Policy contexts and student identity/ies: a post '92 university case study

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Abstract

Jacqueline Anne Boddington- Success in a knowledge economy? Drivers of student identity in a post-92 university environment: a case study.

This work concerned itself with the becoming and being of studenthood against a policy environment that appears to position the student as both watchman and inmate within the panopticon of the higher education system, prompted by a suspicion that the need to occupy both these roles problematise a sense of belonging and the benefits this offers for student success within the academy. The work positions its enquiry through phenomenological frames, and allows that the essence of modern studenthood in the context of one post-'92 university may thereby be extracted from common themes emerging from seemingly disparate existences. Drawing on nomadic constructs of identity that acknowledge the student's academic citizenship as bounded in both space and time, the work explores the oscillatory themes emerging between policy texts, in-group identity performance and individual reflection. In this way it identifies the moments of pain and seeing that impact the lines of flight to the students' desired selfs and begins to surface how these are represented in the being and becoming of student in both group and individual settings. This work identifies that the essence of studenthood as demonstrated by the individual within the academy is a commitment to an openness to change and flux that allows self-development. However, it adds a nuance to this and so extends our existing knowledge in suggesting that this individual ambition for change is disguised in-group by a social identity of studenthood firmly situated in consumer mode, thus allowing groups of students to belong to cohorts through the co-option of identities that place them

in opposition to their places of study. In this it would seem that the policy rhetorics of employability and value for money offer readily assumed consumer and professional identity labels that provide useful handholds for cohorts to latch on to while navigating complex transformational landscapes.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

"It's no use going back to yesterday, because I was a different person then."
Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, Lewis Carroll, 1865.

Introduction

I start this work – and indeed all subsequent Chapters – with a quote from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. This device began as a tactic to get me through the fear of blank paper when attempting to put material together ahead of transferring my studies into the final tranche of this doctoral journey. I realised, however, on the further development of this work that the insistent call of the book was the result of some quiet moment of seeing: *Adventures in Wonderland* is an example of the literary nonsense genre, Alice is a bored girl gone looking for an adventure, finding herself initially down a rabbit hole and surrounded by locked doors. What better metaphor for a mid-life engagement with the production of a thesis prompted by – in my view- the fantasies of the policy environment? But then *Adventures* is also a tale of growing up, of determining identity in a landscape of apparently arbitrary rules, and as such perhaps has a pertinence to the experience of the participants in this study, as well as its author. For these reasons, the device refused to be edited out of the developing text. I therefore hope readers are understanding and receptive to its presence.

Call to action

This project was born of a growing dis-ease within me, born of a concern that the descriptions of student success in the

successive legislature of this first part of the 21st century seemed to sit in direct opposition to my understanding of the precursors of student success in practice within the academy, and as evidenced by a growing body of work looking to the practices that support positive student outcomes (Thomas, 2012, Tinto 1990).

In these policy documents, success, it appeared to me, was described not within any agenda of public good, but by considerations of return on investment that placed the benefit to the economy, and to the individual within that economy, as the priority of the higher education project. Further, the current legislative thinking conceives a public information rationale for observation and measurement to demonstrate institutional quality, but in this requires students to act as watchman within their own panopticon. For while the policy literature claims a fundamental purpose of measurement as being to allow students more informed choices, the expectation that aspirant students are able to apply rationality as autonomous consumers of university services is problematized by both individual and structural contexts.

Indeed, just days before the submission of this thesis, the Public Accounts Committee published its findings into value in the higher education sphere (2018). Its condemnation of the ideological imperative of the DfE and OFS is fairly damning:

> "**The Department treats the higher education sector as a market, but it is not a market that is working in the interests of students or taxpayers.** There is greater competition for students between higher education providers, but no evidence that this will improve the quality of the education

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they provide. Higher education providers have increased their marketing budgets in order to attract students rather than compete by charging different tuition fees. However, the amount of funding for higher education (primarily via tuition fees) has increased by 50% since 2007/08. It is therefore critical that the higher education market is delivering value for money, both for individual students and the taxpayer. The new sector regulator, the OfS, has a primary objective that students "receive value for money". But neither the OfS nor the Department has articulated well enough what value for money means in higher education, or how they will seek to monitor and improve it.

Recommendation: ***The Department should write to the committee by October 2018 to explain what it expects a successful higher education market to look like."***

Indeed, while the challenges to the individual have been identified within considerations of bounded rationality (McManus *et al*., 2017), there is perhaps a broader understanding developing as to the structural contradictions to the positioning of student as quality monitor, not least when this is then linked to cost - as demonstrated by last year's National Union of Students National Student Survey boycott where the wider student body demonstrated its recognition that it is perhaps positioned less as watchman than as prisoner in this particular ideological construct.

I therefore began to consider the possibility that the rhetoric of watchman, played out in the reality of a lived student experience that takes place under a different panopticon might be of itself a problem. Certainly, student retention at Middlesex, in London and increasingly across the sector, is troubled. Higher Education Statistics Agency figures for continuation and completion figures at

this university sit below the benchmarks you would expect to find for its cohort's demographic. The reasons for this could be legion – it is not unworthy of note that the HESA algorithm providing benchmark indicators for continuation rates across sector were developed before the application of a £9k fee regime which might not play out uniformly across all socio-economic groups. However, this policy ambition to situate the benefits of the university system in the individual coincided with the emergence of a wealth of literature on the importance of a sense of belonging to ensure students "stick" to their institutions to complete their qualifications successfully. This literature emerged in part in response to the reputational and financial sustainability concerns universities have if failing to deliver when retention has been co-opted as a proxy for academic quality. This then repositions the successful student as needing to "belong" to their institutions, to become part of a collective. The sector then falls into line behind applying aspects of Thomas's seven-year Higher Education Academy research project foregrounding the need for inclusion, engagement and belonging (2012, 2017).

Against this understanding, a majority of students identifying outside the University in line with the dispassionate consumer of the policy literature would seem to suggest more trouble ahead, for on the one hand, the external context insists students become complicit as individual consumers of higher education debt, while on the other, institutions attempt to follow approaches to foster belonging, conscious that at least for the majority of students, the need to finance their engagement serves to distance them from these opportunities. This distancing takes the form of work, and/or continued residence in the family home, alongside the concomitant life splicing and study choices these circumstances force, potentially reducing the student commitment to the project of education simply through the availability of time on task.

This context provides additional grit to my growing concern that the current environment, while claiming to co-opt the individual instrumental student as the central beneficiary of its ambition, is in fact creating a context for higher education that at best disenfranchises those it claims to want to include, and at worst, excludes them – all while chasing a vision of market that seems to trump the logic of its own desirability.

In response there is a strong voice in the sector suggesting that we need to develop resilience in the student body – training them in developing personal qualities of compassion both for themselves and for others in order to map more secure routes through the uncertainties of this part of their lives (Mair, 2016). Therefore these considerations of resilience building respond not only to an institutional concern about the capacity of students to navigate increasingly – to them - uncertain spaces, but also to the sector's ability to respond should they experience any significant problem en route.

This thinking also sits within considerations of the role of the university, with the concomitant benefits of increased years of education playing out in public goods claiming the delivery of lifetime health benefits (Feinstein *et al*. 2016). Indeed, from multiple perspectives it would seem that there is a need for a reconsideration of how individuals are prepared for change across their life span – as the drive to individual, as opposed to collective, resilience to structural and personal change suggests the need to support a different sense of both self and external referentiality (Alheit, 2009, pp121-5).

Achieving these public goods, however, does not come from situating the student body as deficit and in need of training - rather the sector is driven to consider institutional practices and performances of compassion to understand how we both facilitate and demonstrate qualities that are both valued by and valuable to the student. Certainly if compassion is considered as the act of identifying with an other, in order to reduce any individual distress, it becomes clear that within the student-centred landscape of 21st century marketised higher education, compassion might be usefully considered as an essential constituent of practice – and supported therefore through institutional structure and culture.

It therefore seems that policy developments that foreground student success, sector concerns for student wellbeing, and student considerations of their lived experience are aligning in such a way that requires the sector to look to alternate practice – or perhaps more accurately, to start to value more those particular practices already current within the system that speak to an agenda of compassion.

This then starts to point to the starting point from which my work adds to the current body of knowledge. Research exploring (or imagining) the impact of the neo-liberal agenda on the university sector is legion (as demonstrated in Chapter 2); research examining its effect on the student body experiencing the academy is not. It is not that the outplay of the current environment is not considered. Thomas's (2017) ongoing refinement of the What Works series exploring interventions supporting student retention acknowledges that both commuting and the availability of quiet and dedicated study space will have an impact on student retention. But while acknowledging these challenges to student retention through belonging, the emphasis of the report and associated recommendations is to make students in these groups want to

belong more in the traditional sense – rather than acknowledge the structural obstacles to them doing so (Biddix, 2015; Thomas, 2016).

Identifying identity

This said, it was not the hours spent attempting to square illogical circles in creating institutional responses to the Teaching Excellence Framework that kickstarted my initial consideration of these themes, but rather a moment of surprise I fell into while reading a report from the Middlesex University Student Union which demonstrated that a small majority of students, when asked to describe themselves, rejected the label "student" in terms of their relationship with the university. This report revealed their reasons for this were not extensively explored – but clearly, in their own brief explanations, the name described not "a person studying at a university or other place of higher education" or "denoting someone who is studying in order to enter a particular profession" (Oxford English Dictionary, 2012). It did however suggest the absence of an apparent collective student identity in the Student Union study that sat uneasily against the need to respond to the ethical, reputational and financial circumstances of our time as earlier described, by creating that "belonging" required to improve institutional retention rates and other measures of reputational advantage.

It also chimed with Kandiko and Mawer's work for the Quality Assurance Agency (2013). This suggested that the consumer mindset had some hold in the student perceptions of their learning environment, and found that students of all years, in all UK funding regimes, had adopted a concern of the value-for-money received for their fees – most usually expressed in a concern over contact hours and availability of staff as part of a learning community and space and resource. However, this work also suggests a personal commitment to self-improvement, with these same students

acknowledging that the learning environment is also impacted by their own engagement with their learning, with this commitment recognised as being an enabler of a future self – as across all disciplines, all years and in a range of institutions, the main reason given for going to university was to enhance career opportunity.

This engagement with the practice of being a student then prompted me to consider the transitory nature of student – and put me in mind of the selfhood suggested by Battaglia (1995 p29). Here identity is culturally situated and emergent from social practices – allowing me to co-opt selfhood into a concept of studenthood as being a process of seeking academic citizenship through a sequence of nomadic turns, in which the energy of individual ambition is played out against a backdrop of we're all in it together – thus allowing the lines of becoming and belonging to coexist within what for students is the transitory space of the university. This form of consideration has been previously given to what it is to develop subject knowledge – the knowing and coming to know of a discipline (Barnett, 2009) but not the knowing and coming to know what it is to be and become a student.

Sitting behind this conceptualisation was therefore my belief that there was benefit in exploring the identity positions of the student body, the better to appreciate how the becoming and being of a student allows an understanding of belonging and student success, and, further to consider whether and how the external contexts of being a student might be informing this. It seemed to me that in acknowledging, supporting and valuing these identity positions within the university, rather than demanding psychic work from the students themselves to fit our institutionally-situated beliefs of what students should be, we might become better placed to understand how to support them in modes of belonging. This last

point is not a topic of this work, but, nonetheless one that seems increasingly pertinent.

However, in describing this work, its ambition and its results, it also feels appropriate to emphasise that this project sits as a piece of academic research in pursuit of doctoral accreditation, rather than a problem to be solved in practice at my desk, for this would, perhaps, have offered another way to understand the tensions of student identity at play. Fundamentally, to place the questions within academic research gives me freedom to resolve them unhampered by the received wisdom of the sector. Hammersley offers that academic freedom in the pursuit of knowledge may allow for ways of engaging that others feel unintelligible or shocking, suggesting that developing theory in the observation of the academic community means that the implications of the work in political and practical terms must be held in abeyance in order to focus on the likely truth – the key claim of the social sciences being to produce findings whose validity is greater than information from other sources (Hammersley, 2010). This freedom, in a context where sector wisdom conceives the attributes of traditional students the most desirable, and therefore under greatest laudatory scrutiny, may become important in speaking an unpalatable truth back in the lifeworld of student engagement; that is, that our best stated intentions for student success are being undermined by those that have us state them.

Such a positioning, however, is unlikely to free me from the desire or requirement to "do" something with my findings, with the conceits of new public managerialism both in the wider sense and my personal practice making it unlikely I will have the opportunity to pursue understanding in this area only for the its own ends, and not for its potential for immediate practical effect (Hammersley, 2010, p2).

Conclusion

This contextual background to the development of the work led me to consider two questions **How and what is it to be and become a student?** and **Whether, and if so, how, does the environment of study affect this being?** On completion, and against my initial prompt to the work, these reveal themselves both celebration and despair. The surfacing of a nomadic studenthood committed to self-development, albeit not entirely in the emancipatory mode, suggests at least some connection to the spirit of transformational pedagogy desired by longer term inhabitants of the university system; that students appear to bind themselves together against their perceived pain in the unknown landscape through a protective shield of group consumerism perhaps less so. But then perhaps imagination is the only weapon in the war against reality (Carroll, 1865).

Chapter 2: Literatures and Contexts

"Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?"
"That depends a good deal on where you want to get to."
Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, Lewis Carroll, 1865

Introduction

The positioning of this research – and therefore the identification of the supporting literature – is driven by the available descriptions of student success in the successive legislative literature of the first part of the 21st century. In these documents, success, it might be read, is measured not by any suggestion of personal development, but by considerations of return on individual investment. In this the higher education project has been co-opted as one that places the benefit of the university as being to the economy, and to the individual within that economy. This is then playing out internal policy and practice through the governance of the institution, which might be seen to be the ways in which it cooperates with external agencies, and sets its own policies – with this played out in different ways in different parts of the sector, according to the particular history and era of any one institution (Shattock, 2006).

Indeed, as Colllni has it, there seems currently to be enormous political pressure placed on the recently expanded university system to justify itself in turns of purpose and efficacy, with concurrent turns of language throughout the practices of the sector that suggest an acquiescence to the political forces that position higher education in the service of productivity (Collini, 2012; Shattock, 2010; Ramsden, 1998). That I might find this ideologically troubling might be enough to prompt further investigation - but the purpose of this investigation, as previously described, is to explore

how this drive to situate the benefits of the university system in the individual participant coincides with the emergence of a wealth of literature on the importance of a sense of belonging to ensure students "stick" to their institutions to complete their qualifications successfully (Thomas, 2012: Tinto, 1990). More simply: at a point in time where much practice literature within the sector is predicated on the premise that a sense of belonging to the academic community drives success, the legislation might be seen to be situating students in opposition to their sites of study, while using a variety of mechanisms of observation, from the Teaching Excellence Framework to the National Student Survey, to redefine the university's function as one of return on investment for both the individual and the state as opposed to the delivery of public goods. This return demonstrated through the financial returns to state and individual from graduate employment and privileges an identity forged as an individual consumer of higher education.

In particular, then, the work is interested in whether the ideological claims on the purpose of higher education set the construction of student identity situated as student as consumer, while simultaneously, within the academy itself, the accepted wisdom framing student success sees it being the outcome of an individual's sense of self as belonging to the collective, in other words, a belief in the student as a member of an academic community. Further then, the work is interested in how the student makes sense and use of these positions for their personal benefit, particularly given their position, necessarily, as temporary inhabitants of the higher education environment.

To support an understanding of how these factors may interact in the development of 21st century studenthood, the chapter is developed as three sections:

Part 1: Construction of the sector as market

Part 2: Constructs of identity

Part 3: Considerations of student identity.

This allows the chapter to break down the supporting themes of the literature to allow a contextualisation of the issue from both an appreciation of the policy environment shaping the identity of the higher education sector and through authors positing processes of individual identity development. This consideration of identity is further deconstructed to examine the co-constructed identity of the group – and the implications of this for the university cohort, and thinking on the development of individual identities underpinning this. In this it draws on material both from academic and policy sources and is framed by a variety of philosophical approaches to allow a scoping of the environment of the research questions and an identification of the approach I will take to explore them. The chapter therefore intends to corral the literature to explore connections and tensions in these previously discrete realms of the construction of the student in the policy literature and the understanding of identity and its formation in the student cohort. To date, these two divergent suggestions of assumed student identity have not been considered simultaneously for their overlaps and contrasts and this work attempts to consider these in the round to better understand the factors determining individual performances of student.

Part 1 - Construction of the sector as market

This section examines the literature surrounding the framing of the purpose of higher education, particularly against the backdrop of the massification process begun at the tail end of the last century, with considerations of the application of new public managerialism intended to drive an audit culture delivering data to support consumer choice. It closes with considerations of how these contexts may be positioned in the lived experience of the student.

As indicated in the introduction, this work is sited within a period marked by an ongoing governmental desire for the marketisation of the UK higher education sector. This is the latest phase of an ongoing repurposing of the sector (McGettigan, 2013; Collini, 2012; Willetts, 2011) and while the wealth of literature addressing these recent developments might suggest that the expansion of the sector is a modern concern, it is one that might alternatively be considered as a project which first began with the extension of the trivium in the Middle Ages, and therefore sits in a long tradition of changes to curricular content (Shattock, 2006; Bernstein, 1996, pp8-9; Friedman, 1955). This is most commonly within a conversation between educators, business and government that continually seeks to redefine the purpose of education for the benefit of wider society – with the nature of this benefit contested between these three stakeholders (Timmins, 2012). These ongoing attempts at prescription of acceptable knowledge, and the implications this has on the shaping of any university environment(s) might be considered to have some pertinence in determining identities shaped within them given that a number of authors suggest the particular contexts of the student experience inform identity choices (Mancini *et al*., 2015; Sestito *et al*., 2015; Phillips MacDonald, 2013; Anetil, 2008; Labianca *et al*., 2001,).

To begin to unpack this it is useful to explore the literature exploring the nature of the modern institution over the past 20 years in particular, as this responds in large part to legislative shifts that inform this research through their role in developing a massified higher education system which, as a result, sees student numbers expanded and student populations diversified as never before in the past 20 years (Goastellec, 2008; Schofer and Mayer, 2005). While the Robbins report of 1963 pushed for the expansion of the university system, the landscape of the mid-1980s was still populated by less than 60 universities, with only about six per cent of the population accessing the sector. Twenty years later, this was transformed with 140 universities and university colleges and participation rates (for 18-year-olds) reaching 42 per cent. This expansion was achieved through successive extensions of university title, most notably through the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 which brought the former polytechnics to the same table as existing universities. However, this massification, along with near-concomitant political activity to break academic autonomy, created a striated sector in which this more heterogeneous student group shows its greatest diversity in those universities which have more recently acquired the title. For while the student population as a whole has changed, traditional patterns of application and selection have shown less plasticity, with the majority "non-traditional" students still sitting in the "non-original" universities (Foskett, 2011, Archer *et al.*, 2002).

In this then, an appreciation of the literature surrounding the project of massification has pertinence – with higher education expansion running as both driver and brake on the practices of higher education policy over this period of government interest in marketisation. Even before the historical frame of this project, Trow recognised, soon after the Robbins Report, that the expansion of the sector was likely to drive demand across a base of differentiated provision, with the traditional universities of the day

unlikely to be able to respond to the policy agenda with a speed able to deliver the ambitions of wider access (1965; 1972). The literature then also identified the increasingly interventionist role of government – either directly or through third party agencies – in one part to ensure that the participants in the expansionist project were being prepared for the right sort of jobs (Trow, 1975), while simultaneously beginning to question the affordability of the project in a massified environment, at this point beginning to suggest that expansion was possible only in accepting different cost models of delivery (1987). Other theorists have similarly identified the developing cost of higher education globally, while pointing to the reputational drivers of institutional success as contributing significantly to these – while acknowledging that the complexity of the operating lores of the sector fails to allow easy comparison either of institution or cost benefit consideration (Kimball, 2004).

Trow was also among the first commentators to explore policy analysis against the development of higher education – identifying that a lack of consultation and shared ambition between policy-makers and institutions was driving resistance deep into the heart of the system (1998). It is worthy of note that this resistance is demonstrable not only in the practice of higher education, but also in the literature of such resistance (Hoecht, 2006; Dillard, 2002; Lawrence and Sharma, 2002; Sing 2002). Indeed, the prevailing academic view from the literature of this period is the identification and refusal of the agenda of the free market within the university in such a way that this anti-neo-liberal position appears to hold sway as a common-sense view, rather than one which is as ideologically positioned (Clements, 2013).

A brief history of policy documentation

Tuition fees were first introduced in England in 1998 – and one might therefore see the policy documentation of the past 20 years

as potentially usefully informing the contexts of my current research project. The history and extent of this might then usefully be considered in identifying which materials could be used to support a better understanding of my research questions.

Timeline:

1988 Publication of the Jarratt Report, explicitly requiring the primacy of financial sustainability as a guiding principle of university governance in what was to become the post-92 sector.

1996 Gillian Shephard commissions the Dearing report into higher education funding.

1997 Dearing Report (National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education) published.

The Report made a series of recommendations into the funding, standards and expansion of higher education, of which the funding suggestions were considered the most radical. However, given the funding circumstances of the day, the proposals received little attack, albeit proving politically unpopular at the following general election.

1998 Blair Labour government introduces £1,000 top up fees with Teaching and Higher Education Act.

2004 Higher Education Act 2004 passed into law, allowing for the fee cap to be raised to £3,000.

The Act predicated an increase in the fees system in order to fund an expansion of higher education designed to allow 50 per cent of young people to enter the university system.

2006 £3,000 fee cap introduced. The Act passed in the Commons subject to fees no longer being upfront payments but deferred and linked to income. The implementation of higher fees was linked to universities maintaining support for widening access under the auspices of the Office for Fair Access.

2009 Gordon Brown commissions the Browne Review.

2010 Browne Review published advocating fee cap lift to £9,000.

The Review claimed that research evidence indicated that higher fees had not disincentivised poorer students from university attendance, and drew on a self-commissioned research base to suggest an increase in fees would be acceptable to all. Commissioned by a Labour government, the Review was developed into a White Paper under the coalition government of 2010.

2011 The White Paper, *Students at the Heart of the System*, was introduced in Autumn 2011 but its journey into legislation abandoned after it became clear that opposition to it would be extensive – and the realisation that its core ambition, the introduction of the £9,000 fee cap, would be possible in the absence of additional legislation. The Paper begins to posit the individual benefit received from higher education as positioning the responsibility for funding back with the individual that undertakes it.

2012 £9,000 fee cap introduced.

2016 Jo Johnson proposes the White Paper, *Success as a Knowledge Economy*, following the principles of previous legislation, but with an increased emphasis on driving further market reforms into the university system, in particular the opportunity to open the system to new market entrants with greater ease, in part through a reconsideration of the regulatory environment and with a view to differentiated fee options through the introduction of the Teaching Excellence Framework.

2017 Higher Education and Research Act is passed in both Houses, but only after significant controversy and amendment.

These developments in the external policy environment might therefore be seen to more directly drive internal/institutional

strategic direction in a timeline out from a point close to the publication of 1988's Jarratt Report. Shattock (2017) identifies this as the moment where the governing bodies of universities were required to assert themselves in ensuring that the strategic direction of any single institution would deliver financial sustainability, with this then enshrined in the constitution of higher education corporations and then continued into the university title of the post-92s, in the process removing the power of strategic direction from academic boards, rather handing power to vice chancellors more in the form of chief executives within their governing bodies, this then placing oversight and ownership of institutional strategy beyond the academic community.

Against this backdrop, the 2017 Higher Education and Research Act could be seen as a continuation of the tradition of co-opting higher education in service of the state. But its intent has been seen by some as more disruptive of the status quo than previous legislative activity thanks to its intent to drive market forces through the sector. Indeed, its ambitions for radical reform were such that it passed both houses only after a significant shift in content (Leach, 2017). However, the very public nature of the parliamentary contest was inevitable given that earlier shifts in the higher education landscape had been taken in regulatory rather than legislative realm over the previous decade, after the 2011 Bill was seen as too contentious to be taken through parliament (Hillman, 2014) and a bulk of initiatives setting the scene for this latest development took place in less public fora in the run up to the legislation. For example, in 2016 when still responsible for the higher education sector, the then Department for Business, Industry and Skills (BIS) set about developing an external metric for learning gain. This was initially posited to demonstrate value for money to the public purse to the civil service, but was soon also co-opted in the language of sector agencies as an additional piece of public information for the student about to embark on a significant

consumer investment, with pilot projects focusing heavily on an employability agenda (Hefce, 2015).

This co-option of the university as a site of instrumental response to a larger governmental and societal drive to deliver productivity has continually been seen by its critics as the repositioning of the academy away from what they see as its true purpose of supporting enlightenment (Leach, 2018: Mommsen, 1994). Their criticism then frequently takes two discrete foci: the bureaucratic response in sector to the prevailing pressures, and the role and practice of government in creating these pressures (Murphy, 2009; Deem *et al.*, 2007). Habermas situates the tensions between bureaucracy and freedom within the modern academy as being a clash being the social and the systems worlds, created in the imposition of the power of the state within one of the structures of the lifeworld (1987, p311) Habermas's model, however, places this activity as an inevitable or "normal" process of modernisation, and therefore seeks to position criticism of the emergent practices around considerations of resultant bureaucracy as functional or otherwise (Murphy, 2009).

This allows that the bureaucratic infrastructures of individual universities might co-opt the rhetoric and practice of the policy environment in ways that directly pervade the experience of their students. This commentary then might be considered through three themes: approaches to policy change and implementation in the connected higher education environment; institutional management practices; and thus the repositioning of the role of students in institutions across the sector.

Taking first the literature exploring policy change and implementation, Reich identifies that policy implementation is made possible in one or more of three ways: the co-option of

political will or political factions or the need for political survival (1995), with these then reliant on additional factors including public opinion and media attack (Greener, 2002, Wilsford, 1994). The literature points to political administrations being able to corral multiple actors in the service of policy shift and implementation, not least actors and stakeholders operating within the area of proposed change (Wilsford, 1994, Immergut, 1992). This then suggests that policy development is made possible through political will, temporal expediency and enthusiastic actors (Reich, 1995). This follows Fairclough's consideration that social reality is necessarily developed as part of an individual's reflexive engagement with discursive objects – thus suggesting a dialectic relationship between the policy world and the ways in which people see, represent, interpret and conceptualise them (Fairclough, 2013). This calls again on Habermas's interpretation, which sees action as a response to the situation of experience, raising ethical-political questions in the minds of participants affected by a particular policy circumstance (Crick and Gabriel, 2010; Habermas, 1996). In this then the circumstance of life pulls issues into the public sphere, and rather than thematic concerns being fed the affected public by the media, the public sphere amplifies this noise into the media's hearing (Habermas, 1996).

This draws in Fairclough's consideration that policy is in a dialectic with practice (2013) and so allows that is possible to start to consider policy documents to be sites of social construction (Newman, 2003, p64) and thus allow that student identity may be influenced through their existence (Reynolds, 2014). The amplification of message from legislation through the genre chain to media narrative would seem to allow that the policy makers construction of student has an exposure beyond the legalese of the Acts within Parliament – making its way into the lifeworld beyond and emerging as a set of positions then communicated as common sense rather than ideological construct (Bunce *et al*., 2016; Kandiko

and Mawer, 2013). Primarily this can be seen in the manner in which institutions respond to policy developments – although we might also consider that these narratives are available in the culture beyond the institutions themselves too. Reynolds has suggested media has a role in acclimatising individuals to circumstances they are not familiar with – and thus set expectations of an experience in advance of being situated within it (2014), with commentators identifying that this phenomenon is similarly experienced in higher education (Tobowlowksy, cited in Reynolds, 2014; Zemmels, 2012), with one theme of this pre-existence being the consideration of the values and beliefs of the academy, with Sheppard suggesting such forms of representation have been seen since the 15th century (Sheppard, 1990). Reynolds' work identifies two recurrent themes developed from media representations of higher education (i) a place apart Iii) a place for personal and national growth (2014, pp19-29) – but interestingly positions these options as shown both to be within and beyond the comfort zones of the student group, with a sense of fear and tension shown among the fictional student body over the course of the 20th and 21st centuries (2014, pp24-25). These tensions are played out in archetypes of a stratified sector – with the literature showing that the rankings and desirability of different types of university establishment form an important pillar of media narrative, and, notably the past decade seeing the sector's relationship with the media alter, as cultures of expertise and separation lose societal respect (Taylor, 2011).

Goodnight suggests that this developing media narrative is evidence of parts of society working to channel the doubt and tension of the lived experience through a prevailing discourse, in this case informing the content of media representations of the student/sector (20120. Thus, this drives the media to reposition the social circumstances of student life, acting to amplify the concerns of any particular group (Crick and Gabriel, 2010). Depictions of

individual students, therefore, are connected to their era and linked to broader concerns of the day (Hinton, 1994).

Current depictions of students situate them poorly served as consumers as part of the ongoing media interest in value for money in the university sector since the advent of the £9k fee regime (Taylor, 2011; Johnson and Ensslin, 2007), with the newspapers developing this theme in two ways. The first is the development of media-led league tables, based on a range of metrics from perceptions of satisfactions and employability outcomes to spend per student and staff to student ratios to allow a consumer framing of the choice of higher education institution in this, coincidentally responding to a desire articulated within the non-ratified 2011 Act. Having contributed to the information set that suggests student choice within a higher education market, the media narrative then amplifies this through the value for money agenda, which is extended to explore a range of related topics: the return of investment of the degree against other in-work training options, vice chancellor salaries and the growing debt burden of the young (Taylor, 2011; Robinson, 2018). This ties in to the emergent idea of student as consumer as an increasingly familiar concept within the academic literature too (Bunce *et al*., 2016; Gokcen, 2014; Saunders, 2014; Newson, 2004).

It is possible that within these interplays of genre, from policy to institutional context and on, symbolisation turns the object into an absence and with student disappearing within this consumer influence. In the case of the student consumer narrative this then both restricting and constructing other forms of studenthood – albeit this is troubled by Saussurian considerations that language has no guarantee of certainty, and is instead always arbitrary (Harris *et al*., 1997, pp209-224; Rose, 1986). Nonetheless, this framing of identity formation provides a starting point in thinking of

how best to capture versions of identity within the student groups of my study – pointing to language/text as a site of exploration. In turn, this suggesting that the display of the resultant "minding" or "performance" of student identity might then be seen to form, regulate and demonstrate itself through language in collective and personalised story telling.

In essence then, the literature suggests both the mechanisms through which the political agenda can situate itself in the lifeworld of the student, shaping their expectations and practices of studenthood, while identifying an increasingly hostile environment of marketisation that attempts to position the student in opposition to the aspects of the higher education environment even while they are engaged in it. The next section of this work, therefore, examines how the student – as individual and as part of a collective – might move to some sensemaking of identity within this context.

Therefore to understand the outplay of this in the context of this thesis, it is necessary to understand these overarching principles of the ways in which the state influences the lifeworld within the context they are being experienced. Deem has identified the outplay of this within individual university contexts as a shift in managerial activity – and concomitant internal criticism - as modes of new public managerialism were introduced to the context of massification – in particular, the requirement to respond to the systematic evaluation of performance against set targets, externally imposed as proxies of quality (1998). Deem describes this as academic managers defining and controlling the work of academics in response to both the value for money agenda and an external environment of increasing competition requiring a response to a quasi-market, with the result being a "regulative bargain" (Ackroyd *et al.*, 2007 p12) in which higher education renegotiated its relationship with the state – receiving resources by demonstrating

this managerially-enacted accountability (Newton, 2002). Indeed the practice might be seen as one in which institutions have reviewed and reformed themselves within a set of newly constructed definitions of quality (Shore and Wright, 2000).

However, the challenge to suggestions of this outplay as being new public managerialism is twofold: the first sitting in an absence of literature as to previous forms of university management to allow comparison (Deem, 1998); the second, through the sector's adoption of a critical view refusing all forms of academic management, and thus attempting to co-opt a critique of neo-liberalism to refuse any such initiatives (Clements, 2013). However, the literature concurs in defining the concept as the co-option within the public/quasi-public sector of approaches to management more traditionally associated with the for-profit sector (Clarke and Newman, 1997b; Itzin and Newman, 1995), with this then played out performatively, both in the delivery of performance indicators and the structures designed to deliver them (Cowen, 1996). In this then, these processes are seen by some commentators as going some way to redefine higher education in the minds of its managers – with the emphasis shifting from a sense of serving the public good to the need to achieve economic goals – and thus positioned as at least part of the response to the challenges of massification (Bouckaert and Halligan, 2008; Ackroyd *et al*., 2007). However, as discussed, there is some contention here: this period of massification of sector is followed in the literature by a significant volume of material in critique of the neo-liberal agenda, refusing the project of observation through the adoption of Foucauldian critique and commitment to a purely public goods version of the university (as above), with the introduction of forms of managerialism linked to neo-liberal projects designed to destroy the purpose of the university. This strand of resistance in the literature, while echoing through a continued objection to the neo-liberal project co-opted as sector sense, is nonetheless less

prominent in material produced after the turn of the century, perhaps suggesting objections within the academy had lost their voice.

Cerna identifies a number of practices that might inform this within the educational context (2013) with path dependence suggesting that once ideas have taken hold within institutions, stopping their continued development is troubled (Capoccia and Kelemen, 2007, Pierson, 2000). However, Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1991) describe the maintenance of policy development through shifts in an advocacy coalition, in which differential shifts in benefit to different parties allow aspects of opposition to the larger implementation of policy to be reduced (John, 2003). Sabatier (1988) points to these advocacy groups taking on particular strength when aspects of their belief systems can be co-opted in the service of policy implementation despite a lack of personal benefit from such developments.

Within higher education, this example of the consideration of broader social concerns allowing the adoption of otherwise contentious practice is again pertinent within the massification agenda of recent years, thus allowing the broader desire for widening access to gain greater pubic and institutional commitment, and so the concomitant opposition to marketisation within the project to be marginalised within the academy (Gornitzka *et al.,* 2005), while privileging the belief in both the individual and social benefits of the massification project. This approach to/practice of policy implementation is predicated on the assumption that not all actors will work in self-interest as a result of their greater commitment to belief systems – and as such is played out in aspects of public policy with the potential for high conflict, and high technical complexity (Hoppe and Peterse, 1993). However, other observations have refuted this, suggesting the stakes of policy

implementation in higher education are not high enough for this approach to be legitimised (Sabatier, 1995) – albeit this position was developed ahead of the implementation of the current fees regime.

Indeed the literature speaks to a combination of top-down and bottom-up approaches to policy implementation. Those commentators privileging a bottom up approach acknowledge that the policy process is enacted through networks in situ in the locus of policy enactment (Barrett and Fudge 1981; Hanf 1982; Hjern and Hull, 1982). In this then, Fullan's work is important identifying that when policy implementation is successful, it builds on a number of actors in interaction (1993). In this, these actors may well be acting rationally in the achievement of a set of policy preferences, in this allowing that institutional activity is also driven by the need to respond to a set of constraints in ways they consider most optimal thus, operating in a space of a combined top-down bottom-up approach to policy implementation (Suggett, 2011). This – and sector practice - then might suggest that the financial sustainability carrot of the £9k fee was too strong a pull for most governing bodies to resist the rhetoric that accompanied it.

