so guilty* whereas if I was at work you know that's it got paid at the end of the week that's fine but here it's different …….

(her feelings of guilt are an expression of her attitude)

**Appendix D:** Assessment of the Reliability of the Attributions

Dear Colleagues,

Thank you for agreeing to do this for me.

What I would like you to do is look at the attached sheets which have 12 quotes for you to consider. Please study each quote carefully and see if you can interpret it as belonging to <u>one</u> of the nine attributions on the other sheet as I have explained. The relevant wording is in italics and underlined.

Please insert the number for each of the twelve quotes that you believe can be attributed as indicated below. The `Any comments?` are for you to comment on any of the quotes that you had difficulty attributing. We can discuss these later.

After studying the twelve quotes please fill out the form below.

| Quote Number: | Attribution (1-9) | Any comments? |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | | |
| 2 | | |
| 3 | | |
| 4 | | |
| 5 | | |
| 6 | | |
| 7 | | |
| 8 | | |
| 9 | | |
| 10 | | |
| 11 | | |
| 12 | | |

Any other comments on this exercise?

Below are the twelve quotes from my interviews with the students for you to allocate to the nine attributions on the other sheet as explained.

Quote 1.

***Interview Y3**
***Degree**
***S1**
***F:** I dare not miss a lecture because I won't understand it if I don't go and I haven't missed a lecture in three years so I'm probably not your ideal person ask why people miss lectures. I think if I don't go I think I might miss something and if I think if that's probably put across more then people will think, oh I've got to go to this because I might miss a tip for the exam or a tip for the assignment.

Quote 2:

***Interview Y1**
***Degree**
***S1**
***F**: I think probably laziness is a factor and finding any excuse not to go to lectures.

Quote 3:

***Interview Y2**
***Degree**
***S7**
***F:** You've got the same problem though if you have done business before you feel as though there's no point going to the lectures because you know what they are talking about.

Quote 4:

***Interview Y2**
***HND**
***S2**
***M**: ..... possibly your conscience comes in and you feel a bit guilty. If I missed a lecture I'd probably think well, should have gone to it, try and find another run then if I don't go to it then I'm thinking if I get a bad grade now then it's my fault. I paid to come here so I'm wasting my money. Other students who miss probably feel differently and don`t feel guilty like me

Quote 5:

***Interview Y1**
***Degree**
***S3**
***F**: Especially like the big lecture studio downstairs, you sort of walk in and everyone turns around and there are no seats so you've got to walk all the way down and around the front, and if they have already given out sheets, that's another thing some tutors if you come in late and they have given out sheets, they won't give you a sheet and you just sit there going what and you might as well of not bothered going because it doesn't mean anything to you.

Quote 6:

***Interview Y1**
***HND**
***S2**
***F:** I always miss lectures if I'm partying the night before I can't get up in the morning.

Quote 7;

***Interview Y2**
***HND**
***S2**
***M**: sometimes it's just like boom, boom, boom and your there just thinking brain overload, your taking in the first thing their on about the forth thing and you're miles behind, you're just thinking well I'm not taking anything in here so why am I here, and I can see why people would give up.

Quote 8:

***Interview Y3**
***Degree**
***S3**
***F:** The thing is by the time you get to the third year you know which tutors you like and you know which tutors you do like and their style and which ones you don't, I think you generally have a preference and you will always attend the ones you do like, because as you said the pack gets given out and you know who's teaching which lectures and normally you can decipher which ones you like.

Quote 9:

***Interview Y3**

***Degree**
***S3**
***F**: I think so, one of the modules we've got at the moment for of us are working as a team and because none of us really like the tutor we were literally taking it in turns so that from the team one person goes per week.

Quote 10:

***Interview Y2**
***Degree**
***S5**
***M:** Yeah, they (part-time students) are irritating, they really are they like work so they think they are so much better and they always start going on about some incident at work, which is totally not relevant. Yeah, I did one last semester with some part-timers and they just got right on my tits and I couldn't be arsed to go.

Quote 11:

***Interview Y2**
***Degree**
***S8**
***F:** I'm a student rep for business and I've been approached because we had problems with one of our modules last semester and it came up in the field meeting, and spoke to XX about it and she went and sorted it out and this semester apparently it's running a lot better than it did last semester but that was because of the tutor, the way he lectured which was a big reason why people weren't turning up.

Quote 12:

***Interview Y2**
***HND**
***S1**
***M**
Possible, more so in the first year because, I know this isn't an excuse not to go to lectures, but there all early lectures and there's a lot of socialising that tends to go on the first few months that you get here. So to go out on a night out and get up really early doesn't go together too well generally.

**END**

**Appendix E:** Basics of Transactional Analysis

The parent in Berne`s model (1984) is the ego that individuals inherit from their parents and from others who are influential on them in their early years. This is the ego state which reveals the way the external reality of the individual is perceived subconsciously. The parent ego is how an individual feels the world is, or should be, or how one should live and the values one should have. (Harris, 1973). A typical parent ego state is the unthinking response to an event and is identifiable in how an individual thinks something ought to be, what is and is not to be valued, and so on. A parent ego state in the context of students would be views like `one should attend lectures` or `one should be respectful to tutors` and so on. The parent ego in simple terms is the internalised voice of the parent that is carried by everyone (Harris, 1973).

The child ego is also largely developed during childhood, but it is that aspect of the individual subconscious which reflects the internalised feelings and experiences of an individual at a time when as a child they did not have the vocabulary to communicate effectively. The child ego state is thus made up of the subconscious feelings that a child might have. A typical child ego state of a student might be revealed through a comment that they do not like a tutor or they want to go out and have fun rather than to study. The child ego in the individual subconscious is evident through the communication of feelings and thoughts in direct response to events. (Berne, 1984).

The third ego state is of the adult which is the rational deductive part of the subconscious in which a situation is assessed in context and logically. The adult ego at a deep level takes account of child and parent thoughts and feelings, but is able to come to a rational decision based on the specific context of the moment. The adult is described as the ego which reflects the self actualisation of the individual who has learned to think and develop their own ideas about the world as separate from those of the child and parent within (Harris, 1973). The adult ego of a student might decide to stay in to plan an assignment, or to go out but not drink too much because of an examination the following day and so on. The adult ego is the rational approach to life that is needed at particular times. In well rounded individuals, the adult ego should be in control of how a person chooses to communicate, but it will allow one of the other ego states to be influential when appropriate. This might occur, for example, in social situations in which the child ego is a better way of communicating. From an adult point of view, allowing the child ego to take over is the logical and most enjoyable way of interacting in these situations. The adult ego in effect is replaced by the child ego which is the creative and fun part of the subconscious of the individual and is thus a more appropriate way of communicating when engaged in play. The parent ego, on the other hand, might be better placed when involved in situations where an individual needs to make judgements about courses of action or when dealing with colleagues in the work place (Villere, 1969). The parent ego is manifest in transactions where an individual needs to communicate their particular views and values. Thus, the parent ego of a student may believe that it is

important not to leave an untidy desk because that is not how things should be done. This might mean the student spends time each evening clearing their desk after studying. The important point about the adult ego is that it should be able to let the other two egos be influential when it is reasonable to do so. This is, of course, done at a deep subconscious level without the individual consciously managing it.

**END**