In practice, this expansion drove engagement with externally curated quality systems built on complicated proxies for student experience (Field, 2015; Middlehurst, 1995). These were then being published and therefore comparable nationally, in the spirit of student information - in the process further embedding institutional practices that might be seen to be linked to the new public management agenda. This begins to give explanation to levels of resistance within the academic realm of the university system - with external verification requiring systematic evaluation of performance against set targets which were seen as working to de-professionalise higher education teaching/research occupations

and their control of the curriculum. Instead, academics and others in the system must now engage with an outcomes-based system fitted within the nationally determined Framework for Higher Education Qualifications and subject benchmark statements. The result is a "regulative bargain" (Ackroyd *et al.*, 2007, p12) which sees higher education renegotiate its relationship with the state – receiving resources by demonstrating its accountability through increased levels of managerialism which do little to improve trust (Bryson, 2004; Newton, 2002).

However, the literature does also allow that the policy environment may have produced the context within which teaching quality has been transformed by the process of audit and that institutions have reviewed and reformed themselves within a set of newly constructed definitions of quality (Shore and Wright, 2000) with the audit process becoming in part an opportunity to translate dominant discourse into a still more broadly held belief in the transformative function of higher education (Morley, 2001). Commentators then identify the challenge for the sector, the student and the policymakers sits in the approach to translating this information collection into mechanisms for effective student choice – and to consider what this means across the extended student experience from application to graduation (Morley, 2002; Newton, 2000; Coffield, 1995, p14).

Here then is the operational pivot through which higher education policy is situated within the lived experience of the academy: the student voice as arbiter of standards through externally administered surveys of teaching quality and the concomitant commitments to highly visible student voice and partnership allowing the merger of the educational and the consumer projects, with the transformational internal space thus mirroring the external

policy environment in language, if not in aspiration (Healey *et al.*, 2014).

This is further challenged by the limitations and proxies of the information available to inform student choice, but at the same time, the literature speaks to a growing rhetoric as to its importance (Bunce *et al.*, 2016; McGettigan, 2013, Brown, 2011; Singleton-Jackson *et al.*, 2010). And, indeed, governments of all persuasions in recent years have seen a contested set of proxies for excellence as necessary to inform student choice in the extended fees era – and as such are a continuation of what could be seen as an ongoing state campaign to mobilise students to place market pressures on universities (Woodall *et al.*, 2012; Furedi, 2011; Modell, 2005). Indeed additional new initiatives, such as the Hefce-commissioned pilots of learning gain, therefore, sit along with the Teaching Excellence Framework, and might be seen to provide additional evidence of the creeping framing of students as consumers (Eagle and Brennan, 2007; Lomas, 2007; Newman, 2003). These latest policy initiatives have been developed in civil service environments beyond legislative debate and seemingly characterised by the over-arching desire to place the university mission more clearly in the service of a neo-liberal position of personal advancement through "academic capitalism" and in this reject the idea of universities as sites of both public and personal goods (Jessop, 2017; Hoffman, 2012; Barnett, 2011, p41). Instead these developments might be seen to suggest that the only acceptable representation of university function as being in the utilitarian service of employment markets (Collini, 2012).

The literature emphasises the co-option of "service users" – or students – as consumers of said services to drive a set of legislative outputs that require increased regulation and accountability on the part of the provider. However, the scaffold for this an insistence

that the resulting policy outputs are a result of a partnership between government and stakeholder at the policy making stage, which appears increasingly flimsy in the light of governmental practice in working with student representatives to drive policy development - a case in point being the non-inclusion of the National Union of Students in the production of the most recent Act (Berlein, 2016). However, even before this latest regulatory output, this co-opting of the language of the market in determining the value of higher education has been a marker of modern governance. Indeed, these new forms of policymaking might be considered as logical solutions within a system that frames most activity within the context of the market, while the development of these newer practices of government attempt to blur the boundaries of public and private realms (Kooiman, 2000, p139).

Certainly, the material made available to students to encourage them to act as consumers is contested – with multiple measurements of university quality poor proxies for their alleged claims (Shattock, 2010). Additionally, commentators have problematised the idea of students as free agents in the application of choice in the selection of higher education institution. Indeed, much of the current policy environment is shaped by the desire to position student choice as a market control mechanism, with commentators identifying an increasingly prescriptive approach to the nature of public information sets in response to a stubborn resistance on the part of the university sector to provide price differentiation (McManus *et al*., 2017; Mangan *et al*., 2010; Briggs, 2006). However, as described below, overall, the conceit of the student as rational consumer of higher education is troubled in three frames: the nature of the data provided; the nature of bounded rationality in decision-making; and the likely aggregation of poor data to compound both of these contexts.

McManus identifies three stages of decision-making: pre-disposition, informed by sociological factors such as career ambition and previous familial experience of university; information search, in which the nature of the university prospectus or website has sway; and choice; when the preferred university is selected. He notes that in the final stage of this model, factors beyond those modelled in league tables come into play, with UK students demonstrating far more heterogeneity in their decision-making than their international counterparts as they begin to focus on other factors beyond league table statistics, such as closeness to home. Briggs too points to the complexity of decision-making (Briggs, 2006; Foskett and Helmsley-Brown, 2001) and again, elements sitting beyond academic reputation and employability benefit – in particular, distance from home – are noted in the literature as strongly influencing choice (Connor *et al*., 2001), and having greater influence among those students making decisions within the post-92 sector.

These observations of the choice-making processes of institutional selection go some way to suggest the problematic nature of the policymaker's positioning of students as consumers – with this position refuted by literature exploring the bounded rationality of consumer choice, the origins of which sit with Herbert Simon's work on organisational decision-making, which he believed responded not only to an appreciation of their overall ambition from their decisions, but also to the extent to which they had knowledge of the world surrounding their decision (Simon, 2000). Studies exploring this phenomenon in the circumstance of the selection of higher education indicate that the proliferation of information designed to extend choice may serve to confuse and obfuscate (Gibbons *et al*., 2015), with the financial cues to decision-making therefore not operating in the same ways as experienced in other markets – not least because the pull of elite institutions serves to distort otherwise rational market choice (Sutton Trust, 2004).

This potential of multiple data sources to offer confusion is not to refuse the role of university reputation in choice-making, (Monks and Ehrenberg, 1999) but rather that this reputation is considered by students in the aggregate, in league tables conflating specifics of institutional performance. Studies also suggest that once student choice is restricted – in that elite institutions are not available to them – the relative ranking positions of more modern institutions appear to demonstrate less influence in final decision-making (Alter and Reback, 2014; Broecke 2012).

This failure of the student to act in accordance with the consumer rationality assumed by policymakers is not the only challenge to the project. Both history and literature suggest some additional schisms in stakeholder engagement in the higher education project (Taylor 2011; Fairclough, 2003). The challenges to the 2017 Act en route to Royal Assent clearly demonstrated that ignoring the complexity of the contextual landscape was unlikely to make for good governance, with the developing dichotomy of student-at-the-centre and student-not-part-of-the-process suggesting a confused understanding of the role of student (Klijn and Skelcher, 2007, p595; Rhodes, 2000, p68). Indeed, the circumstances of the latest round of policy making – and public anger at the processes of its enactment, suggest the challenges posed at the start of this chapter as to the purpose of the academy are becoming more – not less - troubled. Not least for the absence of the student within organisations that claim to be acting in their interest. Indeed, developments of recent years have made equally clear the students' concomitant need to remain apart from an agenda of marketisation (van der Velden, 2018; Guardian, 2016).

Part 2: Constructs of identity

This section introduces a range of literature exploring the construction of identity, taking as its main theme the thinking of nomadic identity theorists, before examining how their position on identity formation might be considered alongside alternative models. In particular this allows an exploration of the nature of the other within identity formation, and a consideration of thinking on the fixedness of identity. The section concludes with a collation of literature exploring the connections and contrasts between individual and collective identity formation, in the process setting the scene for the final section of this chapter and the consideration of these themes as they might be understood in the context of the university.

As previously suggested, considerations of the policy constructions of students, and their potential amplification into the wider world through the work of the media, need to be unpacked against an appreciation of the literature on identity formation and a consideration of how this might be experienced within the context of higher education. The literature suggests that identity is formed within both spatial and temporal frames (Ellison, 2013; Baumann, 2000; Giddens, 1991) with an appreciation of the temporality of experience as an important factor, and shifts in experience and concomitant challenge acting as prompts to development. This idea of time and place and challenge having pertinence in the ongoing construction of identity might suggest that the higher education environment will necessarily be host to students in the process of this type of personal development (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004; Taylor, 2004) – not least given earlier suggestions that this is part of the construction of the purpose of HE in the minds of those that engage with it (Reynolds, 2014).

My premise, therefore, is that the student identity journey is a nomadic one, with the student moving from one landing space to another with intent, in a trajectory determined both by self and external stimuli (Mahadevan and Bendl, 2015; Fendler, 2013; Braidotti, 2012a). In this then, descriptions of the nomadic self allow a useful theme against which to place the temporality of studenthood, being of itself a thing of a connected and informed not just by context but by length of immersion (for most students at least). I read this approach to structuring identity as being a linking theme of other thought on identity formation – and see the zigzagging of personal positioning adopted by the nomad as allowing the co-option and coexistence of a number of additional schema for identity formation. I aim to demonstrate the potential convergence of these points of difference through my interpretation of the literature – this then being of particular relevance both in determining my methodology for this project and against the described ways of being demonstrated by the students in this study. In particular in this, considerations of individual and collective sites of identity-making the power of the nomad to navigate these in the development of self/s.

The possibilities of identity movement and mobility are at the heart of the concept of nomadic identity – but within a clear appreciation of the intentional nature of travel, the non-accidental nature of the nomad being fundamental to its role in re-claiming identity positions through agency and with intent, rather than as a result of constructivist projects on the part of the state. Braidotti (2012a) describes nomadic thinking in three ways to demonstrate this intentional state of being. The first, the context of thinking, clarifies the embodied and lived aspect of nomadic being, with thought responding to the imaginings of the consciousness, rather than in dialogue with rational thought. The second, the politics of thinking, allows the individual a non-unitary sense of subjectivity and so invites a rethinking of the boundaries of self and identity. The third,

the philosophical context of the nomad, sees a rejection of the melancholia-ridden individual at the mercy of constructivist projects producing the self against a pre-conceived master code. Instead a creative dialogue between self and context hands agency back to the individual and in this provides a more contemporary and useful framing of sense-making in times privileging change, allowing individuals to attempt to make themselves in sense of this, rather than subjugated by a more consumerist response (Braidotti, 2012a), with this theme ultimately echoed in the practice of the research design of this study as well as the informing literature.

This might then provide a way to reposition the modern non-traditional non-student as redeploying forms of studenthood in order to reclaim themselves from the singular construction of student-consumer so preferred by the current administration into a more complex site of identity which is defined by an ideological landscape (Langinier and Gyger Gaspoz, 2015; Mahadevan and Bendl, 2015; Fendler, 2013). However, there are three challenges in reconciling other literature to this position. Firstly, that identity formation is built in imagining and desire, not instrumental rationality; secondly, that fixedness is not the ambition of the identity project; and thirdly, that the individual has emancipatory agency in the shaping of self.

Indeed, this sense of the nomad speaks against alternative views that see identity as constructed in what might be seen as some form of binary opposition – the development of self in contrast to the other rationality, rather than the already imagined and desired self. Althusser (1971) described this within a description of the interpellation of the subject by the dominant ideology – a device through which he inserted concepts of psychoanalysis within the ideological realm, constructing a paradigm of self and other (non-self) providing a dialogic realm for the formation of identity within

the social status quo. In this he might be considered to set up an additional consideration of psychological need within the individual identity project: the relationship of need between subject as subject and subject as mirror after Lacan (1949). His model requires four inter-related aspects of psychological work on the part of the individual: first, the interpellation of individual as subject; second, the subjection of the "other: as non-subject; third, the mutual understanding of this positioning, and finally, an acceptance of the reality of this interlocutive relationship. (Althusser, 1971, p37).

Zizek (1999) starts to offer an alternative interpretation of the Althusserian model. He attempts to bridge a psychological-philosophical divide to reinterpret Hegel and suggest that aspects of transitory identities remain in abstract when they sit as secondary as opposed to primary identifications but that these become concrete at the point of reintegration with the primary. Here Zizek offers up an opening to the consideration of nomadic identity that might usefully characterise an experience situated in the temporal (Zizek, 1999, p90). And this still offers the potential for transformation, with the seemingly reductive project of instrumental identification in studenthood having the capacity to deliver beyond the initial/original expectations of its subject. Hall takes this further and suggests that the role of the unconscious lies in providing the veil between the psychic and economic fields of the individual's identity formation with an absence of articulation between ideology and the unconscious (Hall, 1996, p20) in this perhaps allowing a not-knowing knowing subjectivity – or even perhaps an identity forged in negation of that identity.

Therefore, applying a consideration of the nomadic journey could allow understandings of Althusser's interpellation to be reinterpreted in a Zizekian frame that acknowledges the potential for change through a less structurally bound version of the

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individual, in which an alternative desired reality can emerge as "truth" from the void of a situation (Zizek, 1999, p140). In this way it allows a reconceptulisation of self-determined identity not sitting purely in the binary, that is, it removes an identity formation from a more simplistic consideration of self emerging in response to non-self. Rather the nomadic imagination talks more to identity in relation to others, in space, and over time. This allows two dimensions to identity: the personal and so uniquely individual, and the social, which is the representation of the individual in different social contexts, thus allowing a reading of identity that sees it as alternatively performed "in group" and "out group" (Langinier and Gyger Gaspoz, 2015, p309).

Indeed, while Althusser's theory provides a protocol for the formation of identity in which the other is constructed in the psychic domain, with the unconscious thereby shielded from direct confrontation with the ideological domain (Brah, 1992), it is possible to reposition this thinking to allow for both a less solitary and more intentional set of practices. Moving beyond the rejection of agency necessitated by structuralism, Hall reframes this process as an act of suture between discourse and practice (Hall, 1996). While Zizek casts this into postmodernity with reflections on a three-stage process, in which the subject reconciles themselves to the false appearance that lies within a real thing, in the process acknowledges the dialectic unity of the thing – in order to ultimately assume the essence of the thing through the removal of the false in their perception (Zizek, 1999, p59) – the negation of negation effectively mimicking Heidegger's rite of passage (Zizek, p76).

However, it is harder to reconcile considerations of identity "fixedness" as an ambition across thinking in the field. Althusser's concepts of identity are developed as transformational – not

transactional – and situated primarily in a non-Cartesian appreciation of body, not temporary space. And this is at odds to the conceit of this project – which sets its context as positioning of the university as a site driving identity formation, notably a requirement for the cultural milieu of the academy to be adopted by infrequent visitors in a limited time, which could be seen as another way of describing students. Certainly, this co-option of a temporary space as a contributor to identity is at odds with an Althusserian model that sees ideology as eternal, and therefore operating with greater power than time-limited contextual circumstance. However, for the subject in the field, reflections on operation in eternity may prove more challenging and thus the temporary is incorrectly labelled, offering rather a way in which the eternal and durable is experienced (Zizek, 1999, p26). In this it brings into sharp relief the temporary nature of "student": for many constrained to just a few years, intermittently experienced, and constantly changing. Therefore, rather than its focus on the eternality of ideology, Althusser's model might be considered more worrying in its claim for the fixedness of identity. Perhaps instead then it is more useful for this to be seen as emerging in continual negotiation within specific yet shifting cultural contexts. In this Hall is helpful – with his positioning of suture acknowledging identity as constructed in difference – and continually challenged by what this then demands the subject temporarily keeps off the table of their internal negotiations (Hall 1996, p18). A still more optimistic stance on the unknowable in the process suggests this as an advantage – in that transcendental freedom/spontaneity occurs only in so far as the unknown field is not open to the subject (Zizek, 1999, p25) – and certainly for the student progressing through their learning journey within a transient educational environment, the unknown becomes the normalised realm.

These contrasting perspectives on the truths and fictions of the fixedness of identity formation seem irreconcilable – denial of the

possibility of a fixed and completed dialogue simultaneously suggests that either in reviewing identity as a process, or exploring it through lens of individual benefit, there is an impossibility in achieving any unified identity within individuals or cohorts. However, as with identity itself, it is perhaps the demand for fixedness rather than an appreciation of the necessity of flexibility that complicates my thinking, particularly against the complexities of any postmodern framing of context (Snyder, 2012; Seidler, 2010). To unpack this, Foucault's refusal of the theory of the knowing subject in preference for the theory of discursive practice might seem to offer some hope in reading the literature and identifying lines of inquiry strong enough to support further study (Hall, 1996). From this my project might be seen to be more interested in understanding the interaction of environment (institutional and political) and process in providing a context in which multiple versions of studenthood are created, either sitting both in knowing and unknowing opposition to imposed identity or seeing the institution as irrelevant to self.

A further challenge comes in the exploration of the emancipatory agency of the student identity project. For in both transactional or transformational educational mode it is useful to consider that identity formation is most often hidden work - and perhaps only of individual challenge when disrupted, suggesting it is easiest to probe identity in those in which it has become illusive (Kroger, 2007, p5), perhaps therefore indicating that there might be key points in the student educational journey that offer themselves up to the discovery of alternate truths – again suggesting that the perception of benefit within the formation of the student's identity is continuously pertinent, but also fluid. In this both Zizek and Kroger appear to acknowledge that nomadism may provide a way of being that allows identity to be negotiated, practiced and achieved as a series of transient steps. This links to Battaglia's conception of the vehicle through which identity can be achieved

by considering the need to identify two issues: the agency and the rhetoric of individuality and relationality (1995, p4). Not that this thinking is without its own inherent troubles – for the positioning of identity emerging only at a site of doubt, or moment of seeing (Kroger, 2007, p93, Boyes and Chandler, 1992) may, however, overly problematise a series of questions of value and values within the individual that do not, for many, sit as a "problem". In an instrumental environment that sees a student with primary identification in other domains, questions of "who am I?" are mainly understood through a socially pre-destined answer that maps closely to personal subjectivity (Slugoski and Ginsburg, 1989, p28). This then provides a useful frame for later considerations of nomadic identity, acknowledging that points of tension that drive shifts in identity position must be self-identified by the student and not assumed from an institutional standpoint (Taylor, 2004; Braidotti, 2012a).

However, the literature also makes clear the problematised nature of defining identity journeys within the academy in this way for in claiming an emancipatory flavour to the development/experience of a studenthood, it is possible that I am co-opting a particular view of critical pedagogy to provide the context of this student/studenthood learning in such a way that insists on the student engaging with the academy in transformative mode (Jones, 1999), in this then co-opting a particular norm that sits as one of the oppositional strands within the neo-liberal critique (Clements, 2013). There is a danger therein that in applying theoretical models of identity construction as situated in emancipatory desire within this particular context, there is a privilege given to the set of ideologies that hold the nature of the academy as being transformative and dedicated to public goods (Giroux, 2011; Illsworth, 1989; Freire, 1970).   Jones describes this positioning as an alternative imperialism (1999), driven through the familiarity

with a "desire for knowing" that is taken as natural within those that regularly inhabit the university spaces.

Thus a privileging of this particular view of education as transformative necessarily speaks readily to a conception of the development of studenthood as an emancipatory activity – and in doing so serves to situate as "other" those students who choose to sit beyond these practices and self-descriptions. In this the choice of an emancipatory modelling based on a sense of we're all in it together requires an articulation of the shared qualities of any such group (Ford, 2013). And this of itself is challenged both by the possibility of its verification, and by the assumption that any shared belief is a dominant belief (Ford, 2013, Butler, 2000). By default this situates the "togetherness" of the student group of allowing both inclusion and exclusion (Ford, 2013: Agamben, 1990), and in this allowing a temporality of engagement with the collective, a whatever singularity in the view of Agamben that allows the individual to engage with the we while maintaining an ambiguity to a continued relationship to the group (Murray, 2010; Agamben, 1993; Nancy, 1991).

In this way, it is possible to conceive of an emancipatory togetherness having limited appeal or positive meaning for individuals or groups within the collective that might have alternative emancipatory ambition, or for whom an empathetic understanding of the ambitions the institution holds for them is of little appeal or benefit (Jones 2013). However, this might still suggest that shared meaning-making might have greater benefits at particular points in the educational journey – assessment, induction or graduation, to name a few – when the reality of the shared experience of the student community actively is one of doubt and stress; combined with moments of seeing (Braidotti, 2012a; Kroger, 2007). This is not to suggest that students will necessarily be

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pursuing transformation in ways that the academy finds comfortable as it strives to maintain itself as a site of public good. Indeed, some now suggest that the higher education environment may be operating to facilitate socialisation into the contemporary work and spend culture (Gibbs, 2011, p53-6; Haywood *et al.*, 2011, p18). This viewpoint holds that the final qualification is actually seen by the student body not as a badge of academia – but as a way to actualise the fantasy of a good life, thus operating as a bridge to displaced meanings, with students then sustaining their dreams by avoiding elements of their programmes of study that may result in failure and an alternative outplays of instrumentalism (Haywood *et al.*, 2011, p189).

Thus, in beginning to explore whether there are ways in which students identify, as students or otherwise, it is pertinent to develop a degree of understanding of any benefit an individual might derive from this - as there is limited inherent value to the singular self in adopting any identity if there is no benefit for either the individual or for the collective - in doing so (Battaglia, 1995, p3). Albeit this sense of the collective within a widened-access sector is further problematised, with any diversity of student body likely to limit the probability of the assumption of collective benefit. This complication is perhaps most instantly demonstrated through quick considerations of the likely experiences of mature, part-time or work-based learners – but clearly nuanced in multiple ways within all student groups of multiple characteristics. Certainly, while Braidotti's conception of the emancipatory power of the nomad is powerful in supporting the acquisition of the desired sense of self, it is perhaps challenging to assume a shared ideology driving these discreet ambitions.

There is also a danger that this serves to position identity projects as utilitarian ventures and so speaks to a somewhat reductive view

of human potential. Relying too heavily on this idea brings echoes of the concern that sits within Heidegger's appreciation of the modality of being: in that if we operate only through practices performed as a means to an end, we situate ourselves in ordinary time and work only to a series of nows thus becoming averaged and failing to understand our potential within a more existential notion of being (Heidegger, 1953). This way of being in the world potentially sits as the one most comfortably aligned with the public and private goods vision of the higher education sector (Gibbs, 2011, p53-6). Certainly, an appreciation of the emergence of a sense of self historically would suggest that self could not exist in its current form before the enlightenment, with the word itself merging as a noun towards the very end of the 16th century, and "identity" following in the first half of the 17th. This then gives a concept of self seemingly developed within a context of personal freedom, responsibility and agency that was at the time gradually gaining ground as normative practice (Slugoski and Ginsburg, 1989). For as Foucault makes clear, classical civilisation was not troubled by pursuit of identity or analysis of its construction (Foucault, 1988, p253).

This also allows that in a review of the benefits accrued through particular choices of identification, for the 21st century student it is possible there is simply too much resource required in the imagining of an appropriate "other", in that, after Baudrillard, the value of the self, becomes identifiable only through an appreciation of the relational value of the other (Baudrillard, 1994). In the massified diversity of the modern university environment the likelihood of this being a unified emancipatory outcome is challenging and Braidotti's structuring of the nomad as all in it together improbable as a constant driver (Braidotti, 2012a).

The literature provides a framing of this that acknowledges that the together of any studenthood project may indeed be constructed from the collection of individual benefit. Rosen describes the social context of identity performance as the stage on which individuals play both actor and audience for each other's performances – in the process allowing a performance of self that sits within socially accepted norms for particular groups (Rosen, 2014; Klein *et al*., 2007). These practices then allowing some affiliation with others with whom there is some shared sense of purpose (della Porta and Diani, 2006), and bring this shared sense of self into being through these repeated acts of performance (Butler, 1999).

Butler sees these practices as providing group benefits through the cohesion created through these individual acts of shared performance, in this recognising Klein *et al.*'s assertion that group behaviour is a necessary precursor to some sense of collective identity – but that this identity can only be maintained if there are practices that allow it to be expressed (Rosen, 2014; Klein *et al*., 2007; Taifel and Turner, 1986). This allows a reading of studenthood as a performed identity – demonstrated in the public realm by individuals to those others they anticipate will understand and endorse such performance within the particular social context of the University (Klein *et al.,* 2007). In this, commentators suggest that the benefit of such performances is achieved by the individual, through attempting to gain the approval of the group (Porteous and Machin, 2018; Gruenenfelder-Steiger *et al*., 2016; Emler and Reicher, 1995).

These considerations might usefully be considered against Haraway's conceptualisation of affinities. In this modelling of the world, affinity has the potential of offering up identity groups that serve as a disruptive choice against the status quo – allowing groups the possibility of refusing current cultural understandings of ways of

being in the world, instead allowing that the choice of what to value informs both the formation and articulation of alliances (Grebowicz and Merrick, 2013; Haraway 2008). This repositions affiliation as a performative function (Butler 2004, Haraway 2003) and so suggests that the formation of a social group becomes a form of doing, a space of work. Butler points to shifts in kinship theory that suggest this is a practice of self-conscious assemblage that opens a consideration of kinship to communities that cannot be conceived in notions of affiliation that require deeper bonds (Butler, 2004). Butler's work offers an opportunity to link these practices through to the nomadic project. She offers a framing of this as a process of ethical and social transformation, thus acknowledging both the emancipatory and the journeying aspects of the nomad, and further echoes Braidotti in the acknowledgement that such activity is not without pain – and so more likely to offer loss and disorientation than comfort on the route to the imagined self (Butler, 2004, pp38-39).

Butler and Haraway therefore, as Braidotti, would seem to allow that the nomadic occurs in the individual for the collective, thus construction the "we" for the "together". This then requires that community is glued through the connections of like-mindedness, and in doing so offers up the possibility that failure to demonstrate particular forms of performance and narrative necessarily places the individual –or at least their subject position – beyond the group. Indeed to be other in this environment might be seen to position the individual beyond the benefits accrued by the group. In Haraway's writing this then becomes an opportunity for the collective to demonstrate extraordinary empathy (Haraway, 2008; Daston, 2005).

The literature also allows that the individual contribution to the group identity may also bring benefits to the group, and thus

benefit the individual through their association with the wider group (Klein *et al*., 2007). But in this commentators point to the necessity of group acceptance for any individual benefit to accrue, with the possibility of the group reduced if there is not at least some form of mutual recognition of group membership (Andrew, 2014; Seely, 2014).

The literature therefore goes some way to providing a rationale for both a collective and an individual instrumental engagement with the project of studenthood, while the more emancipatory lines of sight to the desired-self sit in identities beyond the academy, in communities of practice inhabited by the professional self (Woodgate-Jones, 2012). Simultaneously it allows that these multiple identity positions, instrumental and emancipatory, remain possibilities in environments where the visibility of these variations is hidden by more fragmented social relations (Klein *et al*., 2007), and in this the self, as expressed individually and in group, may take different forms (Brooks, 2011, pp147-169; Hoge and Mccarthy, 1984).

Against this, the policy landscape might provide one opportunity for the anchoring of identity within prescribed boundaries, albeit this work remains mindful of the potential for students to respond alternatively to this. To frame this, Foucault offers a loosening of structuralism and looks to move beyond the point "where capitalism has destroyed the subject in a way that makes it possible to admit that the subject has only ever been a multiplicity of positions" (Foucault, 1988, p83) and suggests instead that the multiplicity of power relations at play should place attention on the reflexivity of the subject and their chosen discourse of truth (1988, p38).

This said, while the positioning of infinite complexity might suggest the absurdity of all projects of collective identity, Badiou allows me to rescue this by reframing the problems of post-modern deconstruction, asking instead that philosophy works to identify from the multitude that which offering the essence of wholeness (cited in Zizek, 1999, p133). This connects to the idea of the process of identification becoming the constant, with identity itself as an object in flux offers a useful way of thinking against a theoretical landscape of performative practice mediating the relationships between structure and agency. To support this, Gergen points to the multiplicity of relationships that puts the self under siege and creates constant dilemmas of identity (cited in Kroger, 2007, p21), while Rock appropriates Foucault in this, suggesting that this process allows each to position themselves as their own panopticon (Parker, 1989, p66) and in the process refusing the possibility of universal truth, thus bringing a multitude of theoretical positions back together and opening the door to nomadic identity constructed on points along a continuum of social and individual sense-making, in response to a variety of moments of seeing. For the concept of identity as nomadic and fragmented is a useful scaffolding for the co-location of understandings of how the wider ideological context of studenthood might be experienced and embodied alongside its local enactment at either institutional or subject level - and reposition individual students as being in service of neither state nor self but rather coming to a form of self-actualisation that responds to the complexity of the age through a nuanced performance.

Additionally, while nomadic thinking provides an emancipatory space for multiple identity projects within the academy, the particular benefits this affords the non-traditional student group have a particular pertinence. In attempting to belong to the academy, the non-traditional student needs to explore and embody a version of studenthood from an asymmetric power position, not

only of learning but of being of the academy. These different starting positions, between the centre and the margins, the majority and the minority, can only be negotiated with any hope of developing a common understanding, a shared way of being, if both sides understand the need for some form of deterritorialisation throughout the student journey (Braidotti, 2012a, p30). However, this journey is not marked by linearity, but rather by desire – with the desire for change requiring/demanding a consistent imagining of the other self, an ongoing leitmotif of you will have changed that gives a truth both to the imaginings of future self and a remembering of ambition, rather than of existing structure (Braidotti, 2012a, pp29-30; Braidotti, 2002). The excitement for Braidotti and the potential within the context of the non-traditional student – is the opportunity this process allows for individuals to engage with the discourses of others in a non-mimetic or consumerist mind-set in a constructive symbiotic (2012, p30). This framing of process does away with conceits of nomadism as being a weaving of strands and an acceptance of multiple individual identity positionings, rather placing the process of becoming the desired an unfolding or zigzagging between memory and ambition. At the same time, such constructs acknowledge the temporality of the collective kinship, with the individual subjects consciously constructing mechanisms for being "in it together" (Braidotti, 2012b, p175).

This then potentially acknowledges and allows that identity may be held in both collective and individual realms, but as a fluidity of positioning achieved through the conception of nomadic identity as a state of constant becoming rather than a static given, and therefore does require both an ongoing negotiation and a circling – or zig-zagging – from a chosen identity position that acts as the starting point to a number of other starting points (Hepworth, 2014; Braidotti, 2012a, p40). This brings the subject into a constant awareness of their identity politics of the moment, and creates a

mindfulness within this project of imagination that requires that the dominant ideology is identified in order to provide the other in the discursive exchange, in the process reaffirming that the constant of the identity project is the potential for change. This requires the student to continually process the data of the exchange in order to maintain the dialogue while not becoming overwhelmed by the process. And this in turn requires an environment of space and in time that is felt to be supportive to the nomadic project, sustaining the singularity of intent during particular periods of travel and the understanding among fellow travellers that we are all in it together. However, this is challenged within the academy. Braidotti acknowledges that understanding the construct of togetherness also requires that the individual develops an understanding of the space, actual or geo-political, and time, lived and yet appreciated against history – with this only possible within a collective mode through the sharing/developing of shared memory/narrative and in this the development of oppositional positions is more about a commitment to hope than negativity (Braidotti, 2010, pp409-413).

However, the ability to think as nomad is as nothing to the project of self-actualisation without a concurrent desire to be. Adorno speaks of the capacity of the status quo to put up facades to thwart the ambitions of consciousness and through considerations of desire and Braidotti begins to name the impetus with which the desirous subject can crash through these barriers with the facts of identity positioned as a matter of intentionality, rather than current being (Braidotti, 2012a; 2010). In this, desire provides the agency to imagination necessity to initiate and sustain the change that inspires some to enter the higher education project. This energy is a necessary to maintain a line of sight to the desired self within the public realm of the University, which offers a variety of possibilities that sit both within and beyond the citizenship of studenthood and in which, particularly at the start of their journey, students may find themselves struggling with an inchoate sense of the possibility of

change – while not appreciating that the life choices they have made have positioned them as voluntary migrants within an environment they did not anticipate would be unfamiliar, thus for some setting up the possibility of the decoupling of studenthood from their aspiration for self, while for others creating a longing for studenthood itself (Joseph, 1999, pp7-19). In practice, within the institution, this allows for students to sit within the same cohort while imagining themselves severally as scholars, professionals and hedonists and creates the challenge to belonging that sees retention rates troubled in sites of applied portfolio, if existing cultural and learning identities do not match those available/sanctioned (Martin *et al.*, 2014, p135).

Here then it is possible that for some students the "informatics of domination" rather than acting as a mechanism of control and requiring them to know their place in the academic pecking order of a striated system, instead serve as the stimulus to be other, and to engage with studenthood in different form (Haraway, in Braidotti, 2012a, p134). Gholami's work, after Foucault, acknowledges the adoption of various techniques of the self in order to normalise an individualized preferred discourse is useful here – in particular in identifying the need to know the "other" in order to develop self against it (Gholami, 2015, p47) – with this need to know the other tightly linked to the imagining of self as other in emancipatory mode (Braidotti, 2010; 2012a).

Identifying this other within the massified higher education system is challenging – not least for those involved individually in the process who may be challenged in their engagement by previously accumulated social and cultural capital - but perhaps allows another tactic through which one might consider identity practices of the student group, and again suggesting nomadic identities may be found within the institution. And therefore in sites that position

difference pejoratively, nomadic thinking privileges change and motion in for the minority – with this process of actualisation achieved through passions, intensities and visions. In part this process is facilitated through what Braidotti describes as a revisiting of memory. In this the cultural memories of those that sit beyond the majority position offer their own set of stimuli and triggers to change and – through creativity and challenge - provide those looking for movement with imaginative opportunity not available to students who have come to the older universities from more traditional backgrounds (O'Shea, 2014, p139).

This zig-zagging of the nomadic process then takes on an additional dimension, with it increasingly clear that the nomadic subject not only maintains dialogue with the dominant culture's memory in order to develop sites of shared understanding, but also brings to each iteration of this discussion a new set of personal memories and interpretations to be re-presented, explored and reconstructed as a starting point for the next shift. This endurance sits not only in the temporal, but also in the spatial, that is the site, but also the embodied site of the subject, where the subject is the enfleshed actualisation of the passions they bring to this project of identity (in nomadic or other mode) – as such desire drives a process of becoming which can be inchoate in initial ambition being driven by capability and attraction as much as known intent. However, it is marked by its optimism – the nomadic self being a belief in the possibilities of the future, and as such only ever transient in the present, being best represented by thinking in future perfect; tense and experience (Braidotti, 2012a).

Despite the potential for emancipatory positioning offered by nomadic journeys, the literature acknowledges that such travelling is not without difficulty. Braidotti points to this process of becoming as an "emptying of the self" (2012a, p152) during which the velocity

of travel may need to be sustained while the individual considers devices to avoid being crushed by the impact of incoming data and external context – which may leave the subject, subject-free at times, with energy expended at the surface while these external stimuli fold in (2012, p152). This then means the individual in motion needs to maintain a strong determination to change as this radical repositioning for a knowing subject is uncomfortable and risk-riven (2012, p219). This, Braidotti claims, is sustained by the sense of community – by a sense of we're all in it together. The nomad then is in the process of becoming someone new in tandem with others, in a collective project of reshaping self-meaning.

This description of process is not designed to suggest a journey identified purely through some form of emancipatory joy. O'Shea describes the nomadic through a conceptual lens of turning points and suggests that, within a higher education environment, engagement with the process can be complex and confusing, particularly for those who arrive as mature students with previously established understandings of self. In this then, the nomadic search is not just non-linear, but also fragmented and disruptive (O' Shea, 2014, p138), while Langinier and Gyger Gaspoz point to the complexity that an appreciation of intersectionality brings to reviewing the nomadic processes within any one social setting, in particular the intersection of cultural context and social status (2015, p311).

And there is an additional tension within the construction of student. Any perspective of the subject offering agency only in service of replicating ideology is particularly problematised within the particular circumstance of the academy. If ideology is only made concrete through the self/subject, it will necessarily experience tension if its subject is operating in an understanding of its own subjectivity – bestowed through the desired critical

engagement with the academy itself. That is, the university itself requires students at their best to engage with an appreciation of their subjective status. This can be seen in practice as the academy situates itself as an arena within which certainties of knowledge are contested as a core project: as the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications makes clear, with descriptions of degree holders explicitly requiring graduates with "an appreciation of the uncertainty, ambiguity and limits of knowledge".

Thus, individuals engaged in this endeavour by necessity are perhaps or occasionally situated with full knowledge of their subjectivity. This knowing, from the perspective of the 21st century student, may prove a knowingness too far, usefully described by Zizek, from the perspective of Hegel, as an appreciation of reality as an overlapping of necessity and impossibility (Zizek, 1999, p99). Thinking about this in practice it would require a student, appreciative of the neo-liberal narrative shaping their relationship with their studies, to instead co-opt the academy's insistence on public good, while understanding that this too attempts to co-opt them as subjects within ideological power play. Meanwhile, any more reductive benefit-play consideration of identity would require them to do this while calculating each position for the personal capital it might provide, before co-constructing a shared reality of this with their peers. This was probably a tough call when six per cent of the population attended university, but multiplied by the variety of competing agendas that come with 44 per cent participation this becomes multiple individual calculations of stunning complexity. And perhaps at this point the Hegelian Universal demonstrates its true type and becomes inherently divisive – with the student identity itself being the thing missing from the student identity (Zizek, 1999, pp101-103).

In summary, then, the literature might be seen to provide a route to

consider an alternative conception of the other that moves it from the refused-other-than to the desired-other-than, and so provides the energy for the desirous student to use nomadic practices to navigate the points of the journey that require an interpretation of moments of seeing, through either a shared or personal engagement with the tensions at play. In this way multiple student forms emerge within the collective – nonetheless offering the possibility that at heart they may cohere to some essence of studenthood concocted for any one particular cohort in the particular context of its time and space.

Part 3: Considerations of student identity

The first part of this chapter, exploring the historic policy and media constructs of student identities, started to suggest some framings of student identity at this point in the 21st century, with Gibbs positing that the commercialisation of higher education has the potential to shift student conceptions of identity - turning them away from knowing themselves, instead accepting the being of a consumer entity (2011, p59). The second part began to unpack the possibilities offered by the literature as to the site and process of identity formation with some reference to the educational domain. From these two elements it could be read that sitting beneath this is an acceptance that the individual and collective identities are experienced simultaneously but not identically. Battaglia suggests that if identity has to be simultaneously understood in both the individual and the collective domain, the student may come to understand these separate investments in self according to both the value they provide and the resource they consume (Battaglia, 1995, p6). This third section therefore considers how the literature suggests these factors might intersect in a university setting to inform identity formation in the student cohort.

At its heart then this section considers whether "student" becomes possible through the "minding" of behaviours created by acceptance/development of any shared construct (Noonan, 2003 pp143-150). Within this framework, it might be considered that the repetition required within the performativity of self is a significant resource investment – with any essence of self achieved only through a sustained set of acts (Butler, 1999, xv) – and therefore only applied when benefit is tangible to the subject, in this privileging the "instrumental" student (Maringe, 2011, p144). However, this then suggests that a collective appreciation of the framing of student as consumer may be at odds with the

individualised sense of personal benefit through academic capital and leaving the individual to the sense-making within this.

To understand this better for this particular work, it is useful to consider both the contexts and practices of identity making within the academy itself. Commentators have pointed to the additional complexities faced by the individual student in attempting to locate their identity during the time and place of their university study. Rattansi and Phoenix (1997) have identified the improbability of young adults in any domain maintaining a stable identity given the decontextualisation forced upon them by the rapid social changes of late modernity. Their work suggests that societal change and social mobility have disembedded previously settled collective identities (Kroger 2007). Additionally, for many of those embarking on a higher education journey, the nature of their family unit will impact significantly on the development of their identity, along with their developing of peer relationships – with the interplay of these two aspects introducing a further complication of the project (Kroger, 2007, pp107-9). And picking up Gholami's theme from the previous section (2015, p73-7), this is a process more comfortable for some students than others – for the identification options available to individuals from communities with tightly policed identity requirements can mean the complex social contexts of university can be overwhelming. Applying an appreciation of the practices of resistance to critical pedagogy (Ford, 2013; Jones, 2013), these individuals then adopt specific strategies to defend their existing positions within the challenge of the academy, potentially adopting nomadic tactics of zigzagging in an instrumental fashion to allow emancipatory positioning (Hughes, 2002, pp412-4).

Certainly, even beyond these issues of family and peer group, studies by Adams and Fitch (1983) and Costa and Campos (1990)

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suggest that different university departments attract students of differing identity status – suggesting that the environment is selected as a demonstration of identification, in addition to a cultural context for the dialogic development of self. The literature then suggests that, once *in situ*, the student group invests identity capital significantly in both tangible and intangible assets – in the first case, memberships and credentials, and the second, personality traits and cognitive abilities – both played out in the social realm both to develop and to demark identity (Cote and Levine, 2002). This then prepares the ground for a consideration that any recognisable student-ness is identified through the individual's willingness and visibility in undertaking public and psychic works of studenthood – and in doing so suggests a possibility of a consideration of studenthood as citizenship within the academy (Joseph, 1999, p3), with concepts of citizenship further underpinning the notion of nomadic activity as a process through which this citizenship can be achieved (Hepworth, 2014).

However, as with other considerations of identity projects of citizenship, this begins to foreground the vulnerability of the process identity-assumption within a political and policy environment subject to frequent change; and which therefore continues to reframe the question/answer of studenthood in consistently unique terms (Hepworth, 2014). Thus, those entering their university years at the tail end of this second decade of the 21st century are embarking on a project unknown not only to themselves, but also not knowable through the experiences of those previously engaged in this journey, particularly in those parts of the sector where long history, steady recruitment and strong research funding is not available as buffer against the ideological dictats to structure and curriculum (Varman *et al*., 2011). In this framing, it is then possible to consider that the ideology of marketisation that has characterised the external framing of the higher education sector for the past two decades or so politicises

the position of student – with those engaged in their own projects of higher learning effectively therefore exploring their position within a system open to multiple explorations and interpretations. This then starts to allow that the phenomenology of their performances as students has particular logics as social practices and might be seen to reposition the nomadic from an accidental site of liminal engagement to a purposive positioning that speaks to the contradictions put forward by the ambiguities that now cloak the purpose of the university (Tomlinson, 2016).

Clarke/Keefe (2014, p111) in considering how the university environment shapes art students refers to Magritte's "This is not a pipe" as a useful cypher in the observation of a college student – with the student present in the class but nonetheless present as "this is not a college student". In this she sees the student as demonstrating a nomadic identity which is in part a political response to their situated perspective within the wider global context. This context might be seen to be very much determined by the political environment of their studies (Tomlinson, 2016).

Indeed, Braidotti has it that nomadic identities at their heart are political as nomadic becoming entails the production of differently desiring subjects (2012, p38). This suggestion might be seen to hold particular pertinence in the context of studenthood, whose identity choices are impacted and impact both at their site of study and within the broader context of the national picture of student (Joseph, 1999, p4). In both instances, this requires the student to determine the degree and the manner in which they wish to operate both as an individualised political subject and as a participating citizen – and in the process begins to suggest that identity nomadism in this context is less an optional positioning and more a logical choice. Within the context of this work, this allows a consideration of the interplay of the university, and of the external

political context, as "sites" of study, with both sites needing to attempt to influence the citizens within them (Kehm *et al*., 2012, pp20-77). The political sphere, co-opting the ideology of the market, is keen to promote the individualised consumer identity – conversely simultaneously attempting to homogenise each individual student in a shared understanding of the primacy of productivity in self-identity (Stevens and Kirst, 2015). At the same time, the University attempts to co-opt its occupants as academic citizens situated firmly in subject-communities, based on an understanding that belonging will drive individual, but concomitant institutional, success (Thomas, 2012). In this then, the political nature of nomadic identity is laid bare as it entails the social construction of differently desiring subjects (Braidotti, 2012a, p38).

However, questions of benefit in assuming/refusing particular student identities do not necessarily provide an understanding of how this benefit might be achieved. The actualisation of any benefit can only be achieved through the process of performing the selected identity. Positioning the university as a site of student identity formation, particularly having outlined a neo-liberal colonisation of the academy, suggests an instrumental engagement by the students – and one which may offer conflicting benefit (Hammack, 2010). This response to the question of whether the achievement of a sense of self within the academy is essentially a bourgeois conceit, with the pursuit and attainment of a self-defined form of studenthood permissible only in noumenal response to the pervasive capitalist system (Hammack, 2010). From this perspective, thought is fundamentally made by power dynamics, facts cannot be isolated from values, and the relationship between concept and object is never stable when mediated by social relations - in this then, accepting that moments of seeing are politically framed – with Braidotti's sense of an emancipatory line of flight perhaps colonised in the service of other agents (Bernstein, 2005). Certainly, it is interesting to consider that the latest version

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of this external context is particularly troubled. If nothing else, the media's concerted attack on aspects of the university sector's practice over the past 12 months or so is emblematic of a concern in government, laid out in the emphasis on return on investment in recent legislation, that the current system is fundamentally unaffordable – and that pressure must be brought to bear to create affordable HE provision. This then serves to frustrate the dreams of the citizen-consumer-student, who find themselves bound up in a fear of poor investment that suits the purposes of the project of advanced capitalism (Braidotti, 2012a, p295).

It is possible to consider that this provides a particular tension for some students, in that their imagining of success is inseparable from an identity position that includes wise consumer, with wise consumer, after Simon, an unlikely possibility – and this contributing to student identity positions that are played out in anxiety (Joseph 1999, pp5-15). Clarke/Keefe sees this as a tactic in positioning the student as complicit in the processes of neo-liberalism that she sees as coming to define the university (2014, p113). The impact this concern for wise investment has on student identity positions might be considered to be further compounded in those sites of applied portfolio – where students will experience aspects of their learning in third party environments, such as hospitals and offices, where the prevailing political context may add another level of complexity to the context of their developing selves (Martin *et al*., 2014, p201). Additionally, the availability of individual capital resource may shift context too - one of the most common observations on participation in higher education is that economic cost of attendance is differentially experienced (O'Shea, 2014, p145.) And certainly in the course of my day job, in my regular conversations with the student body the cost of studying, of missing

shifts in order to come to study, is a regular conversation.[1] (Interestingly, albeit anecdotal, it is possible that this has greater truth in an English context than in the Welsh, where the establishment of a more progressive funding regime that still sees maintenance grants supplied, seems to take the emphasis away from this particular position in discussion with student representatives.)

However, any conceit I have of a commonality of student is challenged by considerations of Heidegger's moment of seeing (Heidegger, 2008, pp321-333). This operates as the catalyst to a requirement for any individual to be open to new ways of being - and in this the Augenblick brings together the ancient and modern of philosophy with Kirkegaard, Nietzsche, and Braidotti, *inter alia*, recognising the importance of the concept as providing the potential for an act to change in those individuals ready for the challenge of living the more authentic versions of themselves that the knowledge revealed in the blink of an eye allows. In this the nomad is set in transit in response to a way of thinking that emerges from a particular event (Ward, 2008). For Heidegger these moments of vision occur when an individual is open to being in the moment, allowing that receptivity to change, following Kirkegaard's suggestion that this process was only open to the right person with the right attitude when these moments of knowing occur.

This has implications within the identity project – firstly providing a way of framing the points of departure within nomadic models of identity formation, secondly providing the tamping of an expectation of a collective trajectory and understanding. Indeed, Heidegger's belief in the power of the individual being resolutely

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[1] This work began when I was Director of Learning, Teaching and Student Experience at Middlesex University, regularly meeting with students and their representatives to discuss a range of issues. It came to conclusion when I was in post as Pro Vice Chancellor Student Engagement at Cardiff Metropolitan University.

present, provides him with the description of the tool by which the individual can separate themselves from the masses. And from here it is both obvious and yet important to note that there can be no common description of what student identity might be. Rather this allows only that student identity will be the student identity any one individual student chooses to assume within their academy in response to their seeing of themselves in the particularly context of their experience. Such considerations move the notion of studenthood from a label applied by the academy to a concept that has to be seen as embodied – in that the concepts cannot be external, rather that being is the concept in itself and so tied to the individual. In this way the possibility of a shared emancipatory movement towards a single student identity becomes impossible, and instead, this collective student chimera can only be brought into being by considering any essence of wholeness emerging from the myriad constructions of the multitude (Zizek, 1999, p133).

This would seem to offer opportunities for investigation against considerations of both individual and collective sites of identity formation across a nomadic experience of self. The point at which the impossibility of the single identity combines with the suggestion that such an identity might only be seen to arise from any performed essence of wholeness starts to situate itself around an appreciation that one shared characteristic of the (English) student's political experience is the payment of fees. Therefore, one obvious "other" for individual students is the other that is debt-free. "What am I not? Debt-free." Thus potentially, the political economy of the day may be providing the nomadic-identity student with one fixed point through which they can connect to their larger cohort against a background of confusing heterogeneity (Bernstein, 2005).

The pertinence of this to the nomadic theme sits within the suggestion that students most often demonstrate a shift between their identity positions in response to an external stimulus (Martin *et al*., 2014) and are therefore shaped by the complex interplay between social, personal and political environments (O'Shea, 2014, p145). This might be seen further to underpin thinking that it may not be possible for an individual to hold just a single identity at any point in the student journey (Braidotti, cited in Clarke/Keefe, 2014, p115).

And so could it be in this that the overlapping narratives of various nomadic citizenships point to this one commonality of experience that serves as a bonding agent within the academy, albeit within an appreciation of the danger of applying such thinking reductively. Deleuze and Guattari (2004) identified the danger of an impoverishment of understanding of any phenomenon through simply using the correspondence of two objects as a representation of the actual form of being under review. This is perhaps still more true in the current political climate, for, as indicated previously, students are currently embarking on degree programmes at a time of perhaps the greatest change in sector for a generation as recent policy events have combined to produce dilemmas unique to our time which suggests useful investigation into the ways in which students perform their cultural identity positions at different times across the student lifecycle (Joseph, 1999, p5).

However, the fact that identity performances have shifted over time does not mean that in not being the same they are oppositional – rather these liminal movements could be working to reshape current identities without in the process refusing all of its historic associations (Joseph, 1999, p7). Indeed, drawing on Braidotti, it is possible to consider that rather than adopting a set of nomadic identities that situate the student as complicit within the

vocationalisation of education for its productive impact
(Clarke/Keefe, 2014, p115), a nomadic positioning may be adopted
as a position of empowerment in order to resist some of the
divisive difference driven by the market project (Braidotti, 2012a,
p29). In this the performances of identity are achieved by
individuals acknowledging the liminal and occasional nature of their
studenthood, but remaining unphased by this in full knowledge of
themselves within and beyond studenthood, they are therefore
accepting the uncertainty of the developing self but deploying it as
nomadic subjectivity to allow them to inhabit multiple locations
without being diminished in any singular site and allowing
themselves the potential of maintaining a dichotomous relationship
with their own sense of studenthood (Clarke/Keefe, 2014, p112).

For, drawing on Joseph's consideration of the development of
citizenship in migrant communities, the project of developing
individuals into private citizens, the better to engage them with the
market, is not without disadvantage to the individuals themselves
in attempting to embed themselves usefully within their new
environment (Joseph, 1999, p11). This allows a consideration of
student as a migrant within the university community, coming to
experience the academic community from beyond, and then points
to alternative points of commonality that might serve as emerging
thematics that add complexity to the development of points of
commonality across nomadic identities. And in this we may begin
to see the connections of the student identity project with the
individual institutional ambitions for student success – with this
choice of environment potentially a predictor of student success,
with studies showing that students demonstrate greater
persistence in educational settings where they understand both
field and habitus, and demonstrate "fit" (Thomas, 2012; Nora,
2004). However, particularly in the non-traditional setting, some
students are challenged by the requirement to engage fully with the
potential of the transformational space of the University when its

possibilities are increasingly framed in a utilitarian mode and its purpose most often linked not to abstract concepts of self-development but to more instrumental activities to produce productive citizens for the economy. And this is despite some evidence that students themselves, particularly within the applied portfolio with its emphasis on driving positive impact into the broader community, have a set of ambitions and senses of future self that clash with the ideologies of individualism within which the broader project is framed (Martin *et al.*, p201, 2014).

Therefore we might better consider the contestable nature of the higher education landscape within any institution equally a shared resource through which a variety of nomadic identities might find aspects of commonality that support emergent studenthood – as by foregrounding the ambivalent and performative nature of these sites of identity formation it allows a consideration of the dissonances within the shifting environment to act as the stimuli prompting shared shifts in individual nomadic identity projects – and in so doing, start to debunk the possibility of the studenthood of a previous age, leaving today's participants free to produce trajectories of self which show radical disjuncture from those of previous generations (Joseph, 1999, p14). In the process, perhaps, this is demonstrating the non-student as student, which is entirely logical in its current setting, but confusing to older inhabitants of the academy who are looking for performance in traditional spaces blind to the impossibility of these landscapes as having the potential to be able to continue to host such performances. Certainly the literature is light on considerations of the construction and maintenance of modern student identities against an appreciation of the multiple sites of their demonstration – the social, the learning space, the work experience and the virtual (Martin *et al.*, p201, 2014) – and the challenge this poses to nomadic individuals in maintaining some sense of continuous self

across all these domains, as well as in those beyond the reach of the university (Langinier and Gyger Gaspoz , p309, 2015).

The students' ability to do this is drawn from experience within and beyond the academy and shows creative, contingent and complex approaches to identity work within educational settings (Clarke/Keefe, 2014, p114) that are not initially conceived as identity locations but nonetheless become co-opted as such once students inhabit them, thus allowing them to be reconstructed and then jointly occupied by existing and incoming members of the academic community. Again this perhaps speaks to Braidotti's consideration of nomadic identity as a form of resistance, and a tool to freshly imbue traditional identity labels with new meaning, allowing them both an ongoing vitality and a broader acceptance than would be possible without this process of liminal renegotiation within the spatio-temporal territory of the culture of the university (Clarke/Keefe, p114, 2014).

This revisioning of the university as a site that offers either a multiplicity of identity options, or a collective conscience built in opposition to the higher education project's aims, would seem to conflict with Bourdieusian concepts of social reproduction (1977), simultaneously offering alternative critique of the attempt to continue to co-opt higher education as a driver of social mobility (Bathmaker *et al*., 2016). These considerations of the processes of the normalization of hegemonic positionings as an outcome requirement would seem to suggest that each university has a role as a site of regulation of identity: particularly given the acknowledgement of role of education in social reproduction (Bathmaker *et al.,* 2016). Through this lens, a stratified HE system provides perhaps a meta-classification system against/within which identification can occur, with the elite institutions maintaining control and transmission of the canons of text knowledge, while

other institutions are used to direct certain social strata to useful craft or work (Bernstein, 1996). This differentiated provision complicates considerations of the nature of knowledge and suggests that the ranking of different classifications of knowledge and skill is no accident but the result of an instrumental alignment - an ideology – with subject-level pedagogy providing another context of self-making in the different institutions (Hall *et al*., 2008).

This then sees any university existing not as one site but several, each with notions of the ideal learner. Each strand of curriculum is framed by its own pedagogies, and each will be speaking to a different idea of the ideal learner, with the student likely to appreciate the significance of how their chosen identity situates them within these different contextual settings (Bernstein, 1996, p95), all suggesting that the environment of study in a striated system is unlikely to offer a homogenous backdrop to the experience of higher education. This is particularly true within the applied curriculum of the post '92 environment with its portfolio emphasis on vocational engagement as identity formation and career development somewhat linked at the stage of young adulthood, and career consolidation one of the characterizing practices of early adulthood (Kroger, 2007). Baumeister and Muraven (1996) have proposed that individual identity is an adaptation to a social context – a space where biological and social needs can be met - with identity formulated into what will most help individuals live to best advantage within any particular context. This therefore allows that uncovering other shared identities deemed more worthy of the investment of performativity arising from particular forms of studenthood identity might benefit the individual. Revisiting Bourdieu with this in mind suggests that the habitus of study might usefully be considered to inform the identity choices and their concurrent benefits to different student groups. Certainly, there is evidence that the lexical term student is positioned differently in marketing materials of the sector's mission

groups – with different emphasis on student agency in the academic, social and employability realms seen in the prospectuses of the Russell Group, the former 1994 Group, and those belonging to Million+, and played out in the practice of life opportunities post university (Bathmaker *et al.*, 2016; Sauntson and Morrish, 2011, p78).

The literature therefore goes some way to suggest the nature of the modern university as a necessarily many-layered site of identity formation. Within one institution, vocational portfolios and subject disciplinary contexts provide a multiplicity of early adult identities (Shay, 2016). In this, the field within which students operate becomes less stable as they move between professional placement and lecture theatre, or university regulation to departmental practice, providing real life granularity to Foucault's consideration that power is not an absolute substance, but a form of relationship – determined through many factors (Foucault, 1988, p84). Here the literature acknowledges the inevitable tension between the promise of vocational education as a transformative experience, allowing the development of an alternative or developed self, and the reality, where this aspired-to identity can only be created in an alternative, authentic, community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p53). Beyond this, co- and extra- curriculum engagement provide further additional sites in which students can apply technologies of self. This multi-dimensional space seems as likely to deliver students with identities in opposition to each other as it does to produce with some collectively united sense of self, developed in deliberate or coincidental defiance of some alternatively perceived "student". Indeed, the literature also acknowledges that students experience higher education differently, with academic culture unevenly accessed and institutional – or micro-institutional- cultures treating some students as other (Read *et al.*, 2010). Attempts to understand the operationalisation of this are well-supported by the work of

Althusser (1971) who foregrounds the subject as being placed within institutional structures through its interrogation by the dominant ideology of the environment. Daniels identifies that the nature of this interpellation differs across the multiple sites of the university, with each of these potentially laying claim to the student's/students' membership while nonetheless operating ignorant of the impact of their individual communicative practices against the self-making of students (Daniels, 1993, p 61).

However, Tuomela's we-attitudes (2007) suggest that collective social practices may share some intentionality that delivers to a shared sense of culture and purpose and understanding - this framed in both the context of the educational institution and the professional domain that some programmes bridge. And the knowingness with which students may zig zag between nomadic positions demonstrates an appreciation of the necessity to demonstrate some form of studenthood in order to engage and succeed within the academy (Martin *et al*., 2014, p201), while appreciative that student labels are unhelpful across the wider spectrum of their activity. This knowingness also prompts an additional challenge to ideas of social constructivism that have markets co-opting students in their service in shaping the academy – with the shape-shifting student perhaps suiting themselves in full sight of both the market and the institution (Hepworth, 2014).

The challenge of these multiple contexts of identity making operates at the level of both the collective and the individual. The literature suggests that this complex field of collective and individual identity development is played out against a normative social demand that would suggest individuals make actions intelligible within a particular social context, this then raising questions of whether a student demonstrates commitment to personal benefit beyond the collective in line with the consumerist

frame, or within some version of this consumer model but adopted as shared practice. In this it prompts a consideration of the relationship between structure and agency within the academic institutional environment. In this vein, Archer's considerations of the role of an institutional culture in either freeing or restricting personal agency takes on particular value as a lens through which to examine student identity decision-making (Archer, 1996, pxii). And becomes interesting in the current more febrile environment of the student fees debate as the student reality of the university may be informed by cultural emergent purposes at odds with the structural emergent properties being dictated by policy – thus producing a situational logic that drives agency in ways other than those anticipated in a space more traditionally associated with social reproduction (Hepworth, 2014).

Certainly, it seems that some form of symbolic interactionism could be at play within the student group within the academy (Feldman, 1972) to construct some version of shared reality – and thus to demonstrate a shared understanding of the incentives of belonging through a variety of interactions, or conversations (Meltzer *et al.*, 1975). This would require that individuals operate collaboratively and reflexively in constructing – or negating - the project of student. For a lack of perceived benefit derived from the student label might potentially mean more value is placed on work applied in identity projects beyond "student". Such considerations provide a useful backdrop to the current discourse on belonging (Thomas, 2017; 2012) and suggest a consideration of alternative communities of practice, particularly within the applied portfolio of the post-92 institutions. For the literature suggests this may be particularly pertinent in the vocational realm, where students may well be seeking to develop an identity within the collective sphere of their discipline (Wenger, 1998, p146), albeit commentators suggest this work might be considered more challenging for students because of their position on the periphery of their practice community – and

the need to participate more, not less, to become more fully embedded (Pyrko *et al.*, 2017; Light and Cox, 2001; Wenger, 1998).

One framing of this is to consider learning as situated, within the definitions provided by Lave and Wenger (Wenger, 2007) – with these offering us a way of identifying the realm in which the university is experienced through engagement with a community of practice, as novices or apprentices. In this apprenticeship model of teaching the student develops themselves through legitimate peripheral participation in the desired community of practice (Wenger, 1998; Lave and Wenger, 1991,). Through this, they develop a sense of the communal practice identity. The individual explores and develops socially through practice, developing shared meanings through participation and this allows each student to position themselves against their vocational community and plot their trajectory across/within it through learning (Wenger, 1998).

Within the teaching and learning practices of the applied portfolio, the context of the development of vocational skills is a learning experience which focuses on exposure to more expert persons – either through apprentice-type practices of imitation and observation of technique in the workshop/studio or through a more homiletic knowledge transfer in the lecture hall. In each of these places the individual's line of development is brought into contact with a different set of cultural practices and histories – so effecting learning through visible and invisible practices (Lave and Wenger, 1991, pp102-3). Within some parts of the portfolio, this includes a recognition that an appreciation of histories and theories lies secondary to practice. Therefore, the socialisation into the particular community of practice requires not only that the student begins to internalise the psychic tools of the trade – but also that they identify their relative importance to their future identities through the relative subordination of different categories of

knowledge within the curriculum (Bernstein, 1996, p73). In this way, the students quickly come to appreciate the need to position themselves with practice communities through the ascension to the concrete (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p38).

Any interplay of identity positions therefore needs to be understood in terms of whether individuals may choose to situate their identity within the entirety of the pedagogic experience (Reid *et al*., 2009, p 740) or their practice communities. What seems to be lacking in the literature is an attempt to consider these two divergent aspects of concurrent university learning – student identity and the shaping of graduates through graduate attributes/pedagogic experience (Daniels and Brooker, 2012) - again suggesting the pertinence of considering these questions of identity against the institutional strategy context as this drives the ways in which institutional success is measured – and thus the experience of education for many students.

This also provides an alternative consideration of the individual or collective sites of identity making, through the linkage to considerations of personal development conceived as either exterior or interior – with the interior representing the embodied processes of learning as opposed to their institutional locations- and this learning may be seen to encompass the development of identity (Harrell-Levy, and Kerpelman, 2010; Chappell, 2003). But, again, to posit this as some form of unbreachable interior/exterior divide is problematic. A possible reading of Vygotsky's zone of proximal development might position the internal process of cognitive development as being both individually and socially contextualised (Daniels, 2001; Hedegaard, 1996, p171). Here learning takes the form of the acquisition of psychic tools – which are chosen and developed within directed social contexts (Hedegaard, 1996, p173).

The idea of the development of identity within the collective is extended beyond the direct interaction of teaching and learning in the 21st century academy. Increasingly in this era of marketisation, universities and students are coming together within and beyond curriculum in a bid to reframe the conception of student of consumer/customer through the lens of partnership (Healey *et al*., 2016). And while the desire to operate in a transformative rather than transactional environment, with concurrent ambitions to boost student engagement and reduce attrition – in the process meeting the best/effective standards identified by the Quality Assurance Agency - is understandable from the perspective of universities themselves, there is also evidence of this being the preference of the students themselves. In some ways, this provides a protection from the implementation of identity created in the external policy space. Indeed, it is interesting to examine how the drivers of the student agenda in this domain are also positioned as defences against the worst excesses of the market, albeit against separate threats. In 2016, the National Union of Students published the Manifesto for Partnership. Its ambition is to provide a clearly articulated definition of partnership which does not leave students as major funders, yet junior stakeholders of the partnership project, while foregrounding that authentic involvement will work to the benefit of both parties in rejecting some of the consumer rhetorics surrounding the sector. However, closer reading of the text might be problematised, in that perhaps it simply co-opts an alternative version of student identity against the will of the individual. Certainly, it has been developed against a concern that the culture of individualism being fostered in considerations of consumer potentially leaves the collective project of the union movement exposed and under some threat.

Conclusion

Taken as a whole, my work claims to make an original contribution to knowledge based on outcomes from the co-location and exploration of objects/domains not usually considered together: in this case the relationship between the ideological constructs of higher education, their lived demonstration within a specific university and the individual work carried out by each student to make sense of this within an identity position that serves their purposes at this point in their lives. Necessarily therefore the literature that has been considered in identifying the theoretical underpinnings of work is also broad, drawing on eclectic sources the better to understand the frames of the work, in this providing not only the scaffold on which the project rests, but also, ultimately, the tools through which it can be interrogated (as in Chapter 3).

The challenge to the work therefore is not simply to identify the themes supporting the research, but also to understand and articulate their connectedness, thus demonstrating how my work illuminates their points of intersection, the better to understand a developing student identity from a standpoint not previously inhabited. One way to achieve this is to explore these positions from the point of view of student. This then allows that the definitions of student as propagated by a policy environment which also has its eye on a renegotiation on the purpose of universities might be considered to be engaging with the informatics of domination in order to enforce the view of student that best suits its ideological intent (Braidotti, 2012a, p134), rather than the interests of the student group. As described in the literature, this would seem to be the case, with governments of all colours in recent years conscripting the student body in a fight not of their making for the soul of the university, not only thereby constructing them as consumers of a market, but also in the process attempting

to insist on what should be consumed. The work that follows therefore sits as an attempt to explore the possibility of this being in play in one particular university at this point in our political history.

The second tranche of this chapter then considers the possibility/process of any such identity construction - and within this it I believe it is possible to demonstrate the thematic of the nomad, of itself a politicised and emancipatory identity positioning, emerging as a framing of the identity project that clearly positions the students' own identity work within this ideologically framed project of student as constructed beyond the boundaries of the institutions. This conception of identity work does require both a "we" and an "it" to be in together – the "it" then allowing in the individual institution as the site for this work. In this then the work sets the scene for the third tranche of literature, which explores whether the "we" of the project is likely to be found in a sense of "studenthood" – and, if so, what might influence such a construct. Within this then, Braidotti's notion of becoming might usefully be conflated with the belonging that drives sector practice in attempting to foster student success through individual transformation into citizens of the academy. However, within this, to acknowledge the challenge of this transformational process – perhaps particularly in those institutions populated with groups of students historically unfamiliar with the higher education environment, thus allowing the idea of the renegotiation of territory, the renaming and shaping of studenthood by the students themselves – rather than their governments or institutions - seems likely to be a necessary technique in the pursuit of an authentic self.

In conclusion then, the literature outlined throughout this chapter provides the platform against which it can be seen that students may need to form some appreciation of themselves as students in

order to navigate their own routes through a landscape marked by its competing ideologies, simultaneously suggesting the mechanisms they may choose to adopt across the process in response to such an environment.

Chapter 3: Methodology

"It would be so nice if something made sense for a change."
Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, Lewis Carroll, 1865

Introduction

This Chapter identifies the philosophies and traditions of research within the field(s) of this study – alongside considerations of my own worldview – thus allowing a positioning of the process of the work that sits comfortably against both the histories of identity projects and my personal perspective and ethical framework. In the text that follows, therefore, I attempt to position my work epistemologically and methodologically by an understanding of its genesis and context, my own positionality within the work, and to explore further the implications of these in my choice of method.

It is therefore designed first to clarify the focus of my research, before exploring its epistemology, methodology and methods discretely for their strengths and weaknesses in more detail, drawing these together against the themes emerging from Chapter 2 of policy and identity formation. It concludes with a consideration of the ethical framing of the work, and the associated limits of the research, before attempting to coalesce the whole within three overarching themes.

Explaining the questions

Chapters 1 and 2 set out the field of my interest and the nub of my concern: that the environment of study produces a form of studenthood that sits in opposition to that desired by widely-held

understandings the supporting contexts of student success. This would seem then to set up the research questions for this study as:

How and what is it to be and become a student?

Whether, and if so, how, does the environment of study affect this being?

The development of the resultant research project therefore requires of me a thoughtful engagement with the connection between these two questions – and through this to remain appreciative of the scope of the work, in that it brings a series of methods into play to better understand the lived experience of the individual student through a frame that acknowledges the current ideological circumstance of their higher education. My intent in this research, therefore, is to see what emerges from these by exploring the truths of these two positions and examining the connections between them (Fairclough, 2003, p9).

A further dual positioning of truth and purpose within this work is surfaced through the process of writing this Chapter itself, in that it is necessary for me also to explore the traditions and positioning of the work but nonetheless to foreground that the purpose of this methodological writing is to aid the function of the research. That is, not to lose the thread in the philosophy and rather to remember that, while philosophical in outlook, methodological positioning is essentially normative in practice.

This then starts to inform my personal understanding of the project (with the full detail of these choices, their applications and limitations then explained in the text that follows). In this I hope also to demonstrate an understanding of the two-way pull of methodology and of method – as the framing of research position and intent is one thing, but the need ultimately to engage with the

lifeworld and to gather data, is an equally essential driver. This then brings me to one personal core belief in the messy work of understanding people, that research is essentially a craft skill, refined and understood best in the field with aspects of design necessarily following the practical demands of gathering information (Thomas, 2003, p4).

However, here the benefits of the duality of philosophical and practical considerations required by methodological thinking offer clear advantage, allowing that the "mess" of the world is both acknowledged yet held at bay by considering the craft as explicitly positioned within an epistemological frame, albeit one mindful of the reputation of the sociological field as being striking for its colocation of specialisms that "don't cooperate and barely communicate" (Shipman, 1997 p13). The challenge, therefore, is to engage with the work within a heightened sense of methodological awareness as a protection from potential validity threats. In this an articulation of the philosophy of truth underpinning the project – and thus uniting its three discrete stages of research practice with this thread of my own worldview becomes essential both to clarify the rigour of the nature of the collection of the work's truths-in-practice beyond scientific method, while ensuring that conclusions drawn in the process are justified by this internal validity.

Personal positionality

As a result, undertaking this work has required me to rub away at the surface of my worldview to identify the connections and challenges of my conceptions of truth - because only through this understanding can the truth claim of any research be legitimised (Gadamer, 1960). This is only possible having framed the theoretical positioning of the project as in the understandings laid out in Chapter 2, but also against an appreciation of the research

processes by which these positionings have been brought to view by others. Through this synthesis, it is possible to start to define methods within an epistemological frame that allows my personal alignment with the work to hold itself to external scrutiny in practice. This becomes increasingly important in seeking understanding in disciplines beyond the natural sciences: Gadamer has it that human science is concerned with establishing predictable phenomena, with many commentators arguing against the possibilities of such reliability outside of scientific method (Yu *et al.*, 2011, p732; Morse *et al.*, 2002, p15; Brink, 1993). However, these dismissals are mainly posited in a positivist frame and so sit without an acceptance of alternative approaches to the framing of truth. To refute these, therefore, this Chapter aims both to counter such claims and reposition the project in a more pluralist view, in constructionism, thereby demonstrating my own philosophy. Indeed, by positioning the work through phenomenological methodology, the study seeks to privilege the unique, thus allowing a multiplicity of truths to which it ascribed inherent value (Van Manen, 1984, pii) and my positioning of the work within plural truths, while maintaining an integrity of research design that allows these plural truths respect through their validity within the lifeworld (Koryaks, 2008, p49; Van Manen, 1984, p9).

The above positions me as approaching this work phenomenologically, yet critically, and so informs the choices and design of the research project. However, the epistemological positioning of this work falls over if I do not also accept my own interpretation of experience as informing my being as researcher. Here then I attempt to describe this, first as a history, but then as a context to the self I am in the work.

At the point of this project's conception I was Director for Learning, Teaching and Student Experience at Middlesex University, with

responsibility to support both the enhancement of the student experience and to understand the relationship the measurement of this experience had with perceptions and promotion of the University's reputation. We were attempting to develop a 3D model of enhancement (demand, design, delivery) that therefore responded to an authenticity of the student experience rather than our interpretation of it at hierarchical remove. At the point of the project's completion I am Pro Vice Chancellor Student Engagement at Cardiff Metropolitan University, with a brief, again, to respond to the reality of the student experience with effective enhancement, again, in the process, driving reputational gain.

I therefore perceive my role primarily as sitting within a para-academic frame, understanding and supporting the drivers of success for both students and academic colleagues – but approaching this primarily from a model of organisational change rather than through academic inquiry – albeit, I hope, with a mindset sympathetic to the complexity of the academic role. This speaks to my own layering of professional self with a 15-year career as journalist and editor before starting my teaching career – first in the delivery of vocational journalism skills, but then, after engagement with both Education and Mass Communications at postgraduate study, going on to teach, write and present in each – with the only commonality of these positions informed by my moral philosophy which leads me to attempt a service approach to practice over authority achieved through hierarchy. In this then, my work as manager and teacher is predicated on early life positioning emerging from a critical post-structural feminist perspective, developed in the social realm and only applied later in the academic sphere. These combined factors ensure that despite moving through the ranks of university hierarchies, I am conscious that I interpret my position within the academic community as one of novice. I've zigzagged through subjects (my first degree is a BSc in Genetics and Microbiology) and modes of study (post grad as

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distance and part time) and engaged only superficially with research with very limited writing and publication. My forays into being academic appear to me to be spaces of temporary habitat before I return to the security of managerial responsibility. This engagement with the extended rigour of doctoral study has therefore, for me, brought together the study and experience of nomadic identity formation in one, with my appreciation of the noematic travails of the student group I have worked with also informed by my own concurrent experience of developing studenthood/becoming academic.

My history and context therefore informs my own shaping of the project primarily in four ways: firstly, in situating me within a particular power relationship with the students who are included within the project; secondly, a reluctance to pursue knowledge for its own sake, rather to co-opt it in the service of change; thirdly, to position me initially beyond disciplinary boundary in engaging with the work, and finally to place me within the project as student as well as researcher.

These four aspects of positioning then deserve some additional unpacking in order to consider their interplay with the research undertaken for this thesis, for their implications for both method and interpretation.

Clearly it would be naïve of me to suggest that my role within the university might not have been known to the students who took part in the project. I attempted to minimise discussion of this with the student group, but given I used the Student Union as the initial route to find participants, and my ongoing working relationship with this body, it is possible that this informed students' decisions to take part. Similarly, as the project developed, and I moved

institution, this might suggest that the relationship with the second group of participants, in the unstructured interviews, might have altered. I was conscious of not talking to my job role at any point in the process, but similarly aware of flickers of LinkedIn interest that suggested the participants were using other methods to review this.

The second point, that of looking to explore this theme without an immediate requirement to respond to it, has been challenging. I've been struck by the ways in which this more purposive engagement with thinking and not necessarily doing requires me to move beyond my own sense of self and ways of being. Most importantly, as alluded to elsewhere, it becomes an essential that I step beyond my professional persona into an alternative one, within an academic frame, and begin to see and respond to the world differently. This applies most obviously in two ways: the first an acceptance that siting the work within an academic research project allows that it may find things unpalatable to the received wisdoms of my professional domain; the second, an appreciation that this allows me to work in a spirit of discovery unfettered by the concurrent requirement to "do" something with any emergent themes. This is not to say that back at another desk I will ultimately be able to resist the urge to "do", but more to revel in the freedom to be able to find things that may not be able to be solved. Or at least not readily. From this comes my third reflection on my immersion in the project to date: there needs to be rigour in this work that allows it to speak its own truth and in this I find I am suddenly freshly alert to how little rigour there can be back in the metrics-driven realm of managerialism.

Thirdly, I take a phenomenological onto-epistemological stance in this work which is informed through appreciative post-humanist conceptualisations of human experience. This optioning allows responsiveness to the phenomena in non-

anthropocentric preconception and to follow the emergent themes from the data gathering and analysis (Love, 2000). This choice allows the lenses of post-humanism, critical theory and critical realism to shine their light on the data and through them to add an abductive logic as an additional approach to the interpretation of data. This theoretical position matches its pragmaticism, in order to synthesise complementary approaches to enhance my understanding of any phenomenon and to find a truth which sufficiently explains it.

Finally, I am conscious within this that these elements situate me within the project as able to inhabit the mindset of both researcher and participant – with my own becoming academic/becoming student front and centre of the more instrumental drivers to engage with this research. However, I believe in largest part this is resolved in the work through the exposition of a hermeneutic phenomenological philosophy against which my exploration of the nomadic is explored.

Positioning the work

Acknowledging this positioning of the work allows the research design to be considered in response to its philosophy and allows a more sophisticated response to Crotty's suggestion that research is framed by two key questions: *what methods will be used?* and *how will these be justified?* (2004, p2). In this, perhaps maintaining sight of the truths both of the researcher-self and the research offers an opportunity to plot a route from the thinking-of to the doing-of this piece of research. This would seem to offer a surprising simplicity of outcome to the complex set of considerations required in the ontological turn that both tradition and logic dictate.

The literature introduced through my reading for this work, as described in Chapter 2, has also served to inform the choice of method, and supporting methodology. Fundamentally this situates the project in the sociological realm – but I'm appreciative that this alone would still allow the methodology of the project to draw upon a number of traditions and hope to clarify my route to my choice of methods by exploring the epistemological roots/routes of my ambition for this work. In providing this justification and explanation, I hope to make explicit the thinking and values behind my choices, and thus provide a greater understanding of the reality I'm bringing to the work – and the nature of the reality I expect to find within it.

Ethics

This positioning of self against the project and its participants serves to allow the ethics of the work to be considered. Fundamentally, the research is positioned against an understanding of a consideration of ethics that allows one of two approaches: consequentialist or non-consequentialist (Israel, 2015, p9) - with consequentialists assuming that a balance of benefit over suffering tips the balance in ethical favour. Therefore, as indicated earlier in this text, I am very aware of the need to approach the project mindful of the ethical implications both of the context and of my role within it, particularly within a methodological positioning of truth that requires that the positioning of the researcher and the honesty of the report are the grounds on which findings can be substantiated (Crotty, 2004, p125). The work has been based on an understanding that access to research is not the unalienable right of the researcher and modern life, but rather an outcome of practice that has seen a collective trust built between a research community and the public (Israel, 2015) that is still fragile when that trust is breached. From this, the problem within the work is the impossibility of establishing the impact of action in a "messy" field –

with researchers, particularly in education, defending local and specific approaches to the context of the work (Israel, 2015, p19) – with all topics offering the potential to be sensitive when working with individuals within focus group and interview settings (Bloor *et al.*, 2001, p21). One defence of this lies in the procedures of research (informed consent and debriefing among them) and another within Gilligan's ethics of care (Israel, 2015). However, the project can only proceed mindful of the possibility that the process itself, in its determination to surface normative understandings, may necessarily trouble some participants (Bloor *et al.,* 2001) – with this unease extended thanks to my own presence and implicit power position within the group.

Taking Shipman's concern about "humans investigating humans" (1997, p3), I'm conscious that my own research is accompanied by the philosophical and technical issues this brings to the fore. My position is further informed by the Chicago School's insistence on the importance of understanding truth from the perspective of the observed, rather than the observee, and while my ongoing commitment to the phenomenological turn is designed to maintain this position, I am also conscious that this commitment to an 'attentive practice of thoughtfulness' (van Manen, 1984, p1) is achieved only by continual mindfulness in practice, with this itself challenged by the concurrent requirement to deliver the research project. Indeed The facts of the research programme, like those of identity itself, are not neutral but constructed – meaning that an appreciation of the role of both the researched and the researcher provides a platform for both a rejection of essentialist positivist views and for the postmodern refutation of absolute truths (Kitzinger, 2004, p114-6). This consideration of the postmodern crisis of representation (Delamont, 2004, p 214) requires the researcher to locate rather than discover meaning, and positions findings as readings in response to a post-structuralist appreciation that words refer to things separate to the words themselves and

with an increasing disbelief in meta-narrative fed by hyper-reality and individual stories (Gubrium and Holstein, 2003, pp4-7). In this way meanings are fluid, and constructed in the moment by shifts in the constitutive role of language (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p12).

However, the application of traditional interview processes within a phenomenological methodology needs to be carefully considered to avoid the nature of the method allowing researcher assumption to privilege the hunting of particular ways of being when played out in practice – even within its most unstructured forms (Mazzei and Jackson, 2009, p4). In particular the use of the interview is fraught for the logical continuation of this thinking that then situates truth in the voice of participants – with analysis then falling into a philosophical trap of having to determine what any participant means as a certainty (St. Pierre, 2001). This awareness then requires an analytical approach based in reflexivity to produce an understanding of identity/position/category as something understood either in its demonstration of difference from a category – or through its connection and similarity to the same (Barad, 2007).

This sits against an appreciation within this work of the role of reflection within phenomenological investigation, in the process building on the thinking of Husserl, who originally determined that reflection was the platform on which phenomenology sits, rendering it without method if refused – and in this thinking, suggested experiences that are not reflected on are nonetheless ready to be perceived through subsequent reflection, which offers a clarity of the thing experienced. However, Husserl himself came to refute this simplicity and acknowledge that reflection is complicated in its explication not only in the accuracy of memory –

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but also by the processes of ego which choose to frame the past and project the preferred future (Cai, 2013). This study then, while co-opting individual interview processes in the service of reflection, has adopted this approach with awareness of the shortcomings.

However even within this positioning, there is an assumption that the process of reflection is the representation of thought process – with more attention necessary to the ways in which this assumption underpinning research practice therefore also positions thinking as fixed (Barad, 2007). However Deleuze has positioned this approach, in effect, as a category error – in that the focus on similarity or difference necessarily looks to create a sense of separation and division and thus diminishes the complexity of the connections and affiliations within human systems, and hides the impact of the relationships between those within these systems. In the process this sits in contrast to the idea of the nomadic and the possibilities a nomadic scaffold provides to consider ebbs and flows, and the constant process of becoming – which may indeed be activated by participation in the project itself (Deleuze, 1994).

A rejection of this category error allows a re-engagement with the data of the interview process open to an understanding that it sits as one set of data against many other possible data-sets, not produced as this one version was favoured in the moment (Jackson and Mazzei, 2012) – rather then to apply diffraction to explore what other versions of truth it might suggest (Haraway, 2008). This then allows the participants not to be considered as individuals untouched by their experience through connectivity – but rather that these individuals might be better seen to be becoming through their interconnectedness, with the interaction of self with other selves and the collective self necessarily of one piece in determining what the data might also be saying (Alaimo, 2010; Barad, 2007).

This feels to have particular pertinence within the constructs of this project – both in space and method. Certainly the participants in the project are bounded geographically by institution, and in some cases discipline, and following Haraway and Braidotti's consideration that the collective creates the we of the transformative, and ensures some sort of appreciation of the ways in which these trajectories of the individual and the cohort abut would support deeper understanding of the possibilities of the data. In terms of method – this perspective on data collection suggests that not only does the data of the individual participants need to be read for its interconnectivities, but it also provides a deeper rationale for looking at the like-mindedness of the community – derived through focus group practice – with those stories that emerge in individual reflection and their connectivities.

In this then it could be seen as some homage to Derrida's *différance* - in acknowledging the play of difference and the relationship of differing difference to each other, over time and space, with this too positioning the subject as being in a process of becoming, and thus unable to see the truth of itself thanks to its distance from knowing itself (Derrida, 1984).

Such appreciations are also beneficial for consideration against my own engagement with the project. As previously noted, there is perhaps a commonality of experience between myself and the students under observation in this project. Many of them had embarked upon a transformational project, draining personal and financial resources, in a bid for acceptance and opportunity, and at a cost of some degree of personal discomfort - at least I assume this - which stands too as good description with my own engagement with the doctoral project. Thus too an appreciation of my own bodymind (Alaimo, 2008) and its capacity both to engage and

interfere with the data is a useful surfacing of possibility beyond that offered through the ethical consideration offered earlier in this Chapter.

This then allows a re-engagement with the data that moves beyond coding for differences and similarities against pre-selected categorisation, and rather points to a consideration of how the connectivities and oscillations within the data offer up a way of engaging with it in the spirit of becoming (Haraway, 2008) rather than holding it at distance by maintaining a discrete theoretical reading of it. In this particular circumstance, however, even this approach is not without hierarchical problems, as in both a reflective and diffractive stance there is a danger that my own privilege – as researcher, as senior staff member, as one immersed in the tacit understandings of the academy – will find my own embodied experience blinds me in truth or acceptance to other realities - thus ensuring that even within interpretive and multiple discourse analysis, the emerging alternative narratives are still those that find acceptable traction against my own value set (Hekman, 2010; Jones and Jenkins, 2008). To counter this, a reflective engagement with the epistemology and practices of the project, as set out below, serves to help support a research design that attempts to overcome the challenges of the research environment.

Epistemology: phenomenology

This work is positioned within an epistemological framework that situates itself within a Heideggerian phenomenology of being in the world and with significances appearing at the point of engagement and use – and in this acknowledges that experience is understood within culture, and therefore that experience is informed by time and place, with the nature of individual existence situated within the specifics of the wider social and political context of their lives (Campbell, 2001). This then begins to allow the research to be positioned against the emergent themes of the literature with regard to the framing of identity, and in the process to incorporate the theoretical perspectives that serve to frame the research questions of the work.

I describe the work as growing from a phenomenological onto-epistomological stance – suggesting that this is not just a way of considering the world but a frame for investigation in practice too, in the process allowing a pragmatic synthesis of methods (described later) that attempt to surface a consciousness of the historically lived experience of studenthood in the world of those experiencing it (after Heidegger). This then allows the possibility that the work can surface meaning that is found through participants who have been structured by the context they are in – while simultaneously constructing this context through who they are – thus allowing the macro, meso and micro levels of this work as space within which to coalesce in interpretation (Munhall, 1989). Within this work, this then allows an interpretative process after Anells (1996) that seeks to disclose meaning through language – with human activity open to interpretation to find intended or expressed meaning (Kyale, 1996).

To further explicate this phenomenological positioning, it is perhaps helpful to consider the informing concerns that bring me to this particular understanding/interpretation of knowledge, with this understood both for its own merits and in contrast to alternative

positions. As identified in my observations of my personal belief system, my presumption of reality existing through individual and subjective positions points me to a research philosophy in qualitative mode, in this a rejection of deductive reasoning to drive an appreciation of cause and effect relationships, instead privileging an inductive approach in which the researcher seeks the understanding of phenomenon through the capture of individual experience though observation and interview (Groenewald, 2004). Here then a phenomenological approach provides both epistemology and methodology, with research framed by an appreciation of the individual's existence in their culture explored through methods which are subjective, inductive and dynamic (Groenewald, 2004).

Therefore, the choice of phenomenology as epistemological view of the world allows the development of a methodology for this work is based on its ability to surface meaning. Indeed, Fernandez suggests that phenomenology is less defined by its doctrinal base and more in the articulation of its practice, where first person perspective revealed through descriptive account is the glue maintaining the structure of the approach. However, this rather reductive consideration is given opportunity for expansion through the identification of intentionality as a core focus of observation as an additional strand in the definition (Fernandez, 2017, pp3547-9).

This draws on Crowell's identification of phenomenology as being not interested in the description of things, but in the description of the meaning of things. That is, it foregrounds meaning as the object of interest (Crowell, 2002) and in the process casting light on the subject's way of being in the world, fitting it to the exploration of chosen identities or ways of being within this work, not least because the temporal limits of a traditional university experience

are framed both within and beyond institutions as to require students to demonstrate a conscious agency of being, first in choosing to study/become student, and then in choosing what and where to study.

Positioning phenomenology as the means to study meaning, but within this frame of agency, allows me to maintain an appreciation of the active nature of assumed identity within this context, thus acknowledging the authority of the individuals that I am working with to create their own sense of self within the student experience, informed by their current and past contexts, and thus to recognise the picaresque nature of the assumption of such identity (after Braidotti, 2008; 2012b). This again brings the understanding of studenthood into Heidegger's frame: positioning the desire to be student as a presence at hand (Fernandez, 2017), ensuring that their existential nature is positioned as "who", rather than "what" and so ensuring studenthood maintains itself as an active expression of self, rather than an applied label. In this reading, studenthood becomes a mood of the existential, which can be interpreted *in situ* from a phenomenological perspective, in the process bringing to the fore subtle modes of human existence, with these understandings sitting not in opposition to the broader sense of the existential but more designed to illuminate it from alternative angles.

This then goes some way to explaining the choice of the interpretative phenomenology of Heidegger in contrast to the descriptive positioning of Husserl. Husserl's descriptive phenomenology looks to the directed awareness of the individual to an object or event, and assumes the preconceived ideas of the participants in this process have been removed – or bracketed – with the emphasis therefore sitting in what people know (Reiners, 2012). In contrast, interpretative phenomenology repositions

epistemology in ontology – and questions, what is being – in the process situating itself more closely with the research focus of this study, that is, what it is to be/become a student. Further, it positions the project as seeking meaning in the occurrences of the every day – and in the process allows that the context of the individual in the study has pertinence, and thus refuses the removal of preconceived positionings, allowing the pertinence of an interrogation of policy contexts and their interpellation of local practice to support this.

In turn then, this adds to the clarification the positioning of a phenomenological approach within a constructionist framing (which I explore more fully below), particularly one understood in critical theory explored as symbolic interactionalism. Unpacking this, as previously described, this work rejects a framing of interactionalism that does not by default provide an untroubled route to the development of self – and thus is more readily interpreted within a constructionist frame of critical theory.

This ongoing appreciation of the critical frame is important for my personal positioning of the research, albeit needing considered application to avoid a lazy rebuttal of neo-liberalism as a badge of membership to forms of academic community. This work aims to explore the connection between the shared meaning of the social and political context, the cohort interpretation of studenthood, and the primary experience of the individual in developing a response to the collective – and therefore is positioned to unpack the relationship between these two meaning making devices. In particular, this work presumes the identity work of self within the cohort structure of the university is in some part developed as an emancipatory project (after Braidotti, 2012a) with a collective endeavour, a being-in-it-together, initially framing perceptions and constructions of studenthood. This then suggests an appreciation

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that being-in-it-together is one mode of being of studenthood. Therefore, it could be considered that the ideation of studenthood occurs in the collective, as a form of symbolic interactionism, and sets the stage against which the individual determines their participation or otherwise within this joint project through the co-option of multiple cultural artefacts within this process. This then acts as a defence against some critiques of the phenomenological turn. For example, Mayo and Onwuegbuzie suggest an inability to acknowledge cultural context is a weakness in traditional phenomenological research and suggest researchers resolve this through a critically reflective approach to research design (2015).

In this way, flexibly co-opting a phenomenological approach allows me to conceive of studenthood therefore as an active journeying through existential nuance and so fits comfortably against earlier considerations of the nomadic formation of identity within the temporality of student. It also allows a consideration of this against Braidotti's emptying of self (2010) – in the process presenting an opportunity to position those rejections of studenthood as prejudices developed in response to particular moments or events.

There is a useful extension of this appreciation of moments of vision in the creation of identity to the very process of developing the character of the research. In analysis, researchers acknowledge that some of the subject's understanding of their own meaning making may well be sited beyond/before language – with both subject and researcher vulnerable to and benefitting from flashes of insight drawn from immersion in the process of the work (Norlyk *et al*., 2011). And in this work, where I simultaneously explore the nature of studenthood across timelines of student identity, while developing myself as student within my own liminal spaces, with students experiencing their own studenthood, the potential of this

is exciting – but offers up both benefits and challenge in maintaining participant truths.

This has implications for data collection, which needs to be alert to practices within the traditional interview process that remove authenticity of emotion and sensation from any recollection of self, in favour of societally sanctioned understandings of story-telling. Indeed, a Foucauldian take on the interview sees it as the contemporary's panopticon – applied as universal surveillance with potentially normalising properties – and thereby requiring and formulating particular forms of subjectivity, constructing the self as an object for narration (Gubrium and Holstein, 2003, p24-29). Therefore, there is a necessity within my work to place the emphasis on capturing the mood of a situated experience – allowing these moods and prejudices to emerge from their surrounding emotions (Norlyk *et al*., 2011). This requires the interview stage of the work, within the phenomenological frame, to situate itself only in open questions, with the process prompting recollection and description of the individual experience - which is only framed by myself in research mode by the understanding of the insights of the group in the analysis of data, not its collection.

Therefore, in designing this project, these and earlier methodological tensions start to be eased through the iterative nature of the work, in that it allows themes to be drawn from the collective cultural space through the documentary and focus group analysis, in order to explore the lived experience of the individual in the form of recollection and emotion. Its analytical procedures are similar in large part to those of grounded theory and can therefore be criticised for a lack or rigour – and concurrent validity – but positioning this practice within a constructionist framework helps resolve such tensions in practice (Richardson, 1999). Certainly, it is possible that in applying phenomenological thinking to projects of

self-reflection, concerns of interviewer bias are reduced – instead the inherent participant reliability of the approach allows an authenticity and reliability that is familiar within projects of personal oral history – made possible, as previously described by careful reflection on the nature of the individual interview.

The challenge is to ensure that the data collection emerges from participant experience rather than allow my preconceived positioning of the project to drive instead of inform the process, thus losing sensitivity in identifying the stories within both documentation and student voice. For the critical frame does add contention: there is a danger that the initial personal positioning and associated hypotheses interfere with the iterative nature of the work (Hyatt, 2013, p834; Vidovich, 2013, pp22-23; Crotty, 2004, p33), thus opening the potential of relativism. Indeed, a constructionist reflexivity is a form of relativism (Lockie, 2003) and I in this context the ambition is to have managed this risk through an awareness of its possibility/likelihood in driving bias, both in the production of results and the weight attached to them. In this objectivity need not be confused with value-free activity, nor reflexivity take over as a substitute for objectivity, rather the process play out with attention to rigour in the methodology supporting objectivity as an epistemic value essential to research.

One element in this awareness/avoidance of bias is the consideration of sample – both in the selection of text and human participants and in the relationship between them. In this then it suggests that the identification of the layers of sample necessary is dependent on saturation within the project itself, rather than pre-research ambition (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p50), in particular in the necessity to let each sample speak to its own truth, rather than be forced to a particular reflection based on pre-determined evidence. In this the project gains pertinence in part from the ability

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to recombine in analysis objects not usually considered together (Crotty, 2004, p124). This approach, situated within phenomenological methodology, contributes to my thinking on the nature, size and selection of the sample. The desire to surface the flight lines of real and imaginary selves would suggest a necessity to opt for a depth of data that offers a better understanding of the relationships that characterise the types of social phenomenon at play (Denscombe, 2009). It therefore privileges the individual as unique, and only concomitantly providing an extrapolation to the generalisable essence within the crowd, thus reducing a need for the massification of sample size, and positions the documentary and focus group activity as sense-checking and exploratory practice to support later analysis of the main investigation. (The specificity of sample selection within this research is further considered in Chapter 4.)

These selection choices are informed by and informing of an appreciation of population validity and measurement validity – in that their nature clearly then predetermines the extrapolation of results into certainty. Clearly the design of the study intended rich and conversational material from the focus group activity - however necessarily there will have been some form of selection as author on my part – and therefore the material becomes illustrative or emblematic as opposed to evidential in purest form (Sapsford and Jupp, 2006). In some traditions, this material is challenged through a concern of a "story telling" on the part of participants – but I believe the argument holds sound in this particular study that even one voice of imagining allows the mining of understanding of a particular way of being. Where perhaps the choice of sample might be further challenged is the lack of any form of control group for contrast, but the continuum of identities on the student/non-student spectrum appears to make this a false dichotomy that therefore would add little to understanding.

Theoretical perspectives

This study has been further informed by the consistent positioning of both the thinking and practice of the research within a number of theoretical perspectives that inform both the choice and the application of methodology and method and so allow the diverse activities within the work to be woven into a coherent whole. The recognition of this theoretical glue in ensuring connection across the work takes on additional pertinence in works organising the collation of activity from different realms of analysis. Thus, in this work, the cultural landscape of an interpretative phenomenological frame is understood through an appreciation of the nesting of activity across a macro, meso and micro frame, and an understanding of the agency of individuals in interpreting their cultural environment and the interactionalist form in which this may occur.

1. Macro, meso, micro

Firstly, the work recognises that it operates across the macro, meso and micro frame, with the object of the research moving from the macro of the policy landscape, through the meso of the institutional/cohort lens and on to the micro of the individual student. In this the object of study – studenthood – will reveal itself at each level, with the additional thinking of the work, constructionism and interactionalism, played out not only at each level but also between these three domains, thus allowing a hermeneutical approach operating both sequentially and cyclically across the three main strands of research activity, in this then, responding to a development in sociological thinking that no longer demands a refutation of any connection between these themes as insistent on an incompatible positioning of social realities, but

rather a desire to understand the empirical relations between them (Alexander *et al.*, 1987).

2: Constructionism

Secondly, fundamental to the structure of this research is a belief that all knowledge and therefore any identified realities are driven by human beings and their actions and interactions within a social realm, with individual and shared meanings constructed through consciousness (Hammersley, 2010, p42). Further, it acknowledges that this then situates truth in multiple sites, and thus gives it multiple forms in that knowledge becomes individualised and unique. This position is then informed through the thinking of Heidegger and Gadamer, in that this meaning is not purely a projection of the human mind, but a projection of what was there to be realised (Davis, 2014, p376). This positioning of the thinking of the project is both a representation of my own interpretation of the world, and of my understanding of it as a mechanism through which the formation of identity – which sits at the heart of the project – can be understood. This then allows me to claim constructionism as lens through which any emergent realities of both this research and its focus – identity - might usefully be both surfaced and analysed. In this the work acknowledges the nomadic, and understands that identity takes form in part through exchange with others in the social realm (Jackson and Hogg, 2010).

This acceptance of multiple realities ensures that this work does not by default see the subject (student) as lesser: constructionism takes the object very seriously as being open to the world and acknowledges the dialectic in which there is a mediation of subject and object that allows a balancing (Crotty, 2004, p51). From a social constructionism perspective, this balance is an outcome of social interaction through which individuals can construct the meanings of their context. Choosing to explore this within a phenomenological

frame further privileges the subject's experience of the theme under consideration and turns individual reflections into devices through which this is not only vocalised, but positioned in such a way that may allow an understanding of the drivers and underpinnings creating this individual experience may also be demonstrated.

However, it is important to recognise that this work has a critical stance, in that it further assumes that the social field of identity formulation allows for the interaction of economic, political and communicative structures (Fairclough, 2006) – and that these c/should be held to account. In this the work demonstrates itself in realism, in this not so much rejecting the subject's power of imagination, but, as described in Chapter 2, acknowledging Braidotti's use of the imagination as a driver of intentionality around any individual identity project in achieving the ideal-self of future projection. Applying critical inquiry within constructionism therefore requires careful consideration within a phenomenological methodology - insisting that the ways of thinking about the subject of the research are carefully managed within the practice of the research – supporting an approach which places emergent themes within a critical consideration, but chooses not to require research participants to consider such themes. In this then, the work seeks to place reflections on individual experience against the context in which higher education currently exists, but not to drive explicit themes of the current context onto the subjects within the research.

3: Symbolic interactionism

Symbolic interactionalism provides a useful frame for the study as it allows a space for social interpretation and thus aligns to considerations of meaning in the meso. It considers that individual action is aligned to the perception of how others might act but

within a context where individual meaning informs this perception, with this continued dialogue allowing and requiring flux as a constant. In this then it provides the viewpoint from which phenomenology's surfacing of meaning re-engages in the social realm, thus building on Dewey and rejecting a positivist paradigm of social reality (Smith, 1994). A symbolic interactionalist frame, therefore, privileges individual meaning, but identifies that these may occur, mutate and become intelligible only within social interaction – a consideration then both of considerations of studenthood within the academy, but also for those particular students within the context of this work.

Finally, building on this constructionist positioning, symbolic interactionism seems a logical perspective from which to consider an understanding of identity formation, given my situating of identity as developed nomadically, through a zigzagging of the individual towards their desired self in an emancipatory journey. Deleuze and Guattari (1987, pp322-328), see this emancipation as personal desire framed by political context, with the individual making sense of their personal circumstance through engagement with cultural artefact as well as personal context. In this frame, the individual engages in forms of symbolic interactionism in order to negotiate personal meaning. Within my own worldview this form of symbolic interactionism is entirely comfortable in observation through critical inquiry. For while some have positioned symbolic interactionalism as a non-problematic practice through which identity is developed through intersubjectivity, interaction, community and communication (Crotty, 2004, p63), the introduction of the sense of the emancipatory immediately challenges this benign interpretation and allows that the political context of the individual may spur identity development through discomfort or negation as much as through agreement. That is, for me, critical theory provides a lens that sees the backdrop to the formation of self as a hegemonic battleground, with the individual's

inner conversation (Griffin, 2006, p62) as likely to sit in resistance and frustration as in untroubled discussion. Therefore I see no contradiction here in therefore accounting that this inner conversation is informed by cultural artefacts of modern politics; with policy narratives of modern studenthood and consumer expectation being as plausible in determining this inner dialogue as considerations of subject community and personal ambition. The truth of this assumption at the core of the work is therefore surfaced through the data gathering methodology and techniques that require these themes to be emergent – and not foregrounded in research process.

As indicated, the research intends to explore how students experience being students and what being this provokes, appreciative of the context of their study. Here Adorno's consideration that objects do not go into their concepts without leaving a reminder is worthy of note – to see whether there is an other-identity of which the student is simultaneously desirous and incapable (cited In Crotty, 2004, p132), in this calling on Derrida's structures of *différance* in which any presence is denoted by the half of self that is not there (1984). That is, whether the form of studenthood adopted is in part formed against a realisation that there is an other-identity that is unavailable to the student. Shining light on this other-identity, the undesired/desired self, may in the process reveal a different shape for the studenthood that is assumed. However, within a symbolic interactionalism frame, the standpoint of those studied takes precedence – and thus allows the exploration of both identity and other-identity through the language of the students involved in the study but without privileging either position, following Adorno's consideration that actors are not reproached for their play-acting - but only any denial of it.

Links to the literature

This developing appreciation of the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of my own thinking, and therefore the positioning of the project, creates a frame against which historic themes in the investigation of identity research can be considered for their applicability within this work.

One approach in the canon of investigation into the adoption of identity has positioned the individual pursuit of identity emerging as a position of tension as traditional social structures fragment and coalesce within the potential allowed by postmodernity (Kroger, 2007). Authors point to schisms caused by geographic relocations and identify growing challenges between the individual and state and individual and ancestry as significant structures against which identity development needs to be considered. Research in this domain has traditionally followed sequential design – often demonstrating an interplay of cross-sectional and longitudinal strategies to explore the outplay of social circumstance in individual identity practices.

A second approach to the study of identity is situated in a socio-cultural methodology (Kroger, 2007). This model is most interested in the role that society plays in providing individual identity positions. In this tradition, language and action serve as the primary tools for the formation of self – with intrapsychic processes less relevant. In this the intention to act is linked with the reasons for acting – and in the process used to demonstrate that intention is ineliminable from any account of action. Within this is an appreciation that we are formed in relation to others – and an acknowledgement that this might allow for a plethora of identities to be held within one subject to be played out in different social contexts – with people ascribed to identities according to the way

they demonstrate themselves within any given discourse. In this the crisis and commitment of identity formation are no longer private operations, but culturally sanctioned practices produced instrumentally by individuals. Thus, socio-cultural approaches allow an appreciation of how the social context – and peer expectation – shapes the course of individual identity (Krogan, 2007). The limit of this approach comes in the understanding that multiple individual variation can be found within any one social context – suggesting that it should read against an appreciation of other drivers of ego development.

Both these themes offer connection to my work, with traditions of studenthood altered radically in the postmodern world both by the expansion, financing and description of the student experience significantly shifting it from its form in the second half of the 20th century, and with the project positioned against an appreciation of a nomadic engagement with the desired self, spurred by moments of tension and sustained by lines of sight. However, as approaches to identity research they have most usually drawn on the interpolation of demographic data with detail of socio-economic trends. In the microcosm of my research environment, the informational proxies for student identity would seem to be unlikely to have validity – with models such as those employed by Rattansi and Phoenix (2009) of limited applicability in the circumstance of my proposal, with the lived understanding of studenthood not captured in the available data-sets – and proxies, such as retention and satisfaction data, overly distorted by the multiple identities that sit behind broad considerations of socio-economic data and blind to intersectionality.

This would seem then to add additional evidence to support my approach to attempt some additional understanding of the complexity of studenthood in 21st century form, as it seems

phenomenological approaches to understanding identity formation offer the most suitable route to address my proposal. In this I will be acknowledging that symbolic interaction allows identities to be made, challenged and reframed – through textual and verbal representations – and uses a consideration of language in reflection for the interrogation of identity formation of the individual against the background of the crowd, in the process illuminating identity in both the unique and the collective (Van Manen, 1984). In this phenomenology sits as an interrogative strand for its ability to identify identity through the autobiographical and the personal - with the emphasis on whole person understanding to gain insight into the processes of identity that might become confused in the noise of larger samples.

Methods: documentary analysis, focus groups, and interviews

My earlier description of the adoption of phenomenology as epistemology – or in Heideggerian mode, ontology – as well as methodology might then seem to challenge the ongoing selection of methods – with a number of commentators reflecting on the reluctance of phenomenological researchers to acknowledge a preference in method that might serve to restrict the demonstration of the understanding sought by this study (Hycner, 1999; Holloway, 1997). However, this conceit fails to allow reflection on the potential of varied methods and their probability of success against the themes under investigation, not least in determining the applicability of these methods within an interpretative phenomenological mode. In this it becomes necessary to factor an appreciation that the nature of the research – and thus the research question acknowledges that students are present in the world, and thus interpret their experience of studenthood against their own understanding of its context, rather than simply describe the ways in which they have experienced

studenthood. In this too, it is pertinent to the choice of method to consider that students will experience this studenthood within both a spatial context – that of the group and/or individual mode and that of the institution – and that of the temporal in this bringing the dateline of their study and their position on the timeline of their programme both in to play.

Against this my research is positioned through techniques or methods that allow the core questions of the research to be addressed within a grounded theory approach within phenomenology. In premise, there is some tension between these two approaches, with phenomenology concerned with how people make sense of their lived experiences, and grounded theory developing explanatory theory from social processes studied in context (Starks and Brown Trinidad, 2007). This work, while predominantly grounded in the phenomenological, and thus anticipating that there may be a common essence to the notion of studenthood, also allows that that this common essence may be developed within a social context, with both explored through similar method. To this end, the study allowed the data as it emerged in the initial stages of the project to dictate its final form (Reiter *et al*., 2011). This is, however, conscious of Laverty's observation that a cycle of investigation and reflection on emergent themes may lead the researcher into the danger of getting lost in the obtuse and the incomprehensible (2003).

In practice, the work guards against this danger through the maintenance of an appreciation of the nesting of experience at macro, meso and micro level within a constructionist frame as theoretical perspectives on both the process of the research as well as the framing of its outputs. This allows a connected feature of the

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work as the claiming of texts as social events, and the collection of social events as texts, in the tradition of Fairclough (2003). This means taking the language of policy and strategy and reconsidering it as a social event that may inform the inner dialogue of individual participants in the study via the articulation of policy in institutional practice. These texts thus become events that provide an insight into social structures: in this case the construction of studenthood and other-identity, these being identified and desired through action, in social relations, in individuals, in the material world and in discourse – this latter demonstrated in action, representation and being (Fairclough, 2003). Indeed Fairclough himself points to higher education as a field in which there is a colonisation of other fields by the economic field – with the changed nature of the global/local relationship affecting local processes (and vice versa) and the resultant technologisation of discourse redesigning community practices (Fairclough, 2002, p162-4). This is not to suggest that this positioning is without complication. Critics have pointed to the moralistic underpinning of CDA (Graham, 2018), with evidence that such a positioning privileges researcher bias in practice.

However, to counter this, the focus group work is designed as a social event to produce texts – to allow some understanding of the collective social practice of studenthoods to allow a later triangulation of documentary, collective and individual events. In this way I intend the collection, collation and interpretation of these texts to allow the discourse of a social practice to be interrogated the better to understand the thing itself. These texts will be considered both deductively, i.e. allowing that there is a continuity between the everyday knowledge of the student and the theoretical knowledge of the project, and inductively, privileging the lifeworld of the student as the site in which the student experiences themselves, and therefore mindful that the theoretical underpinnings of the wider project sit as within the wider context of

the research. This then again begins to demonstrate the benefit of considering Haraway's oscillatory approach to data to allow the surfacing of patterns and connections – allowing as it does an application in the service of better understanding of choices and processes of student identity formation, thus allowing the exploration and generation of hypothesis rather than strict testing of preconceived ideas.

To explore texts across the breadth of the project, I'm using a range of methods in the collection of content (Tauscher *et al.*, 2007) – suggesting that content analysis might more usefully be seen as a strategy for research rather than a description of precise method. And as a strategy for this proposal it would seem to sit well – with its origins lying in the development of massified media and within a political framing – thus siting it appropriately against the two strands of my investigation (that is, understanding the context of student identify formation within the external context which may be offering influence on it). However, where content analysis originates in the pre-ordered classification of lines of enquiry within mass communications text – my project applies this initially within the policy realm allowing a deductive development of theories and classification – thus both defining the field of student from the policy literature and simultaneously providing the ground from which flight lines of identity constructs can be explored in focus group and interview. Further it applies three methods to collect text for such analysis, separately situated in the policy and the student domain: using critical discourse analysis of the policy literature to identify legislative framing of student identity, exploring these concepts for pertinence within the consensus of the focus group, then using reflective interviews to surface the experiences of individual identity work – looking to see synergies and refusals between these three spaces.

I intend to consider each method separately within this Chapter– but there is value also in looking at their collective use – with both discourse and narrative methods interested in the use and power of language in shaping the social world (Livholts and Tamboukou, 2015, p4). Narrative research uses smaller samples for investigating specific periods or transitions in the life cycle (Lieblich *et al*., 1998), by default mirroring in human subject the practices of critical discourse analysis applied to determine emergent discourses in society and their appearance in policy. The advantage both provide is rich data: the challenge the ability to interpret their meanings. One perspective puts the diffractive relationship between discourse and narrative as allowing the identification of the individual's nomadic identity – and understanding in this how context allows the subject to navigate between Foucault's economies of power and Deleuze's economies of desire (Livholts and Tamboukou, 2015, p12) and thus create a particular notion of studenthood/culture through the motivating impulse of any one student's aspirant identity being forced to make sense of their political context. This then informs the nomadic thinking that allows the individual to reengage with the boundaries of self in the process better understanding their subjectivity.

In this relationship between the discourse of the text and the subject's moments of vision might be found the ways in which meaning moves from the text in the process allowing changes, distractions and connections in the social world (Livholts and Tamboukou, 2015, p27). In this the role of the focus group or interview as a social event for story-telling becomes important to the core of this project and provides the space in which stories are not only conceived as discursive effects – but also as opportunities for the self to transgress power boundaries, a process that lends itself in part to the imaginary self, as the flux of the collective will

allow the narrative self to always retain some element of the discursive, provisional and unfixed. This suggests an opportunity in group to look to diffraction (Haraway, 2008) as much as reflexivity on the idea of studenthood or other-identity, and the challenge therefore exists in the methods of the project to maintain a line between a process of categorisation prompts that help avoid research bias, while allowing a privileging of Imagination to play a constituent role rather than just a distancing one (Livholts and Tamboukou, 2015, p44), particularly in working with groups who may not have previously attempted to articulate their identities within this realm.

My desire to allow imagination within the research space has clear purpose. It applies the critical stance of the project to my own taken-for-granted knowledge of the confines of studenthood and attempts to provide an opportunity for groups to explore diversity as much as privilege sameness in a context through a practice favours talk as a means to reduce singularities and differences (Livholts and Tamboukou, 2015, p42). This I hope will allow participants to do something with their stories – that is to produce realities previously not imagined or considered, thus becoming authors of their own student experience. Here I believe it will be particularly important to give student voice another function – and through the sharing of stories and experience allow the students to dispel distorting institutional truths about students. Here their own ambition and passion can disrupt the institutional context and in the process allow an emphasis on the "unrepeatable" individual against the pressure to be part of the group (Livholts and Tamboukou, 2015, pp44-96). I'm taken in this by the potential connection to lines of flight, spaces were desire can transcend political reality, and the possibility this has of providing one arc of identity transit across communities of practice within the post-92 setting for these nomadic thinkers.

Data Collection: documentary analysis

Bowen describes documentary analysis as particularly pertinent to qualitative case studies, with the material gathered in the process capable of providing useful context to the environment in which participants operate, allowing rich descriptions of a phenomena – with the method well-suited to be used in triangulation with other qualitative research processes (2009). It can therefore be usefully applied in situations where the researcher is looking to surface the connectivities and convergence that emerge from different forms of investigation into the nature of a phenomenon (Denzin, 1970) The method allows the collection of data which can then be considered thematically through the application of some form of content analysis.

Documents themselves might be seen to take three forms public records – inter alia in the form of mission statements, strategic plans and policy documents; personal documents, such as first person accounts, emails, and scrapbooks; and artefacts, including flyers, posters and agendas – indeed Caulley suggests that all archived material: writings, oral testimonies, photographs or archaeological artefacts can be considered to be documents (1983)

In addition to offering the potential to reify aspects of the context of participant experience, documentary analysis is noted for its ability to suggest questions and situations that might usefully be explored through other elements of a research project, track change and development of a thematic of research over time, and to provide a corroboratory opportunity to test data emerging through other investigation (Bowen, 2009).

In addition to its applicability as to collection, verification and prompting of data in qualitative research, the literature notes that documentary analysis also has benefits based in pragmatism. The availability of many documents in the public domain positions the method as an effective and cost-efficient mechanism for data collection – with the very nature of the medium ensuring that the object of observation remains stable and exact (Merriam, 1988; Yin, 1994)

It is not unproblematised, with the literature noting concern with its outplay with limited rigour in research projects – with both the selection of texts, and the selection of material within them occasionally opaque in descriptions of method (Bowen, 2009). In this the choice of method needs to be mindful of the likely level of detail available through the texts against the ambition of the particular research project, given the limited likelihood of the document having been constructed with the research question in mind, while researcher need to demonstrate effective and complete collection of documentary evidence in order to avoid charges of biased selectivity (Yin, 1994). However, O'Leary suggests that these concerns can be overcome by applying set considerations of process in order to limit concern in all textual analysis (2014). These include a clarity of purpose, the generation of a list of the materials that need to be explored, the identification samples and participants; an appreciation and response to possibilities of bias, the development of appropriate research skills and an appropriate response to ethical issues.

The process itself is played out iteratively – through skimming, reading and interpretation – and the application of both content and thematic analysis. In this then the first play across the documentary evidence Is designed to identify material pertinent to

the research questions, thus sifting the material to provide a working sample of pertinence to the research (Corbin and Strauss, 2008), this then providing the subset of the documentary sample(s) that can be considered for coding and categorisation. In line with documentary analysis's ability to operate either as a corroboration or prompt to investigation, this coding process can be played out in one of two forms – either or both of the identification of material against the pre-existing considerations of the research or research frame, or the collation of material to surface coding and categorisation. This categorisation might also usefully include a consideration of the latent content of the document – that is, the nature of the style, tone, opinion and agenda of the documentation (O'Leary, 2014) - with this therefore allowing critical discourse analysis as a mechanism through which to review the documentary evidence, having allowed that the thematic characteristics emergent within the material may take the form of rhetorical device as well as thematic content.

Therefore the decision in this work to use a form of content analysis to collect and consider the emergent thematics of text is perhaps unsurprising given its long history for this purpose (Titscher *et al*., 2007). Traditionally though, content analysis sits in quantitative mode and is appreciative of the presence, not marked absence of content, and so given the political context of this strand of the work, it would seem appropriate to make a choice to transcend this with the application of some form of discourse analysis, building on the appreciation that an understanding of language enhances the understanding of social context (Johnsen, 2001), in this responding to one part of my research query: **Whether, and if so, how, does the environment of study affect this being [of student]?**

Data collection: focus groups

The purpose of the focus group is to throw light on the normative understandings – perhaps unthought as well as unspoken in the context of the day-to-day – that allow us to operate in sensus communis (Bloor *et al.*, 2001, p4; Gadamer, 1960, p21). The benefit of this within this research project is that the method begins to position the two strands of my research together, the what of being/becoming student within the social context that might demonstrate aspects of the environment of study, in the process potentially allowing the macro, meso and micro both of environment and studenthood to emerge through a diffractive engagement with the themes emerging at each level. In this instance (as demonstrated later in this chapter) focus groups are deliberately chosen in concert with a research design that includes individual unstructured interviews to allow an understanding of both socially performed and individual constructions of studenthood to be explored.

However, the use of focus group in phenomenological research has been challenged; the ambition of the epistemological positioning being to identify the essence of some form of being, with that essence considered by some to be diluted or refused in group mode. However, drawing on work by Bradbury Jones *et al.* (2009), my work considers that an appreciation of the group context deepens understanding of the individual's being as a student – in particular given this work is one strand of the investigative activity, with the study designed to allow a further investigation of this at an individual level. Further, it acknowledges the pressure to conform to group think within this research setting, but anticipates that this connection to the collective is implicit within the project of studenthood. In this then, its choice speaks to an appreciation that alternative methods of deepening understanding of this being/becoming of studenthood would be challenged by the

unspokenness of this being in the day-to-day. For the unspokenness of aspects of the collective self is maintained even at this stage of the 21st century and despite the plethora of technological tools through which we reflexively construct ourselves (Bloor *et al*., 2001). In this project, therefore, I mean to use this as a mechanism to begin to work through the two questions of the proposal:

How and what is it to be and become a student?

Whether, and if so, how, does the environment of study affect this being?

Given the function of the group is to surface and discuss normative beliefs rarely articulated directly in life, the benefit of this text event is to be able to use the group to show these normative assumptions upon which groups make their decisions on particular issues or practices, and how subjects construct themselves against these, and to do this more effectively than might be achievable by ethnographic method given these unknowns. This means the use of this method is not without challenge. Forcing consideration of ideas that normally sit below conversation may challenge individuals or entire groups, expecting groups to operate beyond existing hierarchies to reveal more nuanced understandings may also prove difficult – a particular concern given my desire to give space to the imaginative self in constructing non-student identities.

Focus groups have become an important part of the mixed economy of social research methods – where the mixture of methods is part of a process of investigative rigour but are not so commonly used as a standalone unit within research projects. This would suggest therefore that, conscious of the dictats of a phenomenological approach which anticipates the data to demonstrate a route to the development of theory, it is possible

the investigation will need to be augmented within an interview mode, following Kitzinger and Barbour's suggestion that they are used creatively within research design (Bloor *et al.*, 2001).

Two factors play out in their effective use: group composition and mode of facilitation. In this then, groups themselves need to offer a diversity that feeds participation in discussion – and this diversity needs to be mindful of a range of characteristics: sex, age, ethnicity, religion, as well as background in shared experience (Bloor *et al.*, 2001, p22). Whether this is best achieved through "stranger" groups or those constructed from pre-existing social networks has been debated, with the reduction of existing group hierarchy in the former setting sitting as an advantage against the greater likelihood of participation from the latter (2001, p24). Either way, systematic random sampling is made unnecessary in this method, as the aim is not to find outcomes generalisable to the population as a whole. Instead purposive sampling may prove more beneficial in driving towards some smaller degree of generalisable outcome.

Data collection: unstructured interviews

As with focus groups, I intend to use interviews to dig further into the identity realm of the project, namely in responding again to the two questions of the research, in this frame again looking to examine any themes surfacing that speak across the context of the being/becoming of student at macro, meso and micro level.

How and what is it to be and become a student?

Whether, and if so, how, does the environment of study affect this being?

The choice of the unstructured interview against the epistemological concern of the work is perhaps the least contentious of the three methods identified for the project, given its extensive use in this field (Smith and Osborn, 2015). However, that is not to reduce the need to remain mindful of the implications of the method inherent in choosing a method traditionally played out in this form for both its strengths and weaknesses. From a research perspective, the interview allows the production of meanings particularly pertinent to the research question, through engagement with a purposive conversation – with up to 90 per cent of all social sciences investigations exploiting interview processes to gain data (Holstein and Gubrium, 2003, p28). This prominence brings its own problems. A Foucauldian take on the interview sees it as the contemporary's panopticon – applied as universal surveillance with potentially normalizing properties – and thereby requiring and formulating particular forms of subjectivity, constructing the self as an object for narration (Gubrium and Holstein, 2003, p24-29). But this is countered by a phenomenological approach which sees its focus not on the extracting the narratives of others to confirm the larger theme, but on exploration and reflection on the experience of being, with the individualised variety of these accounts providing the depth of vision that allows for fresh insight (Van Manen, 1984, p7).These processes, and the ability to respond flexibly within them to gather complex and detailed answers, provide the potential for a special insight into subjectivity (Rapley, 2004, p15) – but the interview has no claim to reveal experiential truth thanks to its methodological construction (Gubrium and Holstein, 2003, p29) with even techniques of rapport-building and affirmation likely to influence the content produced by the process as part of the dialogue (Boranes, 2004, p38; Gubrium and Holstein, 2003, p35). More pragmatically, issues of subject selection/self-selection may further problematise confidence in the results of the process.

The interview is also challenged by the potentially asymmetric power dynamic of the interview relationship, a view of the researched as passive repositories of answers and a belief in the power of the subject behind the interviewer to achieve neutrality in the process (Gubrium and Holstein, 2003, p30-31). This power dynamic may also create hotspots of sensitivity between researcher and researched which may also change our understanding of the nature of the interview findings (Fontana, 2003, p 58). In particular this might problematise the student voice – making them believe they are required to present identity in a culturally acceptable way – limiting the stories and genres that can be used by interviewees in describing their experience, an experience already constructed through "fallible memory, embroidery, impressions, contradictions and lies" (Kitzinger, 2004, p114-6). Against these considerations, the interview narrative sees researched and researcher co-construct particular genres in response to the questions asked (Squire, 2004) and suggests that researchers should pay as much attention to cultural and media studies as to social science research in considering the stories they find and the cultural scripts on which they draw – for in the performance of interview, the researched will draw upon their own understandings of cultural story-worthiness (Andrews *et al.*, 2004, p102; Squire, 2004, p105; Narayan and George, 2003, p125).

Here again a phenomenological stance allows an alternative process, through the use of open questions designed to prompt individual recollections of an experience or practice, rather than observations or stories in response to the interviewers pre-selected theme (Kovarsky, 2008, pp53-6).

Conclusion

This chapter then, attempts to clarify my personal positioning, its interaction with the research traditions surrounding projects of identity and the reification of these in methods capable of responding to the particular questions of my investigation. And then drawing these together with threads that allow these various activities to coalesce. In attempting this challenge, despite the distinctions created through my positioning of this research in constructionist epistemology, I am nonetheless much-influenced by some thinking of Haraway in the framing and development of an argument in practice – and, to paraphrase, this suggests that the multiple modes of engagement are a necessary feature that build to the structure of the work as a whole through an insistence that none of these positions finally dominates this whole (Haraway, cited in Schneider, 2005, p 143). In this then it seems to me there are three key themes of self, that flare through the final work, having driven the choice of methods in this chapter.

Truths: The phenomenological turn within the piece speaks loud to an appreciation of the power of the lived experience to shape perception – both as agent of change and context of self – and of that perception to hold a set of personal truths that organise an individual in relation to the world and in being in the world. This allows for a multiplicity of identities co-existing in bounded space and time – and for me offers further support to the positioning of the work within symbolic interactionalism as a necessary form of sense-making in the stimuli-rich environment of 21st century higher education. This then for me allows an internal dialogue with personal not-truth in the pursuit of the better-known self.

Politics: The work does, however, allow that truths may emerge from lies and fictions. I earlier alluded to identity being constructed

in the collision between economic, political and communicative structures – and this observation is true not only of the identity of studenthood but of this work itself. And in this it might be seen that my political position puts the lie to my insistence on truths existing in multiple sites once those truths are constructed by politicians and not by students. This then plays as a tension across the piece – in constructionism, in the choice of critical discourse analysis, in aspects of the phenomenological given these are identified as much for political purposes as much as analytical accuracy.

Empathy: Following this preference for emancipatory practices, this work is situated across a series of research methods that are framed through the potential of both the researcher and the researched benefitting from engagement in the project, acknowledging that my view of symbolic interactionalism within an emancipatory frame offers the opportunity for flashes of insight of benefit to both myself and the participants. This then affirms the phenomenological nature of the work, allowing participants space to represent themselves beyond the contemporary panopticon, thus allowing me the possibility to make good on my earlier determination to allow these multiple truths.

Chapter 4: Research Design, Practice and Analysis

"People who don't think shouldn't talk."

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, Lewis Carroll, 1865

Introduction

In Chapter 3 I describe and resolve some of the theoretical difficulties of operating a phenomenological study in a critical frame and explore some of the challenges of engaging with this emerging from my own positionality. This chapter aims to demonstrate how these have been resolved further in practice through the design, practice and analysis of the work. As previously indicated, the research structure has been very much informed by an appreciation of the multiple themes playing out at macro, meso and micro within the project. This, then, has informed a determination to approach the data gathered not only as a set of discrete material within each of the three realms of investigation (policy, social identity, individual identity) but to identify a process whereby these activities, while discrete, are also positioned within an overarching project design that allows the information gathered to speak to itself across the three realms to better understand the patterns generated across the project in its totality.

The work therefore took place in three discrete and sequential tranches – albeit each stage then fed both forward and back into the consideration of the analysis of the other two.

First then, I interrogated the texts of the policy documentation (both governmental and institutional) to identify the emergent themes of studenthood within them and therefore the impact they

could be demonstrating out in the lifeworld. Secondly, I worked
with students in focus group settings to explore how studenthood is
experienced/demonstrated in a social setting, examining the
outcomes of these discussions for emergent themes – then looking
to place these either within or beyond those emerging from both
policy and academic literature. Finally then I worked with students
in one to one unstructured interview settings to explore their
reflections on their travel through the university experience and
their resultant understanding of how it was for them to be a
student. Again here I allowed students control of the emergent
themes – but then looked to explore the material produced against
the ideas of the policy, of the literature, and of the social identity
setting.

Sampling

Fundamental to the quality of the research undertaken within this
work is an appreciation of the necessity to identify, recruit and
analyse an appropriate sample to allow confidence in its final
conclusions and therefore produce reliable results by ensuring a
saturation within data collection (Fusch and Ness, 2015; Bowen,
2008).

This therefore requires the researcher attempt to ensure that the
sample used has allowed all possible themes of the topic under
review to emerge from the participant group, while avoiding three
challenges associated within the collection of qualitative data; the
first, the potential of diminishing returns from continued expansion
of the research "net" (Mason, 2010); the second, a philosophical
concern that in deriving meaning from individual existence, any one
occurrence in the data may prove pertinent (Crouch and McKenzie,
2006); and the third, an appreciation of the practicalities of
collecting and analyzing large data sets within time limited research
projects (Bowen, 2008).

However, the identification of what might be considered appropriate numbers is challenged in two domains: firstly, the lack of certainty and clear parameters in the available methodological literature; and secondly, an ongoing reluctance across existing studies over a number of decades to explain their own rationale for sample choice and size (Marshal *et al.*, 2015; Mason, 2010; Morse, 1995).

In this section, therefore, I intend to clarify my own decision-making in selecting the scope of both the documentary and human sample.

Looking first to the documentary analysis, its selection is predicated on one of the four forms of triangulation suggested by Denzin for social research (1970) responding to the need to correlate people, time and space, as the 2011 and 2016 White Papers are pertinent to the temporal framing of the choice and experience of study for the students in first, second and third year of study taking part in this investigation, while the Strategic Plan allows a consideration of how this policy discourse might be experienced in place. Therefore, having ascertained the ways in which policy discourse impacts the lifeworld (Habermas, 1987), the choice of White Papers allows the sample to co-opt all significant material from the period in question.

I selected the 2011 and 2016 White Papers for this tranche of the work as their combined timeline defines and describes the framing of the educational experience for students currently in their first, second or third years of an undergraduate degree, i.e., those that I would be working with in the other tranches of this work. The publication of the two policy documents also coincided with the development of a greater tension in the acceptance of the fees narrative and thus would seem to speak at those points at which the state seeks to impose itself in altering the lifeworld.

I have chosen to explore the White Papers – rather than Acts for two reasons. The first, as the 2011 initiative has no final Act for comparison, despite its ability to impact change in the lifeworld of studenthood, the second in response to the limited rhetorical range of published Acts.

The selection of these documents was built on an understanding of the timeline against which these texts were produced as this then allowed an appreciation of the genesis and/or development of ideas within the legislative/regulatory environment (Rapley, 2007, p88). My intention was therefore to build an understanding of the development of conceits of student within the policy documentation after the first raising of the fee (to £3k) in the 2004 Act, by following emergent themes across the documentation of 2011 and 2016. Necessarily selecting a time-frame within which the research should focus is problematic – and to some extent all such choices might be seen to be arbitrary. However, constraining choices through the frame of a fees agenda allows some logic in the selection of material – albeit that within these choices there sits an awareness that the connection of the policy environment to the individual student is indirect, and that the context of policy will be differently experienced for infinitely diverse reasons – not least among which sits the age and the domicile of the student-to-be.

Nonetheless, rather than creating the case that this material is too far removed from the direct experience of the students under consideration, it does, nonetheless, form part of the frame of the political environment of their student life. To further explore the possibilities of the ways in which policy creates alteration in the lived experience of the individual, this legislative documentary selection was extended through the use of strategy documentation from Middlesex University covering the period under review,

notably the 2012-2017 Corporate Plan as this described the interpretation of the external drivers of student expectation within the locality of study – in the process allowing some additional considerations of the nature of the environment of study.

My selection of appropriate sample sizes for the focus group and interview stages of the research were developed in three ways; through consideration of the thinking of qualitative methodologists, a synopsis of the precedent of sampling in similar studies, and this latter further supported through a quantitative review of practice within research sampling.

Additional factors come to play in determining how quickly saturation might be achieved in any one study, with the aims of the research beginning to clarify the scope of the sample required – with, for example, a tightly focused work framed in a specific context requiring less data collection than one claiming to draw conclusions across multiple sites (Mason, 2010). Other considerations in determining likely sizes of sample for saturation include the heterogeneity of the population being sampled and the data collection methods – with studies that use more than one method requiring fewer participants (Lee *et al.*, 2002).

Beyond this, there are commentators that suggest that the concept of saturation is contestable. Crouch and McKenzie argue that in particular research contexts, the purpose is to determine what things exist, as opposed to how many of them there are (2006, p489), with this observation linked first to a consideration of the collection of themes, but on to an appreciation of the relevance this has on sample size. In this then, they conceptualise participants less as individuals, and more as variants within a social setting, in the process reconnecting with the idea that sample size may be influenced by the homogeneity and specificity of the population it

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represents. Indeed, their work speaks to the pertinence of considering individuals within clearly framed social settings more as the 'interaction of the doing with the enduring" (p493), thus speaking closely to my own conception of studenthood as an action, as much as an identity.

This then begins to frame my choice of sample and its ability to deliver saturation from a theoretical perspective, with these choices further supported by an understanding of the choices made by other researchers in considering the selection of an appropriate sample. However, as previously indicated, the challenge in this framing of the appropriate choices is limited to a degree by the dearth of discussion within published work, leading some to suggest that the concept of saturation is poorly understood and deployed as justification, for if saturation requires that no new themes are emergent, there is a danger in being oblivious to the potential that a lack of additional data might predicate the absence of additional themes (O'Reilly and Parker, 2012).

Here again the nature of the research design has a clear role in supporting the choice of sample. Fusch and Ness (2012) identify that the combination of focus group work, to gain collective understanding, with data collection from individual interviews, allows a smaller but still appropriate sample size (pointing to five to eight participants in each setting), as the combination of these two perspectives allows significant data to be collected (p1410). Mason's work attempts to identify commonalities of sample size based on methodological approach within PhD theses – and demonstrates that in consideration of those employing phenomenological approaches, the sample size within these works ranged from seven participants to 20. Mason then considers these against the guidance given by those authors who have suggested the parameters of sample size – and identifies they sit within the limits for phenomenological work given by Cresswell – who

suggests a range of five to 25 (1998), and Morse, who suggests six (1995). Marshall *et al*. have explored this further – applying statistical consideration to sample sizes within qualitative studies and determining a distribution of sample size that offers a bi-partite representation, with either small (<n20) or large (>n90) sample sizes (2015).

In response to these considerations, my research was therefore predicated on an appreciation that its phenomenological basis, and use of triangulation between focus group and interview stages, would allow me to collate useful data based on a minimum interview group size of six, with this to be expanded as necessary until the thematic collection of the data suggested its saturation. Similarly, I determined to run two focus groups, with a view to extending this should the content of the two sessions vary noticeably on coding. These choices are informed both by the context of the project, i.e. the likelihood that the physical and temporal site of the students constructs them in some homogeneity around the project of studenthood, the suggestions of methodological theorists, and the practice in the field.

Data collection: policy documentation

Three texts were selected for analysis in this project. The 2011 Higher Education White Paper, Students at the Heart of the System, the 2016 Higher Education White Paper, Success as Knowledge Economy, and the Middlesex University Strategic Plan 2012-2017.

I began with a close reading of all three documents to familiarise myself with their basic content, at this stage examining them in

particular for descriptions of students/expectations of studenthood and the roles of Universities in delivering these, along with preliminary consideration of the ideological themes/ambitions of the papers. Both White Papers are of significant length (2016: 33,000+; 2011: 31,500+) albeit the Middlesex Strategy document far fewer (3,820+), and I therefore determined that it would be appropriate to manage and code the data using Nvivo to allow me to maintain electronic records of the coding in process, approaching the data using Fairclough's framing of discourse analysis described in the previous chapter (2003, pp192-196) to review and code the data in three tranches, namely an identification of (i) difference; (ii) assumptions, discourses and evaluation; and (iii) modality (universal truths or necessities), with the specifics of these as textual devices described below against the analysis of the documentation.

This tranche of the research predated the ongoing focus group and individual work with students, and was designed not to stand alone, but to clarify the core thematics of the policy environment in order to test their presence in the students' descriptions of self – with this testing serving both to refine my own engagement with the polemic of the policy environment and ensure the legitimate connection between my lived experience of higher education policy and the language of the documents. For this, therefore, the documents were coded at the level of paragraph to produce an overview of discourse that could be used in reference to the students' descriptions of self/selves, rather than at a more cellular level for deep analysis in their own right.

Data collection: focus group

Having identified the required size of overall sample to work with, students were selected on the basis that they were undergraduate students in the second or third year of their programme of study, as

the groups themselves took place in November and I determined that first year students would not have been in situ for long enough to be able to offer useful reflections on their student journeys.

The invitation and selection of participants for the groups was one of the more challenging aspects of the research process, in that in the aim of the project was to understand multiple framings of student identity, but any selection process offering the risk of closing down this multiplicity. Therefore, any particular route to developing this sample, not least those predicated on the use of traditional university communication channels, ran the risk of limiting diversity and surfacing a sample made in some way homogenous by the single channel approach to its collation. Within this, the use of the traditional university communication channels most concerned me as these would seem most likely to connect to students who see these channels as primary. To attempt some diversion of this, I chose to use Student Union society channels to recruit participants, with the Middlesex University Student Union forwarding requests for participation to all active society members. In this I reasoned that students engaging in particular groups would have at least one other site of belonging to the university than that simply of the student as formulated by the university itself. This decision was grounded in Braidotti's premise that identity is constructed as "we" and therefore co-opting those students who were involved in these alternate and extracurricular activities meant that they were already exposed to at least one other community beyond simply that of their academic study and therefore potentially offered other lines of sight for their future selves than students engaged only in the academic realm. It seemed possible therefore that in this way the sample might allow that students were experiencing the university severally through engagement with multiple communities and this might offer a usefully diverse understanding of studenthood.

The students were offered a small financial reward as an incentive for participation, in part in response to my previous administrative experience in putting focus groups together, in part to ensure that the group did not self-select out students for whom time is money. However, again, it is possible that this process served as a different sort of selection criteria, raising the profile of the project among students needing financial support. Nonetheless, this mixture of theoretical and pragmatic constraints delivered an effective cross section of students (male, female, across the subject portfolio, including mature and young undergraduates from both domestic and international backgrounds), thus suggesting to me its legitimacy as a mechanism.

Fourteen participants volunteered through this method of contact – and were assigned a focus group slot on the basis of availability, thus constructing two stranger groups in the first instance to understand any shared notions of studenthood across this diversity of sample. All students involved in the study were given participant information forms in advance of their engagement with the study, and signed and returned consent forms agreeing their participation.

In the reality of the research project, 10 students turned up for this stage of the process and two groups took place: one group of six and one of four. I captured the data through voice recording, along with a few contemporaneous notes, although these were minimal as I was acting as chief prompt to the group. Each group ran for approximately 60 minutes and followed a pattern whereby it took roughly 15-20 minutes for the group to start to relax into a discursive environment, rather than operating as a number of individuals responding to the given prompts. Transcripts were

transcribed after the event and again, coded and stored in NVivo for ease of analysis.

The following questions were used as prompts, attempting to take the students through difference perspectives on their experience, with my aim to prompt the students to remember their understanding of their developing student self over time, and from a range of viewpoints. At this stage of the research there was no intention to link student identities to the policy environment, as I was more interested to see if this emerged unbidden:

How do you currently introduce/describe yourself in different contexts?
Why did you choose to be a student?
Are there some students who are lesser in your view?
Have the ways you've been a student changed over the course of your journey?
Are you the sort of student your lecturers want you to be?
What has been the hardest part about being a student?
Do your family think you have changed since you've been a student?

In this way I aimed to open up potential understanding to inform the following project research questions through the later interview process:

How and what is it to be and become a student?

Whether, and if so, how, does the environment of study affect this being?

Although much practice advice suggests that having two people to support the focus group process is ideal, in practice the logistics of the process meant I had to manage the groups alone. I achieved this by recording the discussion in the room, allowing me to act as a

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facilitator with less emphasis on record keeping. I did, however, make quick reference notes as the mood and body language of the participants, and expanded these brief field notes with reflection on the process as soon as the sessions had been completed.

Data collection: unstructured interviews

Having identified an appropriate sample size, eight students took part in this tranche of the research, selected via a snowball sampling method designed to reduce researcher bias in the selection of participants (Cresswell, 2007), starting with one student from the original focus groups, selected at random. An unintended consequence of this choice of method was the nature of the initial cohort of individual interviewees, as many of the students identified others in their discipline, leading to a concentration of media and performance students in the group. I therefore ran the work as two connected trajectories, conducted in two stages – with six students interviewed in tranche one, but with an additional snowball thrown from a second member of the original focus groups – again selected at random - to allow me to expand the disciplinary mix of the sample, thus reducing my concerns that a focus on performance disciplines might be introducing an additional nuancing of the sample group and therefore giving a false impression of saturation thanks to the comparative homogeneity of the group. The extension of the interview sample therefore both altered the prevalence of media and performance students in the mix, with the proportion of these disciplines dropping back to less than 50 per cent of the cohort, and allowed reassurance once it appeared that no further themes were emerging from the process that this was not an artefact of a disciplinary homogeneity within the sample.

Each participating student then took part in an exploration of their own student journey lasting approximately 90 minutes and designed to reveal moments of vision, and both their prompts and implications for ongoing identity. Each student was presented with a visual representation of the typical three-year undergraduate journey and asked to draw the points on the journey where they perceived they had understood or made a change in the way they were being as a student. The interviews then focused on those points, with the students asked to describe what had prompted these changes – and asked to describe their feelings, hopes and concerns on either side and during these points of transition. The interview finished with students asked to indicate the relative importance of each of these transition points from their current perspective – and to explain why they felt this.

To facilitate this I had produced a basic map of the student journey over the three year period of a typical undergraduate enrolment, and explained to each student that I wanted them to talk me through their journey from when they started to their current position, describing what they were thinking and feeling along the way. I asked that once they had talked through their journey that they then looked back and pointed out moments or aspects that seemed particularly significant to them. In this way we were able to conduct the sessions with them talking to the route they had taken, with my prompts included only when they seemed to lose themselves and stop their descriptions.

The use of the map allowed my prompts to take them back to their journey, but provided a mechanism through which these prompts could occur without emphasising any emerging themes. This was designed to allow the continued integrity of the phenomena and the viewpoint of the interviewees (Kotarba and Fontana, 1984) and was designed to ensure that "structure" did not creep back into the

interview process by stealth by imposing any a priori categorisation that might obscure additional emergent themes. However, I anticipated that the process of reflection might also allow some understanding of the nomadic journey through the identification of moments of epiphany, in this way perhaps demonstrating Heidegger's Ereignis and Braidotti's moments of seeing. In practice, the challenge is then opened in the interpretation to reconstitute the descriptions offered by the student of their lived experience back to that which can be reduced and re-labelled within the unfamiliar setting and language of the research topic - at that point reassigning the experience to a different categorisation and potentially allowing my own interpretations greater weight than might be understood by the participants themselves (Reeder, 2009).

However, the initial framing of the data collection through the language of the students was also designed to allow the development of rapport, in allowing them to determine the discourse and lexicon of the individual sessions. Kotarba and Fontana (1984) emphasise the importance of the researcher situating themselves with empathy from the viewpoint of the participant and I was keen to let the individual students feel they could describe their circumstances free from the constraint of my developing thinking on studenthood, developed through the literature, policy review and focus groups.

Data from focus groups and interviews was stored electronically on a locked computer with participant names replaced by numeric codes. However, the project presented a challenge in these last two tranches of the work in the ongoing anonymisation of data – in that, while an appreciation of programme, sex, age and origin (domestic or international) of the students involved was useful to provide rich context against which the data could be understood, it

also ran the risk of allowing the identification of participants within their cohort clusters on publication. To this end, the descriptors of students taking part in the work are redacted in this final iteration of my thesis to avoid their identification (Clark, 2006), although this may still be possible from their contributions in the work. This however was anticipated at the participant information/consent stage of the work (see Appendices 1 and 2).

Analysis

In my description of methodology, I describe the traditions of documentary analysis in exploring the context of lived phenomena in describing my approach to the consideration of policy documentation – and in this section I consider both this approach in its own right within the documentary review and consider the relationship this then holds to the content analysis applied within the later forms of data collection. As previously indicated my stance in this work allows a responsiveness to the data that shines multiple lights on the data – and as such allows an abductive logic to play out in framing its analysis.

Critical Discourse Analysis

O'Leary's consideration of the importance of the latent content of documentation therefore supports the application of critical discourse analysis (CDA) as a tool for documentary investigation against the framing of this project. Its application is pertinent, given the method positions language as a form of social practice – with social practices tied to historical contexts and thus are the means through which practices are reproduced or contested. Its aim therefore is to understand the nature of power relations in texts – and so fits it to the purpose of this research given my ambition to map the external context of studenthood to any developing student identity. To extend this, Fairclough's model for CDA (1989; 1995) on

which this method is developed, requires a three dimensional approach: (i) a consideration of the text; (ii) an appreciation of its transmission; and (iii) an understanding of cultural context shaping these factors (Janks, 1997). The production and location of the texts have been well-explored in Chapter 2, through consideration both of the mechanisms through which policy speaks to practice and a review of the ideological battles for the soul of higher education. Indeed, Fairclough himself has used the method to explore the developing commercial discourses of higher education (Fairclough, 1993). This therefore would seem to allow that mining policy documentation for meaning is pertinent given the ability of that meaning to permeate the environment of study, and that CDA offers a mechanism to do this both for its ambition to surface active ideology in text, and for its previous applications within politics and education (Johnsen, 2001).

The determination of this method against the broader hermeneutical phenomenological approach of the work is informed by two considerations. The first, an appreciation of interpretative phenomenology that requires that the subject comes to know their being in context – and that this context, given the capacity of policy to speak to institution, is informed by through external macro political environment. Surfacing this environment and its local meso practices at institutional level then takes on pertinence in understand what it is that may be speaking to developing studenthood. The second, to some extent introduced in this initial consideration, is that my own researcher assumption of studenthood is predicated on the theoretical perspectives outlined above: a critical appreciation of the policy environment, its ability to manifest itself at macro, meso and micro levels; and the interpellation of subject and environment in sense-making to drive identity formation. This then too points me to CDA as an appropriate tool for the analysis of documentation.

In this instance, CDA offers a potential for exploring the relationship between language and social process across the developing timelines of contexts of studenthood likely to inform the experience of participants in the study. In essence, I intend to apply techniques of CDA to the documents of policy prescribing aspects of the student experience. Namely, the consultation documents informing the last two higher education White papers, and internal strategy documents redefining this within the institutional realm (– with the strategies for their selection more clearly identified in this chapter). Fairclough's approach to conceptualising discourse allows CDA to provide an exploration of the policy documents as actors within a network of social activity (Fairclough, 2006; Prior, 2003, p66). This is made possible by conceiving the order of discourse in this analysis as positioning the student within the consumer agenda within higher education – while being open to a reading of the documentation that may also offer alternative representations (Titscher *et al.*, 2007, p149). This therefore serves to acknowledge that this discourse of student-as-consumer has been in development for well over a decade according to the academic literature, and therefore worth evidencing in policy practice as much as media rhetoric (Eagle and Brennan, 2007; Lomas, 2007; Newman, 2003).

The use of CDA is particularly pertinent here: often used to inform studies of social change, it has been used predominantly to examine the discourses of late capitalism, and therefore can be usefully applied to the developing descriptions of higher education within a knowledge economy (Fairclough, 2003, p4-5: Furedi, 2011). This said, the ability to demonstrate such outcomes through what might be seen as a critical neo-Marxist lens might suggest that research is positioned as emancipatory rather than exploratory and, as previously identified, this tension would need to be carefully

managed both in the framing of the initial interrogation of text and interpretation of results. One response is to effect Strauss and Corbin's approach to grounded theory in the development of the study – allowing it to provide a strategy through which an informed but not partisan interrogation of the text may be developed through an appreciation of existing theory in advance of textual analysis (Titscher *et al.*, 2007, p81). The positioning of this within a broadly phenomenological approach requires care, with phenomenology insisting on a deductive process of thought that moves from the instances of the particular to broader generalisations made by the research, while the identification of landmarks from pre-existing theory within a textual review might be seen to be operating on a more inductive scheme. The resolution of these two positions is found in an approach to CDA that acknowledges themes from the existing canon – but looks to the individual texts with fresh eye to see whether these ideas surface in the particular instance of this round of interrogation, and maintains an openness to alternative themes emerging in the texts under review (Finlay, 2012).

Historically, CDA has lent itself to a number of uses in application – ranging from considerations of genre and intertextuality through semantic and grammatical deconstruction through to analysis of representation (Fairclough, 2003). In this particular proposal, I intend to explore the rhetoric of text – seeking to identify the persuasive devices inherent to the documentation by considering sources, subject identities and assumptions in order to consider the ways in which students are positioned within the documents. The process of interrogating the document sample is therefore considered through, the following, with each aspect considered in more detail in Chapter 4:

- difference (an open-ness to include alternative viewpoints)

- assumptions (identification of value judgements and ideology)
- exchange (the nature of speech functions within the text)
- discourses
- modality (universal truths or necessities), and
- evaluation (implicit values within the discourse) (Fairclough, 2003, pp192-196)

However, while adopting CDA as an approach to the data that usefully coalesces my research intent with my personal positioning, I chose it conscious that the method is not without criticism and remain mindful of its limitations as a result. Not least among these is the suggestion that the reification of discourse into its various pragmatics may begin to divorce the analysis from the experienced meaning of that which is being analysed and therefore obfuscate and confuse the way people actually engage in a communicative exchange (Harris, 1996; Schiffrin, 1994). This critique, then, refuses that the linguistic turn allows an interpretative approach to texts that offers either more, or a more real, understanding of the used language than to approach the text without reducing it to its constituent parts – instead, the emphasis on language and its ability to convey meaning has been privileged over people, and their ability to engage with texts in different contexts, with the resultant outcome in CDA both diminished and diminishing by result (Jones, 2007). In this the suggestion sits that attempting to understand the political sphere through its language, divorced from the theory, intuition and insight achieved through living alongside said sphere is artificial.

This theme is picked up by Philo (2007). His reading critiques CDA for its inability to respond effectively to the changing contexts within which ideology maintains itself. In this analysis, the claims of

CDA become troubled once it is accepted that while ideologies themselves will be stable, their proponents will shift and develop argumentative position and example in response to changes in the political landscape or particular events in a bid to maintain their authority. This identifies that work situated around analysis of text is limited in its ability to explore the relationships between competing discourses and different social interests; the textual forms created through the overlay of media practice on political discourse and the diversity of both audience and audience practices in reading texts (Philo and Berry, 2004).

In response, Fairclough has suggested these criticisms do not argue against the use of the method *per se*, but rather raise concerns as to the use of CDA in circumstances that are removed from political intent. His view (1996) is that the method is misunderstood if considered as a tool to spot ideology, and its use better considered as an additional device that can support and extend the understandings of existing theoretical frameworks in understanding the outplay and impact of ideology. In this approach, CDA is adopted as one frame to explore the outplay of ideology through the dialectic relations between discourse and other social and historical contexts.

In this then the other social contexts might be seen to be demonstrated through emergent studenthood demonstrated through the students' collective and individual reflections on their lived experience. Here then the initial consideration of the latent content of the document allows a coding process to consider the thematic projections of studenthood sitting within the rhetorical devices of the documentation captured by critical discourse analysis. These themes – rather than the rhetorical positioning of them – are then explored as the coding mechanism for documentary analysis of the records of the spoken word sessions

with the students – in the process both allowing a triangulation of those elements put forward with rhetorical intent in the policy documentation and the demonstration of studenthood of the cohort in the project, while still allowing alternative versions of self to emerge through a considered thematic mapping of the student voices in the project.

Thematic analysis

The final two stages of this work are explored using thematic analysis. As previously described, this then allows a consideration after Haraway (2008) of the emergent oscillatory themes between the data sets in order to identify the emergent connections between the data that might start to suggest commonalities of being. In this then the work looks to surface themes that rise from the data itself – those aspects signalled by rhetoric intent within the documentation, additional themes rising from group and individual conversation and the links these have to the underpinning literature.

The choice of thematic analysis as a tool to review this is formed in both the theoretical and pragmatic realms. The method is unbounded by theoretical commitment – and so lends itself to application across a range of research paradigms (Nowell *et al.*, 2017, Braun and Clarke, 2016). It also offers a readily accessible approach to analysis, operating as it does without significant prescription in application (King, 2004). It also offers flexibility in sample size – as it can be used with both large and small data sets – with this flexibility extended in consideration of its ability to demonstrate both explicit and latent meanings (Nowell *et al.*, 2017).

The method is not without its critics, who identify this flexibility as offering the potential for limited rigour and limited coherence in the consideration of data-sets, although this criticism is seen as

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tempered through the clear articulation of an epistemological framing of research (Holloway and Todres, 2003).

In application then, the text can be coded multiple ways, allowing the researcher to allocate (or ignore) text for its pertinence for none, one or multiple themes – the challenge to the researcher being to ensure that in effectively removing text from the sample they are not falling into the danger of failing to capture thematics simply because they fail to conform to ideas of a pre-conceived coding system (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Cresswell (2014) suggests a process where specific statements are categorised into themes emerging within the phenomenon of interest, through code manuals identified in advance of the initial analysis, with NVivo often identified as a tool to support this (Nowell *et al*., 2017).

Limitations of the research

Consideration of Chapter 3 and 4 – and in this the principle and practice of the project – allows an appreciation and exposition of the limitations of this work. I acknowledge that any emergent theory will follow asking a particular set of questions of the student group, and that the same group would produce different knowledge in response to different questions (Crotty, 2004, p94). Here any the passion and/or positionality within the research position is able to drive bias if unconsidered throughout the process, and the previously alluded thoughtfulness needs application at all times to ensure that open questions remain such. In addition, a solution, as previously discussed, comes perhaps from an acceptance of relativism (Searle, 2004, p381-2) while maintaining an appreciation of the importance of the dialogue between theory and research (Searle *et al.*, 2004, p96), and the rigour of qualitative research may be further supported by the interaction of theory and empirical outcome during the research process in a bid to free the project from theoretical blinkers (Dey, 2004, p80). With this fusion of theory and research a defining feature of the symbolic interactionism which is often applied in educational settings, such as Delamont's 1976 classroom study Interaction in the Classroom and Becker's 1961 Boys In White (Atkinson and Housley, 2003, pp47-48), with this interplay of finding and theory allowing enhanced perception without screening out other ways of seeing (Searle, 2004, p387).

Nonetheless, I am conscious that over-claiming the probable outcomes of the project could provide its greatest failing. The problem in the leap from a Marxist interpretation that forms of knowledge presenting as neutral are social products (Crotty, 2004) is that this is then applied as a guiding principle to all knowledge. This confusion would constrict the project in two ways: the first of

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itself, in that such a positioning makes individual authors of us all – with no theory allowed primacy, the second, to co-opt a particular ideology despite its absence in the field. In this it becomes important to be clear as to both the authority of the research and the limits of that authority (Crotty, 2004, pp88-91) – one factor in which is an appreciation of the limits of knowledge, an acceptance that my own framing of this work shines a light on only a tiny piece of understanding, in a circumstance that is dependent on personal understanding of knowledge and experience. Additionally, the work is to a degree problematised through an appreciation of the concerns with the method which arise through the situated nature of both language (Taylor, 2009, p7) and researcher (Fairclough, 2009, p239). This requires an understanding of the ontological positioning of the method and the resultant issues of legitimation and representation of findings (Taylor, 2009, p12).

To some extent this critique can be levelled at all manner of qualitative research, it having abandoned traditions mirroring those of the natural sciences in its quest for validity in favour of a range of processes from hermeneutics and pragmatism in addition to critical theory (Hammersley, 2010). And in this circumstance, when we talk about sufficiency of evidence, we talk about what should be sufficient in the circumstances, there is therefore a gradient of credibility based on consequentiality (Crotty, 2004, p113).

The other challenge to the work is the size of sample. My review of acceptable research practice from the literature suggests that the numbers involved in my research are legitimate - with both Boyd (2001) and Cresswell (1998) identifying that interviews with up to 10 participants or research subjects is sufficient to reach saturation – and thus allowing that the numbers of those participating in this work are adequate to support some legitimacy in its findings. This is then further supported by the triangulation with the other

elements of data collection – with both the documentary analysis and the focus group allowing some cross-checking of themes. It was also clear in following the process that the participants (in either focus group or individual settings) were bringing high degrees of commonality to their reflections.

However, as before (Crotty, 2004) it would be foolhardy not to acknowledge that while one may assume a homogeneity of the student group thanks to the macro factors of their study – those of time and place – the students also travel personal trajectories from many starting points, and it is possible that a different sample, or different timings of intervention, would allow alternative truths to emerge. Therefore my claim for the work is that it sheds light on this particular experience at this particular time – with themes emerging that might usefully be considered in other spaces and times in order to explore their generalisability.

The findings and analysis of these three tranches of research are laid out in the chapters that follow.

Chapter 5: The Policy Literature: collection, findings and analysis

"Why sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast."
Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, Lewis Carroll, 1865

Introduction

This research is predicated on the possibility that the external policy environment may influence modes of studenthood both in the narratives that students choose to describe themselves individually and collectively (as in the following chapters) and through its impact on the internal/institutional environment of their study. The literature suggests that the institutional adoption of policy is predicated not only on legislative oversight but also the co-option of shared rhetorics in its service, not least that of student-led, student-focused activity, while the literature exploring the trajectories of nomadic identity suggests that the ongoing dialogue between the self and the imagined self is informed by a lived political context as prompt to movement.

The chapter therefore attempts an initial understanding of this policy environment through an initial identification of the materials shaping this environment in the 21st century, identification of those materials informing the study of current students, and a review of these texts through critical discourse analysis (CDA). As described in chapter 3, CDA supplies one method of exploring textual intent, while accepting that its reading will be influenced significantly by the context of its reception. Earlier allusions to macro, meso and micro framing play out here too – with the interplay of the policy and identity literature sitting beneath macro considerations of

political context surrounding hermeneutical phenomenological experience. This initial reading of the external environment is then extended through consideration of the local/institutional policy context of the student sample group.

The documents

I have previously indicated the context for the selection of the material for documentary analysis, having identified it as pertinent to the temporal framing of the choice and experience of study for the students in first, second and third year of study taking part in this investigation. As previously indicated, the three documents thus selected for their pertinence to the project are:

The 2011 Higher Education White Paper, Students at the Heart of the System.

The 2016 Higher Education White Paper, Success as a Knowledge Economy

Middlesex University Strategic Plan 2012-2017

Taking these in turn:

The 2011 Higher Education White Paper, Students at the Heart of the System.

The 2011 White Paper was developed from the Browne Review, commissioned by Labour in 2009, which moved to radically alter the nature of funding of higher education in the UK, removing the cap on fees and responding to the need to ensure quality with a number of regulatory powers given to the then funding and quality agencies. The proposals were vigorously contested by student groups in the winter of 2010 and the newly elected Conservative-Lib Dem Alliance ultimately determined it was possible to enact the ambitions of the Paper under existing legislation, without the need to risk opposition in taking it further through the House.

The 2016 Higher Education White Paper, Success as Knowledge Economy

The Paper provides the regulatory framework to drive competition into the market, setting up the Office for Students as the new regulator, subsuming the Office for Fair Access and the Higher Education Funding Council for England. Its Green Paper precedent (Fulfilling Our Potential: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice, 2015) saw the first inklings of the Teaching Excellence Framework, already in process by the time the Bill made its troubled way to law through Parliament.

Middlesex University Strategic Plan 2012-2017

The Middlesex University strategy was conceived in direct response to shifts in the financial underpinnings of the sector and as a transparent response to the competitive pressures the drive to sector marketisation was bringing to bear.

To clarify my intent in the selection of these documents; a Middlesex student in the second or third year of their undergraduate studies in 2017/18 would have begun their studies in 2015/16 or 2016/17 and was therefore making choices about the whether and where to undertake higher education in 2014 or 2015. The documents under review therefore frame the debate on higher education in the run up to their choices, the marketing of programmes at the point of their application, and the nature of the ongoing debate during their educational journey. Here then one driver of documentary selection is the considerations of the urgency of policy in pulling debate into the public realm (Crick and Gabriel, 2010), but my choice of documentation is further informed by the need of the research to understand the relationship between the legislative and thus regulatory intent and the strategy

documentation produced at university level. To this end, understanding any relationship between the legislative intent of 2011 and the content of the 2012 Middlesex University Strategy takes on some pertinence in understanding these particular drivers – or otherwise - of studenthood during this period.

All documents are available freely in the public domain (with links available via Appendix 3).

NVivo lent itself to the exploration, coding and storage of the texts, in part for its ability to support discourse analysis but also for the benefits the tool provides for the storage and continued interrogation of large volumes of text: the 2011 and 2016 White Papers are 31,546 and 33,013 words long respectively, although the Middlesex Strategy takes brevity as a strength at just over 3,000 words.

The purpose of this strand of the work was to identify the policy context of student, in order to identify which themes might then be enacted in the study environments of the students taking part in this work. As described in Chapter 3, the work therefore positions policy documents as actors within a network of social activity (Fairclough, 2006; Prior, 2003, p66) and text was therefore coded along the lines indicated by Fairclough as allowing these documents their agency in prescribing activity. I therefore set up a number of nodes through which to explore the text: Assumption, Discourse, Evaluation and Difference in order to code the material of the text across these four themes.

I began with consideration of the 2016 White Paper, mindful that this sits as the most recent policy material against which Universities may choose to shape their environments, the text was coded against these rhetorical themes, but then additionally

allocated by subject content as well as tone of voice, and so coded
the materials emergent in these rhetorical spaces within these
subject themes, from which emerged a number of sub-nodes with
multiple textual references. Themes with more than 15 references
across the text then revealed themselves as the following themes,
which became sub-nodes for the collection of evidence. These are
listed below in descending order of significance within the text.

Competition

Value for Money

Employability

Excellence

Consumer

Sub-optimal Practice

Social Mobility

This process also allowed the identification and coding of material
that offered external examples of the points being developed (in
practice then coded as examples of Difference).

I was then able to apply this scheme to the 2011 White Paper and
the Middlesex Strategy document, also looking to identify any
emergent additional elements that had significance as content
themes (in addition to those listed above), and as a result surfaced
an additional major theme in the earlier paper, which was the
commitment to the sector's international reputation.

The data thus gathered could usefully be considered against
Fairclough's analytical frame as set out below – and further allowed
a top line evaluation of the developing policy agenda through the
application of a quantitative consideration of the over-arching
themes. Identifying these content thematics also provided a basis

for the framing of focus group activity (see Chapter 6) to understand the social context of studenthood.

1. Findings: exploring difference

As described in Chapter 3, Fairclough is interested in the intertextuality of texts and its role in the support of the assumptions of the narrative, acknowledging that while traditionally this is achieved through the introduction of additional sources and quoted material, it is possible that texts can display intertextuality without the need for direct reference. Therefore, what is said in a text includes that which is unsaid – and is connected to the author's ability to claim particular ideas or identities as universal, rather than partial or preferred. The particular role of intertextuality in this is to introduce alternative voices into any given text in such a way that they may provide a counter-balance to particular positioning. (In truth, they can also be used as sources for confirmation of the author's position, so by default, intertextuality does not necessarily produce difference. However, willingness to display difference in text is also linked to genre as social texts and interaction have differing degrees of willingness to embrace difference.

Fairclough identifies five positions that texts can situate themselves within with regard to difference: acknowledgement, accentuation, resolution, limitation and consensus (2003, p42). The papers under consideration here are thus situated by their genre – with Wodak (2000) identifying that policy papers by default develop a tone that is without conflict and therefore naturally categorised by the absence of dissenting voice. In terms of the practicalities of this in reviewing the texts, it is useful to explore how different stakeholder entities (in this case, students, universities, and employers) are

collapsed into each other in order to create a homogenised consensus. Textual devices include the use of lists or other forms of additive relations. Another way to consider the use of this in text is to explore whether clauses can be re-ordered with no impact on meaning.

Analytically it is also useful to begin to explore texts for intertextuality by imagining what other voices might sit within them. This is challenging within the genre in question, but can also be reviewed in the light of the unattributed voice. The role of texts in over-riding unattributed negation is a rhetorical device of the political realm which reduces agency and impact in oppositional voices, the result being the co-option of the opposing voice in the service of the idea or ideology being proposed or enforced. From the perspective of my research, this consideration of the claimed authority of documents offers opportunity to explore later with students whether the discourses contained therein have a wider traction within educational communities and so respond to, rather than set, existing drivers of student identity, thus speaking back to some beginnings of understanding the centre and the margins that form the underpinnings of a nomadic shift (Braidotti, 2012a).

Within the documentation, then, the following became evident.

Students at the Heart of the System

As anticipated given its genre, dissent is absent from the text, with the collective voice of the narrative supporting the substance of its argument. This said, the document does not move to suggest a collective and equal advantage to all stakeholders from the measures it puts forward – choosing instead to situate the Bill as an informed response to external circumstances beyond its control and as such positioning the proposed changes as being a necessary

device in the face of an external landscape, rather than a politically driven initiative.

> "Our student finance reforms will deliver savings to help address the large Budget deficit we were left, without cutting the quality of higher education or student numbers and bringing more cash into universities. They balance the financial demands of universities with the interests of current students and future graduates." (p2)

The document co-opts 21 additional sources of information to back the assertions and ambitions of the paper. Contributions of a sort are thus heard from a range of sources – from government-funded agencies to independent think tanks/sector bodies and also include a smattering of (three) papers from within the academic research literature. The document is also marked by a number of small case studies – effectively 150-300 word examples of practice identified by the authors as "best practice" and from which proposed policy is extrapolated. It is, perhaps, noteworthy that none of these examples of best practice are sourced from the 21 external voices, but all are seemingly selected by the paper's author to demonstrate the congruence of proposed legislation with the legislator's understanding of best practice. There are 10 such examples in the documentation.

For example, ahead of text indicating the requirement of universities to ensure their commitment to widening participation in order to charge fees at £9,250 a year, the document demonstrates the type of activity that is considered as effective:

> "Realising Opportunities is a unique collaboration of 12 leading universities, working together to promote fair access for, and social mobility of, students from under-represented groups. (p59)

> "Students are supported through a coherent programme of activities designed to raise their aspirations to go to research-

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intensive universities. Successful completion of the programme leads to recognition at the point of application to one of the 12 universities, where students can receive an alternative offer through UCAS." (p59)

The text continues, this last quote being emblematic of the evidential standing of the other case studies included in the document:

> "The scheme is in its early stages, but a robust evaluation framework has been put in place that will help the 12 partners understand the impact of Realising Opportunities on student perceptions and behaviour. The findings will inform the future development of the programme." (p60)

Success as a Knowledge Economy

The 2016 Bill includes 65 footnotes to source its evidence base but once government press releases have been excluded, 17 external bodies – albeit some government-funded agencies – are included to provide context to the policy proposals, two drawn from the academic research literature. Again, the genre does not allow for dissent but in this instance, there is evidence of a shift in an understanding of the stakeholder requirement of higher education- with the document framed in its third paragraph by a conflation of groups impacted by its contents – thus allowing only one requirement from the Bill to deliver this to all those involved in the system:

> "If we are to continue to succeed as a knowledge economy, however, we cannot stand still, nor take for granted our universities' enviable global reputation and position at the top of league tables. We must ensure that the system is also fulfilling its potential and delivering good value for students, for employers and for the taxpayers who underwrite it." (p6)

However, in this instance what becomes interesting is a textual device played out at times in the document where the evidence base identified does not seemingly support the point being made, as in:

> "There are strong arguments to encourage greater competition between high quality new and existing providers in the HE sector. Graduates are central to our prosperity and success as a knowledge economy, and higher education is a key export sector. Research indicates that a 1% increase in the share of the workforce with a university degree raises long-run productivity by between 0.2% and 0.5%; and around 20% of UK economic growth between 1982 and 2005 came as a direct result of increased graduate skills accumulation. Recent research at the London School of Economics demonstrates the strong correlation between opening universities and significantly increased economic growth. Doubling the number of universities per capita is associated with over 4% higher future GDP per capita." (p8)

Evidence here is drawn from HESA, Britton *et al*., and government statistics – but the data given fails to substantiate the first point of the paragraph, that of competition, thus suggesting a support for the argument that is not provided. This device, while not universal, is a common feature of the text.

Middlesex Strategic Plan

This document contains no externally sited sources and is produced, through its foreword, to read as if it is the response of the Vice Chancellor to the internal and external contexts of the University. Indeed, in his introduction to the document, then Vice-Chancellor Professor Michael Driscoll comments:

> "As we considered the options for success over the next five years, it became clear that we must continue to embrace change, while strongly positioning the University to compete in an ever more competitive world. Maintaining the status quo was not a sustainable option, given the change to a new teaching funding regime that will no longer provide the same resources to universities with different missions.

> "Neither did we want to enter this new era competing on price alone, which would have a detrimental impact on academic quality and success. If Middlesex is to truly compete on an international stage, it must focus – and compete – on quality. In doing so, it will become a first-choice destination for many more ambitious and talented students and high performing, inspirational staff from around the world." (p3)

2. Findings: exploring discourse, assumption, evaluation

In understanding available constructions of the university and students within it, it is necessary to understand the way these are represented as ideal type in the policy documents. Here again, the genre necessarily starts to reduce complexity as discourse, assumption and evaluation are each tightly woven in texts which are firmly situated as ideological artefacts – and to this end I report the demonstration and relationship of these three categories

simultaneously, looking then to explore the development of these themes over time (i.e., 2011 to 2016) and then in space (from the policy to the practice arena in the form of the University strategy). However, for the purposes of analysis, I attempt to pull these aspects apart in order to explore them in turn.

Discourses:

It seems important to begin to clarify my meaning in using the word discourse. In the context of this work it is taken to mean a way of representing the world, and as such an acknowledgement that multiple representations of the same world may be possible and plausible. It is also interesting to consider – particularly against the broader span of this thesis, that discourse also provides a way of representing the imaginary, the not-yet-realised, the future, and in this way perhaps also suggests a nomadic journeying, with the documents pointing to a line of sight, an alternative reality, that provides a future perfect, at least to the author. In this, discourse also provides one of the means through which people relate to each other and make their lives relatable (Fairclough, 2003 p124). Necessarily time and space means that such discourse shifts and is not necessarily static in the long term – responding to and incorporating new ideas and contexts. What then a discourse if subject to change and multiplicity? Fairclough suggests discourse exists in dialogue with social life (ibid, p126). In the context of this work, it is interesting to consider the relationship between the White Paper documentation and the Strategic Plan – with different texts in the same chain and framing the same aspect of social life able to vary in the discourse they choose to be most prominent.

To make sense of this in practice, Fairclough suggests we identify the main themes of the world under representation within a discourse – a comparatively easy task given the narrow scope of the

documentation – and then explore the perspectives through which this aspect of life is represented. The choice of words themselves may offer a useful lens through which to explore this, less in the specific choice of language but more in how it speaks to the relationship of things in the world. In this instance, the most common form of neo-liberal discourse can be seen to find voice in an extremely abstracted tone – useful to imply no students will be hurt in the making of this policy – in part through the application of nominalisation that sees nouns reconstituted as verbs. These analytical practice tips of Fairclough's, while useful, still need mindful application. The danger of discourse remains in this work as my own immersion in it, and the concomitant inability to see the non neo-liberal wood for the trees of my own imagination – or more likely, my own interpretation of common sense (Wetherell *et al.*, 1998, p307).

Assumptions:

Fairclough draws on Gramsci in identifying the need to establish consent for power – with hegemonic struggle therefore also co-opting the content and form of written and spoken text in order to suggest a universal acceptance of chosen ideologies. One mechanism for achieving this in text is modalised assertion (see below), as within this framing it is possible to allow the possibility of alternative – and language can be used to suggest possibility rather than certainty. Another option is assumption – which leaves no space for thinking or thought other than that presented. Fairclough suggests there are three types of assumption; existential (what exists), propositional (what case exists) and value assumptions (what is desirable or otherwise) The form most frequently applied in policy literature is presupposition – although it is also possible to

introduce assumption through implication – in this way normalising what might be seen as contentious in other circumstances (Fairclough, 2003, p60)

Assumptions are the implicit meanings in texts; the common sense underpinnings that are provided as givens, and Chapter 2 set out the thinking supporting the observation that, nationally, the current higher education project is situated around an ongoing state campaign to mobilise students to place market pressures on universities (Furedi, 2011, p3). Thus, given my existing personal position and reading of the documentation, it is useful to use Fairclough's analytical structures to give rigour to what otherwise could be seen as my personal politics clouding my eye.

Value systems and their associated assumptions are seen as belonging to particular discourses. And, as Fairclough indicates (p58), any sense of return on investment and value for money ties itself closely to a neo-liberal economic and political discourse. In these instances, the assumptions of a text are played out in the service of the prevalent ideology. Therefore, such documents can be seen to be doing ideological work. Of course, this does not sit as a surprise in the production of texts for parliamentary assent; it is their purpose. So what then becomes more interesting is to unearth the assumptions at their heart and to understand their ambition for hegemony.

Evaluation

Authors commit themselves to values in a variety of ways; through both explicit evaluative statements and evaluative assumptions – with this latter the more prominent form across all genres, but in particular within the form of the material under consideration here.

The introduction of evaluative devices within the text is an additional means through which authors strive to legitimate their statements. However, in a text situated in largest part as a statement of fact, it is interesting to understand the degree to which these facts are positioned as in Fairclough's words "pervasively evaluative". For in the circumstance in particular of the White Paper the authors are determined to select only the facts that deliver a particular value set drawn from the ideology framing the communication. By identifying this value set, it starts to make it easier to identify the ambition of the author in producing the text - for these documents are not designed to act as tools for knowledge exchange, rather they sit as precursors to an activity exchange, they are calls for very particular types of action.

This conflation of fact and value serves to distort the temporal positioning of the documents – again both sleight of hand and a necessary evil in the construction of policy documents – and so sees the White Papers operate to position the future in the present, as if the promised outcomes of their ambition are already factual reality (Graham, 2001). Fairclough sees the process as being of itself part of an "aestheticisation of events" which sits as a necessary part of the consumer culture of modern politics. In this then, the review of text begins to take on a Plutarchian form, as the text constructing consumers is developed in a culture demanding the consumerisation of text (Fairclough, 2001, p115).

Such evaluation sits at two levels – the first the more obvious use of value-led assumptions produced as fact within the documents. But below this it is possible to consider another signalling of value developed through the careful choice of language that suggest the author's intervention through the text is one of benefit. Alongside this sits an additional rhetorical device to co-opt the reader in to

the text as a shared owner of the value set on display in the guise of a common-sense approach.

These considerations have therefore been played out against the three documents under review.

Students at the Heart of the System

So, taking a discourse as a series of statements which are representations of social life, identifying the majority of the discourse themes of the White Paper is a comparatively simple task, given the structure and purpose of the document – and in doing so demonstrates the following as the emergent themes which Fairclough might consider the external relations of the text:

> University funding should not rest only with the public purse, with students as consumers driving choice and quality in the University system;

> Universities must be responsive to the needs of business and industry;

> Social mobility can be boosted through participation in higher education;

> Centralised regulation puts breaks on market innovation.

Given their relationship to the potential framing of student identity, the first two of these are those considered in more depth in this research.

The first of these might be considered as students as consumers as agents of change. Exploring this, the desire for social conditions in

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which Universities are co-funded by students and state is a fundamental to Paper, reproduced as a *raison d'etre* for reforms of the sector, and informed by the outcomes of the pre-commissioned Browne Review. It sits in balance with the Paper's other driving concern, that by turning students into funders of higher education, they by default become the consumers that will drive increased choice and quality across the sector. Indeed, while the White Paper's authors Willetts and Cable offer three aspirations- financial sustainability, enhanced student experience and improved social mobility - the textual order of the paper suggests changes to student finance have primacy as they are introduced first in the text. Not least this is then used as the platform on which other developments are built. The Executive Summary (p5) makes clear the authors' belief that by forcing Universities to respond to the more competitive environment of student fees, many of the ambitions of the Paper will be achieved:

> "Enabling greater competition, while removing unnecessary regulations, is an important theme of this White Paper, because of the benefits for all users of higher education. (p19)

> "The changes we are making to higher education funding will in turn drive a more responsive system. To be successful, institutions will have to appeal to prospective students and be respected by employers. Putting financial power into the hands of learners makes student choice meaningful." (p6)

A more detailed review of the document shows 26 paragraphs that reiterate the centrality of consumer choice, value for money and competition to the delivery of the Paper's ambitions – and in doing so place students at the heart of the system by making them central to forcing changed behaviour on the part of providers.

The assumptions on which this sits are made clear then in the nature of statements that support the proposed activity against this (and other) themes. That is, by consumerising students and thus driving competition, the sector will have to change:

> "The changes we are making to higher education funding will in turn drive a more responsive system." (p5)

> "So that there is a more dynamic sector in which popular institutions can grow." (p5)

> "It will also lead to higher education institutions concentrating on high-quality teaching, and staff earning promotion for teaching ability rather than research alone." (p5)

> "Students will increasingly use the instant communication tools of the twenty first century such as Twitter and Facebook to share their views on their student experience with their friends, families and the wider world. It will be correspondingly harder for institutions to trade on their past reputations while offering a poor teaching experience in the present." (p32)

These statements also point to the ways in which the values of the text are enacted, for despite the limited evidence throughout the White Paper alluded to earlier, the majority of such statements identify the ideal state of the future as being the inevitable outcome of the interventions indicated in the White Paper. Further examples in this domain can be seen as:

> "This will give popular institutions more freedom to expand, including those new providers who are able either to attract top students and/or provide good value places." (p70)

The second pertinent discourse of the White Paper is that universities must be responsive to the needs of business and industry. This theme emerges in a portion of the Paper that aims to drive student engagement and better student outcomes through the development of a learning community. It is somewhat of a confusion of a chapter – beginning by foregrounding student feedback and complaint mechanisms as tools for building belonging, but segueing into the importance of higher education in driving career outcomes. This section of text has a pertinence particularly for the post-92 environment of applied curriculum and is also notable for the requirement that the University serves multiple masters – business and industry being among them – and thus potentially adds to considerations of the identities of students within them. To this end, the Paper demonstrates this discourse with 12 substantive references to employability and descriptions of how this should be delivered. Among them are these examples:

> "The relationship between universities and colleges, students and employers is crucial to ensuring that students experience the higher education they want while studying and leave their course equipped to embark on a rewarding career." (p46)

> "Graduates are more likely to be equipped with the skills that employers want if there is genuine collaboration between institutions and employers in the design and delivery of courses." (p39)

> "For employers, graduate internships offer the opportunity to benefit from graduate knowledge and skills and to test the benefits of offering graduates longer term employment." (p43)

> "Enterprise societies play a key part in helping students gain the necessary skills and knowledge." (p44)

Moving then from the discourse to the assumption of the documents.

In Students at the Heart of the System, the underlying assumption is one of could do better, driven carefully into the text without ever being articulated as a standalone statement. As is common in the 2011 Paper, there is little evidence either that this done, is not done, or has in anyway been evaluated as demonstrated in:

> "Around the world, the very best universities are building deeper links with business both to maximise innovation and promote growth, and to ensure students come out of universities equipped to excel in the workforce. Much has been done to promote better links, including through enhanced knowledge exchange, technology and research commercialisation, and curricula developments. However, in the context of our reforms to HE in funding and student choice, we want our universities to look again at how they work with business, across their teaching and research activities, to promote better teaching, employer sponsorship, innovation and enterprise." (p39)

Despite the underlying assumption of the benefit of this activity, there seems some hesitancy in describing this bi-partite relationship as positively as the belief in the power of market- with the ambition here just the encouragement of such activity rather than an imperative for delivery. One might question here whether the ministers involved therefore value these connections in all sector contexts.

> "The relationship between universities and colleges, students and employers is crucial to ensuring that students experience the higher education they want while studying and leave their course equipped to embark on a rewarding

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career. Our reforms will encourage closer working between institutions, employers and students to create a better student experience leading to better-qualified graduates." (p45)

Success as a Knowledge Economy

And so to the 2016 White Paper to explore its own internal discourse, assumption and values. One might be tempted to draw initial conclusions from the title, with teaching disappearing between the Green and White versions of the Paper. Instead we have a White Paper which from title at least would seem to situate higher education's role as being to deliver economic productivity. The discourses within the documentation contain a rhetoric very clearly focused on demonstrating the importance of markets to drive excellence and choice. In this the White Paper is committed to creating a higher education sector which improves the information available to students, ups its game in the excellence of its teaching, and has its capacity for research boosted. There is in effect one discourse sat behind its pages: competition forces providers to improve, thus offering better value for students, as can be seen in this introductory comment from the document's executive summary.

> "By introducing more competition and informed choice into higher education, we will deliver better outcomes and value for students, employers and the taxpayers who underwrite the system." (p8)

Here again, therefore, the student is co-opted as an agent of change in the opening of the market to competition, but rather than in 2011, where now seemingly quaint images of students tweeting their displeasure were to the fore, in this version of consumer choice, the government intervenes on their behalf

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through the much-anticipated Office for Students through its Board, who will set the outcome requirements against which universities will be graded, and, in extremis, it is proposed will validate degrees for market entrants who are unable to find traditional partners to do so. In this the market is also co-opted as the force to deliver social mobility, with reductions in movement being laid at the door of a non-competitive sector rather than any consideration of the term or its achievability in different social conditions.

However, the simplification of the discourse directly addressed by the document is nuanced by the assumptions that underpin its ambition. These are:

> The current system conspires to refuse market entrants;
> The standard of teaching in Universities needs improvement;
> There is insufficient evidence to support student choice;
> There will be no bail out for failing institutions.

These themes then emerging in statements such as:

> "We have not yet made a decisive enough move to open the higher education market. The UK Competition and Markets Authority (CMA)'s report on competition in the HE sector concluded that aspects of the current HE system could be holding back greater competition and needed to be addressed." (p9)

> "This system is both outdated and insufficiently flexible, so we will create a suite of options for those wishing to award their own degrees in the future." (p10)

> "Information, particularly on price and quality, is critical if the higher education market is to perform properly. Without it, providers cannot fully and accurately advertise their offerings, and students cannot make informed decisions. But there is currently little pressure on providers to differentiate themselves in this way. This is a cause for

concern as poor decisions by the student as to which course and institution to attend can prove costly not just for them but for the broader economy and the taxpayer." (p11)

"The lack of information is particularly acute for teaching quality, which should be among the most important factors in students' choices." (p11)

"The combination of financial and cultural factors in the HE teaching system result in our higher education provision becoming less demanding." (p12)

This over-arching assumption of sub-optimal practice can be seen in 10 reasonably lengthy references within the document, in addition to the background tone.

The future perfect of the Paper sets out a clear commitment to the delivery of choice in higher education, and emphasises the role of alternative providers in this vision, with 361 references against the 148 found in the 2011 White Paper.

> "We will make it quicker and easier for new high quality challenger institutions to enter the market and award their own degrees. A new Office for Students will put competition and choice at the heart of sector regulation: it will operate a more risk-based approach so that we can focus attention where it is needed most to drive up quality." (p6)

> "The OfS will be explicitly pro-competition and pro-student choice, and will make sure that a high quality higher education experience is available for students from all backgrounds. For the first time, we will put the interests of the student at the heart of our regulatory landscape. By enabling better student outcomes, we will also protect the interests of taxpayers and the economy." (p15)

> "We will enhance teaching in our universities by implementing the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), using a phased approach." (p19)

> "We will increase choice and flexibility in the sector by putting a duty on the OfS to have regard to promoting choice in the interests of students, employers and taxpayers." (p19)

> "The OfS and BIS will have the power to enter and inspect providers (with a court warrant) if there is suspicion of serious breaches, such as fraud or malpractice, to safeguard the interests of students and the taxpayer and protect the reputation of the sector." (p20)

And so to a consideration of evaluation. As in its 2011 precursor, the certainty with which the Paper aligns its interventions with the perfect future/future perfect is significant, but unsurprising given the genre. However, there are statements of confidence in the outcomes of the interventions indicated the documentation that give some sense to the alignment of the content to ideological commitment:

> "We will enhance teaching in our universities by implementing the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF)." (p20)

> "We will level the playing field to allow new high quality providers." (p19)

> "We will build learning flexibility into the HE system, increasing choice for students and promoting social mobility." (p19)

Middlesex Strategic Plan

There is only one clear discourse identifiable in the Strategic Plan, a document characterised both by brevity and equivocated sense of purpose. This is as one might imagine from a text designed to speak to multiple audiences, but, in particular, to governing bodies, and one which is available in the public realm. Therefore it sees the world as in continuous and increasingly rapid change and situates itself against this backdrop as a dynamic and responsive institution.

> "Recently the higher education sector has experienced unprecedentedly rapid change, and that will continue: we expect the coming five years to be the most challenging in our history." (p4)

Sitting behind its discourse and associated value system are two fundamental assumptions:

> Success is dependent on responding to change.
> Success is dependent on demonstrating quality across all aspects of provision.

These assumptions are offered without evidence – but repeated in each section of the document bar two:

> "If Middlesex is to truly compete on an international stage, it must focus – and compete – on quality. In doing so, it will become a first choice destination for many more ambitious and talented students and high performing, inspirational staff from around the world." (p3)

> "Our standing among external stakeholders, especially those who influence student choice, will depend entirely on the stature and talent of our staff and students." (p5)

"Deep and rapid change in the environment in which we operate will present new challenges and opportunities for Middlesex." (p7)

"Our vision is to become a leading University of choice, recognised internationally for excellence in all that we do." (p10)

"Prospective students and those people who inform their choice of university – teachers, parents and other influencers – expect Middlesex to have an excellent reputation." (p11)

"The reputation of our academic staff and leaders is of fundamental importance and will be a particular focus for enhancement. Inspirational teaching will remain a necessary requirement for all our academic staff, although more will be expected in terms of contribution to research and engagement with professional practice." (p13)

These statements are underpinned by a set of values that sit somewhere on a spectrum between confidence and pride. The then Vice Chancellor had 15 years in post at the point of writing, and so there is no sense in the text that this volte-face for institutional direction is a comment on previous iterations of strategy, rather:

"We have a long and proud history as a provider of high quality education." (p4)

"As we continue the process of securing the University's position as a leading global provider of quality British higher education, I am certain that our staff will continue innovating and meeting the fresh challenge." (p3)

"As we look to the future, we must also acknowledge strengths that have helped us succeed in the past. We must

continue to develop them in order to achieve our vision."

(p9).

3. Findings: modality

As suggested, modality is the mechanism through which an author positions themselves against the textual representation of their position, that is the space where it becomes clear which possibilities of truth the author is allowing and whether these are absolute or partial. It can be seen in a number of forms (Fairclough 2003, p168); statements or questions, demands or offers. In dialogue, modality is nuanced and intricate, offering complications that are drawn from social hierarchies as much as authorial intent. Such complications are less significant in documentary form, in particular against the type of material under consideration here – where in all three documents the only truth permitted is that of the originally suggested discourse.

However, in the review of text, it is useful to distinguish between statement forms – that is, those that sit as statements of fact, and those that sit as hypothetical truths thus offering the author not only authority but the capacity for prescience. In part this use of authoritative modality is a necessary part of the genre – a textual device for claiming and demonstrating expertise that government in particular still plays out in old style, without feeling the pressure understood by other experts to demonstrate their connection to their audience and its problems as part of the process of developing oral and written texts (Fairclough 2003, p186-187). However it is also interesting to consider this practice in pursuit of parliamentary assent – particularly in the light of the passage of the two White Papers – the first to be pulled from presentation under fear of its likely failure to pass through the Commons, the second subject to significant challenge and an orchestrated Lords rebellion in defence of aspects of the status quo. In this circumstance, the language of the text as a strategic device takes on a particular pathos.

An inclusive view of modality sees it played out not only in the modal verbs of language making likely what is only possible (such as, will), but also in a variety of adverbs (such as, certainly) along with adjectives (such as, probable). In the most inclusive considerations of the process (Hodge and Kress, 1988) this can also be seen in the form of some non-modal verbs (such as seem). Modality also plays out in the choice of person – with texts claiming authority in both the application of the third person statements singular or plural. And as seen in these two examples, along with that of the Strategic Plan, the use of the third person plural has a particular strength in policy literature – pulling on the power of the collective to add authority to the voice of the author without consultation being necessary.

Codicil: content analysis

As a final check on the work, I linked the Nvivo themes to understand better the emergent policy context between the two White papers to establish whether there appeared to be veracity to my assumption surrounding the developing discourse of student as consumer within the policy landscape. The results, pulled from the 100 most common stemmed words are shown below – and seem to provide an indication of the possibility of the developing narrative of the policy landscape.

	2011	**2016**
Student	338 (1.74%)	327 (1.22%)
Learning/Teaching	162 (0.08%)	109 (0.04%)
Market/consumer	0 (0%)	184 (0.06%)

This sits alongside a shift in the rhetorical tone of the two documents, with the 2011 Paper demonstrating 29 examples of material situated in purely assumptive mode, predicting a future without any concrete evidence of the efficacy of approach, against 50 within the 2016 paper. Similarly, the 2011 paper uses significant examples of practice to back its assertions in 18 instances across the documentation, while its 2016 descendant provides 12.

Conclusion

The documents offer up a picture of higher education in which narratives positioning the student as learner are increasingly sparse.

The 2011 White Paper has two central tenets on which the rest of the paper hangs, and while these are delivered with certainty, the Paper does at least pay lip service to them being a response to the current political circumstance, rather than being unquestionable truths in themselves. These are:

> University funding should not rest only with the public purse, with students as consumers driving choice and quality in the University system; and

> Universities must be responsive to the needs of business and industry.

By 2016, this narrative had moved forward, with the Paper focused on one over-arching discourse, delivered as an absolute truth: competition and informed choice will drive excellence into a less-than-effective system, with the government regulating to ensure students receive value for money.

Both White Papers consider social mobility within their pages, and both conclude that it will be delivered through increased marketisation, while applying controls that ensure that should this ambition not be realised by markets of themselves, markets will be altered to ensure that this aspiration is maintained.

The Middlesex Strategy is situated purely within the university's understanding that reputation will support success in a competitive market, allowing financial sustainability and ongoing commitment to mission.

In all three documents, the student is secondary to the market. However it is the 2016 paper that cements the importance of markets and the role of students within them as its core concern.

In any consideration of the impact of such texts, it is necessary to consider Habermas's belief in the separation of systems - notably the state and the market – from the lifeworld of daily lived experience and ordinary expertise (Habermas, 1970). It is obvious that the texts of the policy documents do not, therefore, intend students as their target audience, no matter how central to the system or the operationalisation of it they are. Rather in these instants the texts set out the future perfect of their authors by defining the shapes of systems that control the lifeworld. In both the 2011 and 2016 paper, this control is positioned as one that repositions students as consumers of their education systems, co-opting them through marketisation as being the drivers of an ideological project owned by the state. Albeit one small proviso to this, particularly in the Middlesex context, is the degree to which these national debates resonate with international students – and this will need further exploration during the interview stage of the research.

The Middlesex Strategy document itself has no time for students as actors at all – siting them only as recipients of the action of the institution's endeavours. It also offers no point of critical distance from the administration's positions on markets - choosing instead to accept the positioning of the university as fundamental –

concentrating on reputation above mission throughout its ambitions. Perhaps in this it is showing that the concern over marketisation in sector has grown in the senior ranks in recent years as the nature of funding becomes insecure, rather than in ideological opposition to the prevailing policy climate.

Within this, a reading of CDA that acknowledges its limitations in surfacing the meaning made of narratives by audiences either savvy enough to understand their purpose or removed enough to care suggests some care should be taken in assuming that these interpretations of policy/strategy intent impact directly on their readings by a wider audience (Fairclough, 2006). Indeed, I do not anticipate that many students within this observation or beyond it will have read either or any of the legislative material in part or in full, although I believe the amplification of the messages of policy through the concerns of the public sphere make it improbable that their ambitions are not heard at least in part by the student body.

However, it is, I believe, indisputable, that the prevailing narratives of the ideological framing of higher education have been writ large across mainstream media and student politics in such a way that this current student cohort cannot be unaware of the majority themes (Sihvonen, 2015). And, certainly in the following chapter exploring the students' collective construction of studenthood, it would appear that aspects of these narratives do, indeed, frame their understandings of collective studenthood.

Chapter 6: Focus Groups: collection, findings and analysis

"Who ARE You?"

This was not an encouraging opening for a conversation. Alice replied, rather shyly,

"I--I hardly know, sir, just at present-- at least I know who I WAS when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then."

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, Lewis Carroll, 1865

Introduction

In this chapter I describe the experience and outcomes from focus groups I ran with the Middlesex students to explore their perceptions of themselves as students through conversations exploring how they saw this sitting across a number of different contexts – considering both the timeline of their studies and a number of different dimensions of their engagement with these – from career ambitions to their own interpretation of what makes the perfect-type student in a bid to surface the meaning of studenthood from their own experiences.

I undertook two focus groups for the project, determining at the end of the second that additional groups were not likely to yield significantly different outcomes given the convergence of views arising from each, and thus suggesting saturation had been reached, following the literature suggesting focus group work is said to be complete when no additional information is forthcoming from work with additional groups, (Bryman, 2008, pp476-485). Full details of the selection, process and ethics of these choices are considered in Chapter 4.

Ten students participated in this element of the work, as described below:

The participants
Participant 1 – 24-year-old international male

Participant 2 – 33-year-old international male

Participant 3 – 21-year-old domestic female

Participant 4 - 21-year-old domestic female

Participant 5 - 24-year old domestic male

Participant 6 – 24-year-old international female

Participant 7 – 27-year-old international male

Participant 8 – 22-year-old international female

Participant 9 – 37-year-old domestic female

Participant 10 – 22-year-old domestic male

The participants represented a range of disciplines: Business Management, Film, Journalism, Dance, Popular Music, English, Sport Science and Psychology.

The details of the transcripts from these groups were then analysed in two discrete stages: the first, as a response to the findings of the documentary analysis (as in Chapter 5) to explore any synergies between the rhetoric of the policy landscape and the student descriptions of their shared understanding of being students, the second, to begin to understand whether the students' shared understanding of studenthood had connections to the themes emergent from the literature. Additionally, the coding remained alert to emergent themes of studenthood within the student groups.

First, then, I analysed the students' comments against a set of categories developed from the most common themes of the policy

analysis as described in the previous chapter, that is: competition, consumer, employability, excellence, social mobility, sub-optimal provision and value for money.

Through this process, it became apparent that there were synergies among the students' conceptions of their studenthood with those that were emergent from the analysis of the policy documentation, in particular those emerging most recently, ie., from the 2016 White Paper. In particular, the focus group conversations surfaced three synergistic themes: a consumer identity, employability and a focus on sub-optimal experience. Additionally, I determined it was possible to draw some connection between the emphasis on social mobility and the student commentaries, with the students articulating a desire for self-improvement. This latter theme I read as being situated against the policy documentation's considerations of social mobility, but transformed through the students' own agency to be similarly linked to the literature's emphasis on nomadic emancipatory energy.

That these four themes were emergent in both groups, through a research design that sought to open opportunity for group reflection rather than query directly against the findings from the policy documentation, would seem to suggest that these constructs had been previously adopted by these students. Further to this, it was interesting to observe that the descriptions of incidents of sub-optimal practice occurred concurrently with the co-option of the language of consumer. Here then it would seem the student experience of being in the world informed their creation of the meaning of studenthood, in that, it was in the identification of service failure that students played out their consumer identities, with the consumer-type statements being co-located with considerations of poor practice, and in support of this, almost all

references to poor practice were made by students who had in the moment of offering their experience to the group, adopted consumer mode. Again, here it is interesting to note that these conversational topics emerged in response to prompts about change, expectation and difficulty – again perhaps suggesting that Braidotti's consideration of nomadic emancipation being a route of escape from a commercialised existence is only possible once an individual can let go of the need to blame in order to progress their personal flight line.

Indeed my observations of the groups suggested an energy around the sharing of bad experience that altered the previous dynamic of the group, with tales of dissatisfaction - in both group settings – forming the break between the group operating more as a group interview mode, with each participant in turn answering the questions I posed, to flipping to a focus group engagement, discussing, sharing and interrupting to add to the narrative. This theme of student as consumer is drawn out in the text below, along with that of the use of studenthood as an opportunity to pursue professional/employability ambitions.

As described, this stage of my research, exploring the social identity of the student group, also drew on emergent themes from the literature to understand whether it was possible to position the students understanding of their identity within a nomadic frame. To this end, I coded the student responses separately as considerations of change, emancipation, togetherness, pain, habitat, and becoming (which I took to demonstrate evidence of change in response to a moment of seeing). Here, the premise of emancipation, becoming and pain figured heavily in the student group responses, with me reading pain as those incidents that demonstrated a separation either from the we of the collective, or from the desired imaginary self, after Braidotti (2012). In this it was

interesting to note that this sat in contrast to the practice of the groups in response to criticism of external failure. That is, that while anxiety ascribed to an external agent – the programme, the university, the course team - appeared to act as a rallying point for shared experience, other forms of pain, those that sat more closely linked to a perceived loss of self or friends, tended not to generate the same ability to drive group discussion, unless this loss could be assigned to a failure of university process or information. Additionally, while there was some evidence of the students reflecting on individual change within the group setting but little of any consideration of their experience of togetherness (in the sense of a cohort) or habitus[2].

This demonstrates itself in the final coding category in this tranche of work where it became clear that any sense of a moment of seeing or becoming– was not represented by all students taking part in the groups, with only some of the participants offering up a form of experience or practice that would seem to map the possibility of ready-at-hand shifting their way of being. It was noteworthy, however, that this was the only emergent theme other than that of consumer that appeared to contribute to the energy levels of the group, with both speakers and the rest of the room becoming more animated when discussing this form of personal agency, with the group notably 'leaning in' to these discussions

Having used these various codes to map any connection of the students' shared experience to both the policy and the literature as evidenced the surfacing of the understanding of studenthood in their focus group conversations, I also took the opportunity to consider the emotional frame in which the students were

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[2] The exception here was a student who had taken an exchange trip to Malta, who did consider the two environments for their contribution to the way she experienced her learning.

expressing these positions. To achieve this, I classified the contributors within an appreciation of their seeming alignment or opposition to the university at both programme or institutional level, using positive, negative or neutral labels according to the content of their contribution. This revealed a pattern in the data, not unanticipated either from the literature or from my professional life experience, that showed students demonstrated themselves in consumer mode when in oppositional engagement with the university. This was further suggested by considering the relationship between more negative descriptions of university life and contributions to consumer identity discussion with students using examples of what they considered to be poor value for money or bad service. However, the data showed no mirror of this – in that a good experience did not lead to commentary on wise investment. Similarly, I looked to explore whether there was any suggestion that pain or desire for change was associated with moments of vision. Given the size of the samples, I present this not to suggest any significance, but to demonstrate the exploration of these relationships within the participant responses in line with Haraway's consideration of oscillation and connectivity (2008).

The emergent themes of this exercise of analysis, are explored below, using quotes identified through the coding process as helpful in exemplifying them within the focus group text.

1. Findings: the employable self

Braidotti's work speaks to the driving energy in nomadic existence being an optimism, a fuel to the fire of the future self that sets free the enthusiasm necessary to navigate the uncertainties of transformation (Braidotti, 2012a; 2010). The student focus groups each demonstrated two aspects of this sense of becoming, one linked to the future through the imagination of a sense of the

professional, a siting of self as embodying the attributes of a particular type of professional, the other a sense of self development and emancipation, a sense of becoming a better form of oneself.

This demonstrated itself in a number of ways across the two focus groups and it was interesting to note that these two separate themes within the discussions were maintained across both focus groups with reasonable consistency, i.e. that of future employability and that of that of personal emancipation. Indeed, it was less that these themes were less pertinent to both groups, but more that the first group spent longer exploring the concept of the consumer student than the second, albeit the theme was common to each. However, it was also notable that the dialogue around assuming a professional identity was driven and owned primarily by the male participants in the group. All of the men, both young and mature students, domestic and international – in both groups – included a consideration of employability within their discussions of their desires or drivers within their student activity. And while some female participants did discuss this aspect of their engagement, this was most often as an additionality to their positioning as student, rather than alterity. It was notable that the women that did include this narrative were young UK students, with this theme not emerging from others. The emergence of this narrative does allow at least a suggestion that these positions are adopted at least in part to an external environment of expectation that sees some young people start to demonstrate a belief that they should start to put away child-ish things (McAdams, 1997, p97).

The strength of this desire to represent oneself as inhabiting a professional domain in the male voice can be seen in these three comments:

Participant 5: "I describe myself as an artist. I'm a spoken word artist and I have a book deal and have done a tour of the states so I feel it's important that I'm seen as part of that community. It's like my programme is just the platform for me to show who I am so I would rather actualise as an artist than as a student."

Participant 7: "If I'm doing something connected to film I say I work in film. I don't claim to be anything in particular but I want those people to see me as part of their community. I don't want to suggest I'm not part of it."

Participant 10: "I'm not sure I chose to be a student! I wanted to work in Sport and this seemed to be a way to do it and I knew I was going to go to University. But I probably didn't choose to be a student. I think I would have had to have chosen not to be a student!"

These students felt that marking themselves as students was misrepresenting their intention of self, possibly diminishing themselves in the eyes of their desired community. However there was some indication that this emphasis on an external focus/identity might offer benefits when they are sitting back within the curriculum and thus win them approval within the academic realm of the university.

Participant 7: [discussing his relationship with his programme team]: "They like it that I can see the subject outside the classroom. We have very good conversations one to one and in class so I think yes, they like me."

Participant 5: [discussing his motivation]: "It was the way for me to get the contacts in my profession… this was the way in for me. It gave me a place to be while I found my way as an artist."

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Female participants did also identify a line of sight to a professional self but were able to acknowledge their role as students within the university simultaneously, seemingly acknowledging the pertinence of being a novice or apprentice.

> Participant 4: "I wanted to do this not go to a Conservatoire because this is about becoming your own type of performer. The Conservatoire is just like training."

> Participant 3: "This was the way for me to be who I wanted to be. I'm studying media and journalism and this was the way."

These separate framings of the university as a site for the formation of professional identity may suggest the applied curriculum begins to offer up alternative sites of becoming for their student inhabitants – with some choosing to see the university as the periphery of a community of professional practice as in Lave and Wenger's model as above (1991). Chapter 2 spent some time considering the ambitions of students looking to situate themselves within practice communities and the challenges this might present (Wenger, 1998, p146). These initial focus group conversations would seem to point to this demonstrating itself in practice – with additional commentary from these two male participants in particular suggesting a disdain or remove from the pedagogic community of which they are also part.

I explore this phenomenon of opposition to the university in general or the particular cohort of their study later in this chapter, placing these examples here to demonstrate the connection to this identification within the employability realm, while also showing how these considerations start to provide an alternative sense of "togetherness". Of course, it is also possible that the desire to sit in

professional practice communities is the result of the rejection of the pedagogic space, rather than the desire for this space being strongest from the start of the student journey - but this degree of the description of individual disappointments or reorientations was not expressed at this stage of the research. However, certainly in this focus group work, the students largely rejected the idea of being significantly invested in their pedagogic communities.

> Participant 5: "I was really disappointed when I first got here. First because I was the only person doing my particular thing. But also because the rest of the group sort of shunned you as a result. They only wanted people like them."

> Participant 7: "I have to work and it's frustrating because I know I'd get so much more out of it if I could do everything – but I can't so it's a balance and when you pay a lot for it you want to get everything you can out of it. If the things outside the programme are so important they should be in the programme because then we could all do it."

However, these stories would seem to reinforce the suggestion that an individual's line of sight to their preferred future self and the amount of work required in becoming this self, limits the energy and enthusiasm for becoming any other self and thus makes a sense of belonging within the university more challenging for such individuals, not least when their time resource is challenged by the multiple demands of student/non-student life. Later in this chapter it also becomes clear that the strength of commitment to this alternative identity in an external community of practice would appear to reinforce a concomitant consumer identity – particularly when the student has rejected the benefits of the academic environment.

Other participants within the focus groups demonstrated a more nuanced consideration of their identity within the institution.

> Participant 1: "No one is anything in Nepal unless they have studied. It's really important to my family and friends that I complete my course and have qualifications. It's like there wasn't really a choice about it. The choice is where to be student, not whether."

> Participant 2: "I needed a change… This qualification will let me do what I need to do to make changes in my life."

These students, both international students who took part in the first focus group, clearly appeared to be aware of the value of a degree within the context of employment – and of the need to achieve qualification to make sure they can move to the next stage of their lives. However, it was notable as the focus group progressed that they started to appear uncomfortable with a developing narrative of complaint and consumer identity – rather they demonstrated a strong sense of the financial sacrifice of university attendance, and a concern for value for money, but less evidence of progressing this into a litany of complaint. Again, the focus group discussions from both groups at this stage of the project seemed to suggest a significant take-up – or self-generated experience - of value for money narratives, possible drawn from the policy/media environments but certainly demonstrating the adoption of particular discourses surrounding studenthood.

2. Findings: self-improvement

However, the focus groups revealed that there were other interpretations of becoming – where the time at university offered a space to become a "better" version of themselves.

Participant 3: "Learning every day is amazing and I love it. I love being with my friends and all the opportunities it offers. If you don't get something out of it you only have yourself to blame."

Participant 6: "Back in my country I would probably have studied in my home town, that's what most people do, so I did this to make me have to grow up and I think it's worked. I think my mum thinks I'm more mature but that is to do with being away and having to do things for yourself, not really about being here."

Participant 8: "I'm doing everything I can to be [the sort of student I want to be]. It's a big sacrifice but I love it and I'm glad I won't look back with any regrets. If I'd done it differently I suppose I wouldn't know about it – but I can see how much experience I'm getting and I love it."

Participant 9: "The thing that has surprised me is that I'm a better student than I thought I'd be; I enjoy the work and the thinking side of it more than I expected."

However, what became marked in both groups of students was that this movement to achieve a better self was a process of conscious decision making, a point at which the individual student decided that they had to be someone other than who they were, with this position at times appearing to link back to a desire for social mobility. Their comments, however, might be seen to allow a additional consideration of our understandings of belonging across the higher education sector– for their comments seem to suggest that their original intentions were not to belong to their institution or a project of studenthood per se, but rather to use their time instrumentally in the service of self-improvement. Only once the university experience had moved beyond the novel did some experience those moments of seeing that allowed them an

alternative consideration of the nature – and benefit- of studenthood. Their way of being students therefore seemed to arise more in response to a sense that there must be something better than this than in response to a developmental scaffold put in place by institutions on arrival. Their language hints at the desire for this other, describing the "wanting" of transformation.

> Participant 3: "I think there's lots going on but it's really difficult to find out about it and you have to be really determined. If you're really determined you can do so much. There's stuff that the uni does and there's stuff through the students union. I'm glad I got involved with the Union because that's where I spend most of my time now. When I first started I thought I'd just go to classes and go home but then I realised that wasn't what I wanted."

> Participant 8: "In my first year I didn't know what I was doing. I was living on my own and working in retail and it was like uni was the thing that was separate from my life and I didn't really know anyone or feel involved at all. But at the end of my first year I realised that if this was going to work for me then I had to do it a different way. I had to make university the main thing so I started to join societies and then run a society and now I have so much going on. This is more as I want it."

Indeed, a number of students articulated their own confusion at the start of their journey as to who and how they were meant to be, with the ability to make sense of this only possible through watching others be students thus suggesting meaning is made in context.

> Participant 4: "I thought it would be more like school... I think I thought that everyone would be like me too and that's not the case. People had different ideas about what they needed to do which I didn't understand because you

all apply to the same course and so you think you would all want to do the same type of thing."

Participant 9: "I'm less scared now. When I started I thought everyone would be better than me and that it would be difficult for me to get the assignments and stuff. I realised half way through the first year that as long as I listened and planned my work it would be fine."

Participant 1: "When I started I didn't know what I should be doing. I didn't live with other students and I had to work out what do and I felt quite disconnected. At some points I thought I should give it up and go home but then in my second year I decided to try to make more of an effort and I started to get involved in things outside of lectures and that helped."

It seems that these moments of reflection on points of personal change, achieved through contemplation and agency, resonate with Braidotti's descriptions of becoming, encompassing as this does a redefinition of attachment and connection within a shared world. Notable here is a shift in the lexicon that the students use, linked to my earlier description of the animation in the room when they describe these moments of seeing. Here then the language the students use when describing their success in coming to truly inhabit this student space is resonant with positive emotion, with "love", and so maps the joy and affirmation that Braidotti identifies when replacing the negativity of a minority position within the landscape through emancipation (2012a, pp94-5). Similarly, Berger and Luckman identify that, within these points of change, these moments of shift, the emergent identity fragments that sit in those spaces can be seen less as deficit, and more as a line of sight to an alternative normality, inviting individuals to utopic dreams (Mayer, 2014, p275; Bayer and Luckman, 1996)

This reading therefore also acknowledges that such shifts are the processes through which the individual can begin to imagine a range of possible forms of the future. Linking it to considerations of pedagogic intent, it would be interesting to start to explore whether these moments also capture the point at which education ceases to be transactional and becomes transformational; the point at which the student becomes learner, not consumer.

3. Findings: the self in pain

Deleuze (1984) points to the sense of being in it together, to the we as the pain relief of the identity project, following a Spinozian theme in accepting that the individual can only develop through an openness to dialogue with others. In this he acknowledges, as does Braidotti, that the move to a non-unity or post–identity also demands that there will be loss, and, as previously indicated, my work with the students suggested that this loss sits both as a disassociation from the collective and a from the initially desired imaginary self. In talking through the development of their student identities, some participants began to articulate a form of pain in their description of their university experience. This pain then demonstrated both as a separation from the group, a confusion and a disappointment, as demonstrated in these extracts from the conversation:

> Participant 5: "I don't really mix with my cohort … I didn't get any benefit from it in my course."

> Participant 4: [discussing their return to Middlesex after an Erasmus exchange] "But since I've been back it's been really strange… it made the rest of course really odd about it and even though I wanted to come back they treat me differently – like 'show us what you learned in Malta then' and they're like really bitchy."

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Participant 1: "You think you understand what's needed in the first year and then in the second year the work gets much more difficult. Sometimes I think I didn't learn anything in my first year but now it's really hard and I have to study harder."

Here the ready-at-hand student might be seen to have an advantage in navigating their ongoing studenthood, thanks to an ability to take charge of their own emancipation from this sense of separation. Braidotti's reading of this is that when the subject is able consciously to appreciate the impossibility of attributing fault or intention to these moments of pain, it allows them to use these moments, choosing to work through their negative impact, and co-opting learning from these instances in the service of continuing the journey to the future self. However, these negative moments can also serve to introduce rigidity, to stop movement and to suggest the cost of transformation is too high (2009, p154). A problem it seems is the impossibility of predicting the nature of the collective space in advance (Lloyd, 2005, p161) – so the we that we have to be in it together with is unknown and unstable. This perhaps applies even more so in the environment of a post '92 recruiting university where the form of the cohort is informed not only by multiple interpretations of non-traditional but also a numbers game for sustainability that means the form of this community is shaped by factors outside of those that will inhabit it – and in this both academics and students are thrown into a developing community sometimes unanticipated at the point of programme inception. This loneliness and disconnection is clear in the comments of many participants in the group, emerging in largest part when they started to discuss what was the most difficult thing about being a student. Indeed it was interesting to note that this was the predominant theme under this strand of discussion, which followed their fairly extensive consideration of the financial pressures and constraints of the university. Of the 10 students engaged in this

focus group phase of the project, half of them volunteered their unhappiness at isolation within the university, as can be seen from their comments:

> Participant 4: "I thought I would be more involved. That first year really confused me it wasn't what I was used to and I didn't understand it. You only understand it looking back and I could then see what they were trying to get me to do but I couldn't see it at the time... I thought everyone would be like me and that's not the case."

> Participant 1: "For me it was how lonely I was in the first year. If I had to do it again I would do it differently. Not having university accommodation was a mistake and I felt really disconnected. I was really on my own and only just managed to get through my first year."

> Participant 9: "I'm less scared now. When I started I thought everyone would be better than me and that it would be difficult for me to get the assignments and stuff... Sometimes it feels a little bit too informal. People don't respect the knowledge other people have."

> Participant 6: "I was really shocked when I came here because I expected the other students to want to be working."

Indeed, in this consideration of students demonstrating themselves operating in anxiety/pain, it was possible to trace these against previous comments indicating the desire to belong.

> Participant 5: "I was really disappointed when I first got here. First because I was the only person doing my particular thing. But also because the rest of the group sort of shunned you as a result. They only wanted people like them."

Participant 8: "In my first year I didn't know what I was doing. I was living on my own and working in retail and it was like uni was the thing that was separate from my life and I didn't really know anyone or feel involved at all."

It would seem therefore that the students had anticipated joining a community of practice that included both staff and peers – with some then finding themselves surprised at their alienation from both communities within the academic experience. This emergent theme within the conversation, when attached to the staff within the academic community, was often the precursor of disappointment that then led the group into discussions of value for money, again suggesting a sense of self emergent from immersion in the institutional context.

Participant 6: "You do get the feeling with some of them [the lecturers] that they just want to be doing their research and they are not really interested in talking to the students."

Participant 5: "I don't get any support from my staff team."

Participant 4: "I was really surprised when I came here… I didn't understand it at first [the way the course was run]. I thought there was something wrong."

Participant 3: "Some of them are just useless. They don't know what is going on elsewhere in the course and they don't seem to know what they are meant to be teaching."

Participant 1: "They come in and teach and then go."

This individualised pain also represented itself in the focus group as a recollection of being removed from the imaginary self, the projection of studenthood they thought they were about to enter. In running the groups, I was interested in the strength of response prompted by these reflections on their early experiences given that the participants were at this stage in their studies between 18 and 30 months out from their initial impressions of university life.

Taking this in turn, a majority of participants contributed to conversations about their confusion and disappointment that studenthood of itself was not as they had anticipated.

> Participant 1: "I thought it would be more fun. I thought it would be more social. It's really hard to be social at this university. It's not impossible but you have to try so hard."

> Participant 4: "[Being a student] means two things. There's the image of it which is all about being young and fun. And then the reality which is about hard work and juggling. It's not the big university experience; it's just you and your friends."

> Participant 5: "I do what I can to make myself a success despite the university. Being a student is something you can do if you have the time."

> Participant 7: "I thought there would be more student stuff in being a student but it hasn't worked out like that for me at least."

Tracing the path through the continued contributions of these students, and the consensus that emerged around their thoughts, it seems that the students had appreciated the need to move beyond an initial rejection of the type of studenthood they found

themselves inhabiting, taking action to allow some form of reinvention of themselves as students. Here then, this may suggest that nomadic desire for being student therefore, for some, allows it to be re-packaged in the image of the context in which they are being to protect from disappointment and allow the desire to be being student to continue.

Indeed, returning to the idea of individuals re-using moments of pain in a blame-free ethical mode, and so, for the moment, leaving aside any realities of the university's potential for action in the face of student distress, it is clear in the themes of the students' discussions that for some this point of alienation acted as the prompt to begin the journey to their initial ambition, to recast themselves as agents in the achievement of their future perfect and reframe their activities accordingly. However, for others, for a variety of personal contextual circumstances, this shift to a positive response proved too difficult – and these students seemingly began to reframe their journey as other than or beyond the university – again allowing the emergence of consumer or professional identities.

This might be seen to have a particular pertinence now. According to the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI), the average student in 2016 is twice as likely to be anxious as their peers in the wider population (Neves and Hilllman, 2016). Workload pressures, mounting debt and employment uncertainties dominate not only the campus conversation of academic and professional services staff in describing the current cohort, but are also being also self-reported from the student body. Further, according to this 2016 HEPI annual survey of the student academic experience, it seems that this interplay of financial, personal and workload worries now provides the context in which students are measuring their

satisfaction with their learning experience. As major financial stakeholders in their own education, they have clear perceptions of their need to be valued by the institutions they choose and so their experience in the affective domain becomes part of their understanding of the quality of their education. This then provides a jumping off point in which the prevailing policy environment handily suggests an alternative way of being within the university, with the alternative positioning as consumer/customer then further readily available to the disaffected through the external media narratives that pull the concerns within the public sphere.

Indeed, Lloyd (2005, p162) offers that production of a political identity is grounded in antagonism – and thus these points of pain, if not individually co-opted to drive alternate agency, instead provide the opportunity for students to see an us/them division between themselves and the institution at which they study. In this way the external narrative of the media takes precedence when one identity blocks – or appears to block – another within the institution and the student becomes politicised in response.

4. Findings: the consumer self

In the case of the focus groups, particularly the first and larger group, the discussion changed tone once the students started to reflect on the ways they had presented as students over the course of their journey thus far. Their reflections seemed to situate themselves on points of difficulty or change and the group seemed to find common ground in blaming the university and their programme teams for these points of tension and provided a space in which to consider the two-way pull of experience and self in the construction of studenthood. As described previously, for some students this was the first point at which they started to become animated within the group. Watching and listening to their

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reactions at this point, it became apparent that rites of passage were in some way being eased by a sense that we are all in it together - after Braidotti/Deleuze - but what they had constructed as a commonality was a need to overcome the bureaucracy of the university, both for its values and what they perceived as its incompetence. The result was an extensive conversation of complaint:

> Participant 4: "This is the trouble – there isn't enough support. They say there isn't enough money for this and there isn't enough money for that but we're paying and they don't ask us what we want."

> Participant 3: "I complained but it didn't really make any difference. I hate it when they're not interested in you doing well."

> Participant 6: "I spent ages trying to work out who to ask about different things. And then people sometimes give you really bad advice."

> Participant 4: "I know with my exchange trip there was real confusion in my course team and they didn't understand it properly and I got told different things by different people. You constantly have to try and make sense of it and you don't know who has the right answers."

These conversations suggest that the 2016 White Paper's commitment to teaching excellence to some extent misses the point of the expectations of the students within the system. At a time when the competing pressures on their time serve to offer them increasingly levels of anxiety – with one in eight students presenting with some form of mental health concern (Neves and Hilllman, 2016). It would seem there would also be a pragmatic case for cultures of compassion within our academic communities that acknowledge and respond to the tensions experienced by those

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newly joining them. This moral dimension is further emphasised against the evidence that suggests the pressures of managing study in the 21st century affecting more people, more seriously. A recent report for Hefce through the Institute of Employment Studies (Williams *et al.*, 2015) showed increasing demand for counselling support, particularly among students experiencing mental health problems, with the greater financial and academic pressures on students over the course of their studies emerging as one factor in driving the take-up of these services and universities concerned at their own ability to predict future demand.

Within the focus group, the students' comments also serve to demonstrate a dissatisfaction with the confusion that the university serves up when operating as a site of multiple fields and associated habitus creating a landscape of identity traps for unsuspecting students. This landscape is then still further complicated once an appreciation of "belonging" as being not a singular process but rather one with multiple interpretations in a diverse, non-traditional student group is factored in (Thomas, 2017). This might suggest there is a need for a site of respect for diversity that recognises the relationships between the multiple stakeholders to the academy and systematically and synergistically binds them in a coherent whole (Sizer, 1984), thus suggesting a necessity for cultures of compassion to be embedded as part of institutional mission, rather than co-opted by individual communities of practice. In this model, administrators become facilitators of trust (Rogers and Freiberg, 1994) in order to ensure a consistency of power relations that give the student self-legitimacy and start to open the transformative spaces of teaching:learning. This seemingly, from the words of the students, is not seen in the lived experience of the university and serves to further undermine the idea of a shared learning space.

Certainly a failure to consider this compassion, this valuing of students – unsurprising against the context of the Middlesex Strategic Plan itself, which demonstrably positions students passively as coincidental benefactors of reputational growth – seems likely to have students seeking identities in opposition to the university. As Lloyd described, politicisation then occurs in opposition to the entity deemed to be blocking growth (2005). Here the government's narrative of poor value for money seems to resonate, and allows the development of an identity position that is seeking some sort of power and emancipation through the adoption of the consumer position as previously suggested, with both the government and opposition usefully co-opting individual students in their ideological wranglings by the careful direction of the argument on value to money ensuring that fees, not funding., form the dominant discourse. This truth then plays out in the language of the students – notably more commonly in the words of those who have demonstrated previous pain about their experience in the affective domain.

> Participant 10: "The money. You're always aware of it – and it makes it annoying if there is something here that you then can't get. I wanted to see someone to get some advice on an assignment and there was no one available."

> Participant 4: "It doesn't feel like it isn't enough money when it's things the university wants to do but when it is the things we want they don't come through."

> Participant 3: "We're paying all this money and all we hear at course meetings is 'we can't afford this and we can't afford that."

> Participant 1: "They should think more about how it is to be an international student; it's a lot of money and I have to borrow it from my parents and I'm not sure it always feels like you get value for money. This university has a lot of

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international students but it doesn't think about how it is
for us. There is lots of things we have to do."

This shift to the individual consumer identity is problematic not just
for the university, but also for other collectives surrounding the
student experience. In 2016 the National Union of Students
published the *Manifesto for Partnership*. Their ambition was to
provide a clearly articulated definition of partnership that did not
leave them as major funders, yet junior stakeholders of the
partnership project, while foregrounding that authentic
involvement will work to the benefit of both parties in rejecting
some of the consumer rhetorics surrounding the sector. Closer
reading of this NUS document also suggests a concern that the
culture of individualism being fostered in considerations of
consumerism potentially leave the collective project of the union
movement exposed and under some threat.

An additional reading of this focus group work begins to conceive
of this consumer identity not as individualistic, but as an alternative
collective. The language of the student participants and the
affirmation of each other's experiential statements would seem to
suggest that the consumer is an additional student identity, and
part of the condition that allows a sense of all being in it together.
The problem then for individual universities is less that the
consumer construct is in opposition to the student construct – but
more that it positions the student in opposition to their individual
institution.

Conclusion

The conversations emerging from the focus groups would appear to confirm the truth of the student journey being a trajectory throughout which the students experience moments of vision – in which those points identified by Kirkegaard as provoking anxiety can be co-opted into Braidotti's models as prompts for emancipatory change (Pattison, 2002, p15). But what then appears to direct the nomadic student's direction of travel is the degree of anxiety this evokes – with too much operating as a push to a non-student studenthood, grounded in either a professional identity beyond the university, or a consumer response within it. Here then, the context of the student surfaces their own perception of student at the points of engagement with the 'project' of being a student, with these moments of anxiety allowing an interpretation that connects Braidotti's nomadism to Heidegger's phenomenological understanding. This suggests that the student can only identify as such if they identify the context of student also existing, thus unifying Dasein and the contextual world. "Only if the world is there, if Dasein exists as being-in-the-world, is there understanding of being… Self and world belong together in the single entity," (Heidegger, 1988, p297). This then begins to explain the impact of an environment that does not speak to the student expectations of student.

However, while these responses would seem to confirm the approach of siting the development of studenthood within an appreciation of nomadic identity processes, in what way to they contribute to the understandings of the core questions of the research?

How and what is it to be and become a student?

Taking this question first, the purpose of the focus group stage of the research process was to allow the student groups to surface and demonstrate consensus on themes emerging from a discussion of their student experiences, in order to see if particular benefits

emerged within the discussion. By default, however, this means the responses generated as part of this process cannot be seen without an appreciation of the group setting in which they were created. Whitham (2018) has argued that groups take discrete forms, dependent on the formulation of the social identity of the group, which might be considered either category-based (inherent relative characteristics) or group-based (Stryker, 2008; Brubaker, 2004; Lickel *et al*., 2000). It is reasonable to position the focus groups as representing group-based spaces for social identity, and given the variety of characteristics within them, but clearly shared descriptions, thus posit that the benefits collectively identified in their conversations might be those understood as group benefits, albeit group benefits that allow individual advantage, but this then also allowing that the dynamic of group benefit may be assumed in-group, but held more ambiguously by the individual (Murray, 2010; Agamben, 1993; Nancy, 1991).

Certainly, the majority of contributions to the group would suggest that the groups of students involved in this part of the project were at least in part unconvinced by the benefit of studenthood of itself, and saw it as a resource intensive route to another desired self – with this theme demonstrated within a number of the comments included earlier in this chapter.

> Participant 10: "But I probably didn't choose to be a student. I think I would have had to have chosen not to be a student."

> Participant 3: "This was the way for me to be who I wanted to be. I'm studying media and journalism and this was the way."

> Participant 7: Mainly I have to think about all the things I need to manage outside of being a student. I don't have

enough time for everything. So I thought there would be
more of student stuff in being a student."

It could then be read from these group-offered statements that the student group rejects "student" as an identity position able to offer either individual or group benefit. Instead the collective seemed to allow a range of identity positions situated around consumerism and value for money as identified earlier in this text, prompting consideration of why the group might better allow this as an acceptable identity position. A possible solution lying in Whitham's reflections on the contexts in which a shared social identity would seem to offer some form of benefit, in which she includes power-imbalanced negotiated exchange structures, where social identity has been found to inhibit inequality and exploitation in (Lawler and Yoon 1998). This reading of the students' positioning takes on an additional pertinence against the group's ongoing discussions of an inability to navigate a complex system for personal support – thus perhaps then speaking to their need find a collective position that looks to deliver benefits to the group in its entirety, while simultaneously allowing individual advantage (Simpson, 2006).

However, given the nature of the institution, the disciplines the students are studying and their self-proclaimed desires for professional identities as reasons for their study, there might be an alternative reading of benefit if students are considered to be operating within particular communities of practice, these therefore shaped beyond discipline through the consumerist lens that allows the construction of the individual within this oppositional group. Learning then might be seen as the result of the student's lived participation in the social world (Wenger, 2009) and therefore might be read to deliver benefits to the students in the form of understandings of their learning communities and an appreciation of the availability and appropriate use of community

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resources (Wenger, 2010). This then frames considerations the outcomes of the focus group as they respond to the second question:

Whether, and if so, how, does the environment of study affect this being?

Building on the previous section, I would claim that the study environment takes in both the disciplinary and institutional contexts within which the students are situated – with the eclectic nature of the study backgrounds of participants in the focus groups perhaps situating the institutional context to the fore in their shared meaning making throughout these sessions, and within this also mindful that the groups may be operating to some form of group-think in response to peer pressure in the two 'stranger' groups. However, for the purposes of this investigation, surfacing this group-think is pertinent in allowing my developing appreciation of studenthood through both social and individual lenses.

As indicated in the previous Chapter, the strategic direction of Middlesex University at the time of these students' enrolments was shaped by an appreciation of the financial contexts of the sector – and while the introductory statements setting the five-year strategy are also shaped by a determination to compete on quality, there appears to be a direct positioning of the University as a sustainable business within the opening paragraphs determining its direction and purpose

Throughout its narrative it continues the theme that the University is not so much built in partnership around the student and their needs and aspirations – another common theme of the decade (Healey *et al*., 2016) , but more that the student will benefit from

their association with an institution driving quality in all domains to allow ongoing financial sustainability. Against this backdrop, it might be seen from the student comments that the institution has been successful in playing out this sense of its own identity in the minds of its students.

Earlier this chapter has reflected on the comments of students who seem disaffected by an institutional environment that they perceive as offering poor value for money – with this demonstrated in a shared sense of exclusion from the prioritisation of both access to service and corresponding investment decisions about those services. And this sense of exclusion from the university community seemed evidence in much of the language of the group discussion – with the pronoun most frequently used to describe the university – in both its administrative and academic functions – being they – and as previously discussed, the emancipatory we therefore set up in opposition to this. However, reading this against strategy papers quoted above that begin to define the culture of the University as distant from the student might allow a suggestion that this exclusion, while not articulated within the documentation, nonetheless responds to the positioning of the student body within the strategy. Certainly, there is little in the student description of their assumption of a collective identity within the institution that speaks to a relationship other than this.

Indeed many of the comments speak to the students feeling lonely or alone – with no sense of community within disciplinary cohorts emerging thematically as the students from different disciplines discussed their experience, rather, the emphasis seemed to place on their growing appreciation that in order to be part of something, they as individuals would have to step up, again unconsciously echoing the themes of the institutional strategy in which students would benefit by association with practices that were ongoing

around them, rather than be co-opted into such activities. Indeed, throughout the sessions, it was noticeable that only one student commented on a positive relationship with the programme team.

However, in this, both professionally [for my prior involvement] and ethically [for the limitations of research] I am loathe to situate the problems of context solely within the individual institutional realm. As considered in the review of literature in Chapter two, the modern university, and in particular the modern university in contrast to older institutions, is predominantly organised through the laws of market economics (Bell *et al*., 2009), and that Middlesex should then necessarily respond to this, setting in motion a chain of language that might influence its students in their own relationship to higher education, is perhaps worthy of exploration but not individual culpability. For it is possible to conceive of the context shaping students as sitting beyond the walls of any institution – and if not shaped directly by the language of policy documentation, certainly informed by the economic circumstances of its outplay.

Against this it is possible to set up an alternative reading to the commentary of the student groups - is that these 21st century non-traditional students are cast in an emancipatory project in which the thing they are in together is not the learning, but the response to an externally constructed vision of themselves as student consumers. This collective identity might then be usefully co-opted as a political project that allows them to navigate the uncertain power dynamics of a university environment that does not appear to offer immediate inclusion, thus simultaneously providing them with an opportunity to connect across these isolating divides. Thus then, the student consumer identity offers the benefit of belonging.

Understanding the desire or reality of the maintenance of this identity position for the individual student then allows a platform against which the next tranche of the project, exploring individual students' reflections on their developing identities, can be set, considering whether the belonging necessary to support a professional becoming beyond the university is played out in personal as well as collective framings.

Chapter 7: Individual Guided Reflections: collection, findings and analysis

"Who in the world am I? Ah, that's the great puzzle."
Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, Lewis Carroll, 1865

Introduction

This chapter describes the practice, findings and preliminary analysis of sessions conducted with eight individual third year students in the final data collection tranche of the project. These reflective sessions were designed to surface the students' own understandings of their ways of studenthood, and thus to allow the work to gather additional evidence to answer both research questions:

How and what is it to be and become a student?

Whether, and if so, how, does the environment of study affect this being?

Given the phenomenological origins of its method, this tranche of work was undertaken to allow the collection of a series of first person perspectives on the experience of studenthood, thus providing some appreciation of the correlation of the lived experience and the understanding of it (Fernandez, 2017, p3549). Therefore, rather than directing participants through a structured interview with the themes emergent from the literature, the policy review and the focus groups, this stage was constructed as a series of non-structured interviews, drawing on traditions of oral history collection. In this the use of interview serves to provide a method that allows identification of nomadic identity trajectories through

biographical memories situated in a particular social realm, i.e., that of the university and the student's journey within it (Fontana and Prokos, 2007). This stage was therefore intended to provide an opportunity for the students to identify the critical episodes in their experience that shaped their understanding of their own studenthood. In this it anticipated that the description of their intentionalities around the development of their own studenthood might be taken as active expressions of self, even in the mode of a remembered object (Fernandez, 2017, pp3553-3554).

The participants

Participant 1: Twenty-seven-year-old international male student.

Participant 2: Twenty-one-year-old domestic female student.

Participant 3: Twenty-one-year-old domestic female student.

Participant 4: Twenty-one-year-old domestic female student.

Participant 5: Twenty-two-year-old domestic female student.

Participant 6: Twenty-four-year-old domestic male student.

Participant 7: Twenty-two year old domestic male student.

Participant 8: Twenty-one year old domestic female student.

The participants represented a range of disciplines including International Politics, Biomedical Sciences, English, Dance, Popular Music and Film.

In this tranche of the research, I coded the transcripts of the student interviews to explore congruence both with the themes emerging from the policy documentation and the focus group outcomes in order to explore any connections between these two external environments of the student, that is the bureaucratic and the social realm, in informing individual ways of being within the student lifeworld. Again, this stage additionally remained alert to themes emerging beyond these categorisations too.

Thus again, I coded the student responses separately as considerations of change, desire, togetherness, pain, habitat, moment of seeing, alongside consumer, employability, social mobility and suboptimal provision. Six interviews were conducted in the first instance to allow the identification and coding of emergent themes, with an additional two students then included as a check of saturation once it appeared that no further themes were emerging from the data.

As before, within these nodes I also classified the contributors within an appreciation of their seeming alignment or opposition to the university at both programme and institutional level, using positive, negative or neutral labels according to the content of their contribution. A neutral label was applied either when a student had expressed both positive and negative sentiments, or when they had demonstrated neither. In this tranche of the research the results shifted – with the majority of the participants (seven) positive about their experience and just one negative. Following the pattern of analysis seen in Chapter 6, I reviewed the coincidence of particular themes as before, examining these to see if the patterns that emerged in the social identity realm re-emerged in this individual space. However, the emergent patterns here were discrete from those of the focus group stage of the research, with both the outcomes and the differences explored more extensively in the chapter below.

In largest part this tranche of the project revealed students in less oppositional response to the university, and more appreciative of the benefits of their learning journey. However, as before, given the size of the samples, I present this not to suggest significance, but to

demonstrate the exploration of these relationships within the participant responses.

1. Findings: intentionality

Highlighting this theme emergent from the students' descriptions might be considered to disguise a present-at-hand intentionality as being a practice in the moment of change, rather than situate it more accurately as a practice of reflection. However, it nonetheless became clear that in constructing memories, the individual students described their approach to the practice of their studenthood as having intention, again perhaps indicating the propulsion of the desire for the other self as driving agency in this project of being a student. This suggests again that in this stage of life, becoming might be the *raison d'etre* and defining influence of the identity project – with this becoming situated as often in a disciplinary community of practice stretching across and beyond the student journey itself.

> Participant 1: "It changed over time too, it was hard in the first year because of the language – I knew it would be and I knew it would be a couple of months before I got to grips with all of the aspects of the language within the university. I'd lived in England before so my English is OK but it was going to be a different environment. It meant I was different in my studies at first - in some areas I was just quiet, said nothing at first took a while to come out of myself and have the confidence… So then … you have to put yourself into your working a different way - in that you can see what is happening in the first year and you can see the way that the academic work means there are other ways that you can get involved. Then yes, by the second year I felt more involved in university stuff and I want to get more skills and better practical experience throughout the year –

that's been what's been at the heart of these three years for me."

Participant 2: "At the end of the first year I applied for Erasmus and then got accepted and that's in my second year. I went to Malta. And that was like the dream and it was so full on social life. I did September to December here for my second year and then flew out in January and then say that after that I had just such a different life and everything was how I wanted."

Participant 3: "[Speaking about peers] "They'd done so little that they weren't going to be able to keep up so a few people left and I think that helped because it meant there was a sort of a slightly different approach and if you were there you were going to get it done and actually once all the blur finished then then people were kind of quite helpful to each other and everyone that was on my course I knew we sort of we focused in on the work a bit more and we did. We talked about the work more and we were yeah we were doing more of the practical stuff together and that was better. It was kind of like it was something. It was part of what we did. Not the other from what we did. I think the best way to describe it."

Participant 4: [Describing a willingness to engage with her course team] "So it's like taking what you can from them and seeing how it works for you … So now I have like I have these things in my head that I know works for me and things that I know like really don't. But I try and be open-minded toward it. When I was in first year they say the beach things [course team suggesting students imagine particular environments to influence the style of their dance] and I'm sort of I'll just be thinking in my head but this is stupid and I'm not stupid. I won't say though. But now at least try I try and be like 'hey that worked for me so

use that and I'll throw the other stuff away'. This stuff worked for my head which is there - which is a very different – it creates new points of view which means you shift yourself to that point. So okay I might not agree with it but I'll see if it works."

Participant 5: "But I think I came back after Christmas and I had a completely different mindset and things had been much better I was still dealing with the stuff I'm dealing with but I found a way to sort of focus, keep my focus on the uni stuff rather than – which I always did enjoy – and I lost that in my second year and I've found that again which has been really good. I think it's maturity - thinking about how I can do my best despite what I'm going through and I think it just, I don't know, like a couple of lessons it just clicked and I've been more dedicated and more focused and there's an element of just wanting to get the best grade and an element of wanting to be the best I can be and less like I want to get the best grade and more like the way to get a good grade is to improve. And like just more about improving so more focus on uni work and less worried about friends and stuff."

Participant 7: "So that's when I started to like think about not just what I'm writing about but how do I have to do this in a different way so that it can be good academic work… what I realised I had to do was practise being more academic."

Participant 3: "Oh yeah we did mess up one module because I remember I had to retake it over the summer. And that was that was a bit of a wake up call really because I hadn't done that well before which is why I had to go through clearing. And then when that happened in the first

year as well I kind of realised that I couldn't carry on doing
what I was. Does that make sense? I had to do more work.
Retrospectively it was quite useful to see that I needed to
do things differently if I wanted something. You know I
mean it wasn't just like it happened - it happened because I
wasn't doing any work and that sort of became quite
obvious to me."

Overwhelmingly, a theme emerging from the comments of
participants was the desire to sustain the processes of change and
transformation (Braidotti, 2010) – with this further explored in this
chapter when I consider practices of hope. Indeed it is possible to
hear/read the students' words and to see a commitment to this
very process of self-shifting that sat above the particular nature of
the self-to-be-achieved. At times it seemed the students were
describing the desired self as a self always open to change –
opening the potential that their individual state of desired
studenthood was one that opened them to transformation. In this,
then, individually they co-opted the we of emancipatory flight to be
a we committed to this nomadic project of self. Here then it
becomes possible to envisage studenthood as the commitment to
the transition, that is, to the process rather than the destination. In
this again the participants often demonstrated Braidotti's
conception of emancipatory practices to sustain the process of
transformation. In demonstrating this, their language of cohort
inclusion began to suggest that the potential negativity of any
oppositional consciousness – in this case a rejection of themselves
as students in favour of consumers had been replaced with
creativity and affirmation (Braidotti, 2010). This potentially allows
the positioning of the imaginary self of studenthood as being
achieved in the very process of transformation – and so allows a
reading of their comments that suggests a nomadic identity
constructed to desire a self continually open to change.

2. Findings: in it together

A sense of agency in determining an appropriate studenthood to achieve individual goals also demonstrated an additional strand of context from that demonstrated in the focus group work, in that, individually, the students were more likely to reflect on the importance of their peer group in achieving their goals. In these individual sessions, Braidotti's emancipatory we was present – and was most frequently co-opted to suggest a level of kinship with the subject cohort emerging as a supporting network allowing the individual to overcome obstacles to achieve their personal identity ambitions. This we was most frequently situated in and bounded by the student body – with very little sense that this was seen as a connection to the wider academic or university community co-populated with university staff connected within a community of practice. Here again, the students' language often appeared to suggest a celebration of their desiring self in becoming/reconciling the desired – with this joy reflected in their lexicon shifting to the affective domain. In this the students might be seen to demonstrate Braidotti's "practices of hope", and thus be engaged in the day-to-day in ways that sustain them in self-transformation (2010).

> Participant 1: I have loved this experience. I'll stop at the end of my third year so happy because I learnt a lot…. One of the main reasons is because I have met some great people who I know very well … I think of them being so great…. I've always known that people inspire me. "

> Participant 5: "When … I'm performing I want to be in uni forever because I love it and it was the same as in the first year when we did like our performance stuff and it was how we ended the year… So I like love when it's like that… So at

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the moment I might look forward towards the end of uni but I know when it gets to being out of here I'm going to cry. I'll be crying when it is over because like I have loved it, loved it, here."

Participant 7: "So it wasn't just in class and the seminars were really interesting and actually I started to realise that some of the international students on the programme gave me a gave me a better perspective on what we were talking about. I started to appreciate in a slightly different way."

This sense of the community of practice operating within the student element of the cohort was seen as transformative even by those students who also in other parts of their commentary had indicated they felt less valued within the academic realm:

Participant 6: "[At the start of his programme] I was just enjoying life because I was in halls which was new for me as well which was amazing … and I just enjoyed that community... So that was really great that I had something like family that was already here."

Participant 4: "I was really lucky in the first year because one of the second years being a second year like started a company – and I just performed with her and then yeah and then I carried on when I was in second year. And I really enjoyed especially as I was a first year and you got to mix with second years and third years and I got to mix with the older ones. And I got to learn from them and that was really beneficial because you'd see them struggle through their second year. So like then when I was struggling through mine it wasn't just like I felt I was completely unprepared for it. So yeah it was nice because she picked all people that she wanted."

Participant 2: "So it was like we had one studio with eight people in my class as opposed to 30 [once on the Erasmus placement in Malta], and hard training and then we were in the halls. So like it was for us and everyone that was living there were from different countries and all most everyone was having fun. It was like always at events you know was like free parties free transport everything. So I actually felt like I got all my colour back like I'm the person I am."

Here too, the comments from the individual stage of the work allowed a more nuanced reflection on appropriate studenthood, as it provided a space that not only allowed the students to reflect on their own journey, but to position themselves, and their version of studenthood, as other to that of other members in their respective cohorts. This idea of the individual privileging their own form of studenthood was marked for its prevalence in the individual reflection sessions, having been explicitly rejected as part of the focus groups' considerations on appropriate ways of being.

Participant 1: "It's straightforward. In the second year there are far more opportunities to get involved and you have to take them. You could see some people just sitting back but that is not for me."

Participant 4: "So – how I felt when I started. I was really excited like come to uni at first. I was like sure well that's what I thought I was sure this is what I wanted to do. And then when I got here I found it very different to what I'd got in my head, say the way my course was. I like I couldn't get my head around it for about the first month. I really struggled with thinking this is right for me because it didn't feel right. And just because the way the classes are structured compared to me at my college and the way the teachers were it was just so different because it's a

university and I could see others not really trying very hard."

Participant 3: "So yeah and I think I think I remember I was just glad because I wasn't staying home and I didn't want to be at home anymore and I wanted to go to university. And I don't think it really caught up with me what I was doing until a bit later."

Participant 2: "So I wouldn't normally be friends if I didn't like their personality in the first place but then like sometimes those little things that annoy you and you have sort of realise that and have to ask is this small enough not to bother me or will it annoy me or is this someone I want to stay clear - it's about where they are in their life against where you are and how they approach the course and how they are with other people."

I return to the tension between this desire to be included and the context of this inclusion in section 4 of this Chapter.

3. Findings: the employable self

In my initial reflections on the outcomes of the focus groups I posited that the moments of anxiety described by the students were often situated in a sense of the need to belong – but that this belonging was part of the jigsaw of the stronger desire to become the imagined professional self. In this, the desired-self is imagined as something other, and the student community a route co-opted to achieve this other – which, after Joseph (1999) might be read as a desire for a a professional citizenship achieved through a voluntary migration across a number of sites – the sites in question being those studenthood (Joseph, 1999, p16). This journeying then

allowing Braidotti's assertion that the nomadic vision allows the fleeting co-existence of multiple time zones, in this requiring a subjectivity which is relational and outside directed (Braidotti, 2012a, pp214-217). A nomadic framing of identity therefore allows that we are all in it together – and the students individually seem to co-opt the support of their cohort as the we of their emancipatory journey to desired self – with this desired self demonstrating itself both as a professional identity and as an individual eternally open to change, as described in section 2.

In both versions of this desired self, the student reflections that emerged in this final tranche of the research suggested that students had an appreciation that they had narrowed the gap between their imagining of self at the start of their journey and their identity now. In this they might be seen to be reflecting on a self-unity as described by Hegel but, given previous understandings of the temporality of nomadism, perhaps also for many this was also represented as a pausing place in the ongoing project of an emancipatory self (Sutherland, 2014). And certainly the students' commentaries at this stage allow a more nuanced understanding of the professional self.

> Participant 6: "I've got different ambitions to in my first year … now I have different plans because I don't think I want to be a dancer so I've got an interview for my pgce next week. I'd like to do that. I'm a lot more open minded about what I'll do next now. So when I see how close I am now [to leaving] I can see how much London has changed me and I realise how much my college before here influenced who I thought I ought to be… And now on reflection I think I don't really want it enough and I don't want to live in London. I'm going to go back to Worcester and I think I'd much rather do a teaching job and then do some performance on the side, I'm going to do it like this.

I'm not so driven now - Now I'm sort of a bit more like I'll see what happens."

Participant 7: "It's really weird if I think about what I would have been doing if I'd carried on at West London. I was studying business management. It's like I can't even now I don't know what I was thinking about. I don't know why I thought that was what I wanted to do. So it wasn't me. But I think I was maybe just too young when I just wasn't thinking ... I just thought it looked interesting but I wasn't thinking."

Participant 8: " Looking back on that that is quite a difficult thing to know. I'm not who I was but at the same time I'm so proud of myself."

Participant 5: "I feel more like a dancer than a student. I do think of myself as a student – well I say I've come to London to study dance I don't say I've come to London to be a student. I just want to try things out – I think in my second year I just thought oh I never want to dance again and I think in my third year I've realised yes I do want to dance and I do want to be involved in dance whether that's dance or choreography and I hadn't lost the love for it I just had to find it again."

Indeed, for some participants, it was clear that they were already weaving towards their next identity position:

Participant 2: `'So. I don't want to be in the city… I went home and I think that's when I realised, I think like a grown up now, you know – I don't care what anyone else thinks. I see it here differently and then as a result of being here I've become this thing yeah. And then you think if something

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different had happened on this journey that made me do something else."

Participant 7: [Referring to volunteering] "The other thing is that it's really useful because it means that what you're talking about in a class doesn't become what you do in just in a class you see outside and the two things inform each other that becomes important. That makes it more interesting in both spaces because you think about it differently as you in both heads with it you know when you're doing it and you think about it what you think about it when you've got some sort of knowledge of it."

Participant 8: "But also I think I need to take a year. I need to have a gap year to reflect because I'm a different person and I don't know. I don't know whether I could cope with it [studying medicine] physically."

A codicil to this sense of the connection of the imagined self at the start of the journey to the current conceptions of self speaks to an echo within the focus group findings – in which the male participants spoke at greater length and with greater certainty about the instrumental nature of their engagement with education as a necessary precursor to employment. In this, the final stage of the project, the male participants were more likely to see the emergent of that professional self in line with early imaginings as the pre-determined outcome of their activity.

Participant 1: "I did what I knew I had to do because of what I wanted to achieve. I did it quite consciously I knew what I needed to do. In that first week I knew I had to find a part time job quickly and I was lucky I got it. And then I knew okay well but a job is gonna have to do but in two months or so now and then I have to get more work... Then yes, by the second year I felt more involved in university stuff and I want to get more skills and better practical

experience throughout the year –that's been what's been at the heart of these three years for me…. But it was always my plan when I got here - that's what I would do when I got here, first find a part time job in hospitality or something because that is easy, then find some work on a set and then start working with a company in broadcasting. And yeah that's what I did. It was always my priority."

Participant 5: "I'm honestly looking at … creating various opportunities because like you know things on everything I do is for the sheer pleasure of doing … so like I create this community by injecting myself into my own community and being able to take ownership of it."

That the students demonstrate some satisfaction with their progression over the course of their degrees at this stage in their education is unsurprising (and also pleasing in my professional capacity beyond this project); as they are sitting at a point in their final years where they can imagine new futures, free from the realities of final project grades and the practicalities of life beyond the university. However, it is also possible to position their commentaries within an ethics of identity in which the nomadic, or the ambition for self is not only a useful descriptor, but also a value-rich expectation writ large across our culture (Sutherland, 2014) – and one which at time seems also to daunt the participants of the project.

Participant 4: "It is it's scary to know what to do next. I know once we get to later in the year I'll be sorry if I'm not doing something else but I'll only know what when it gets to that point in the end the year. So I've got my plan which is to apply and then if I have that I can see what else is possible."

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Participant 2: "And that's very scary because I don't know what I'm doing. On the one hand I want it to be over and on the other I don't want it to stop because after school I've just got to audition all of the time and I don't want to do that because I don't want to stay in London but I don't see how I can compete if I go home."

Participant 3: "I don't know what will happen next. I don't want to work in this subject – so I guess I'll just have to wait and see. Temp, maybe. Sometimes I wish I had done something else."

4. Findings: The self in pain

That connection with the cohort and the drive for the other, desired, professional self might prompt agency for a particular type of studenthood is perhaps unsurprising. The individual sessions with the students also suggested that a disruption from these ambitions was felt as anxiety – thus allowing the introduction of the pain and loss Braidotti suggests is a necessary part of the lines of flight of the nomad and allowing that these periods or experiences of separation from ambition may ultimately benefit those students who are able to renegotiate their trajectories to freshly imagined self/selves after these moments. Additionally, the student comments from the individual sessions signal an additional disruption from the focus group findings, where students were keen to stressed the legitimacy of all forms of studenthood, simultaneously introducing discussions of alienation only when talking of their very early engagement – where their lack of knowing became the fault of the university. In this element of the work, Instead, it becomes clear here that individuals found their own ambitions, or understandings more than occasionally at odds with the collective of the cohort. Therefore, away from the group conversation, in the one-to-one environment, not only did the students start to demonstrate a greater connection to their desired

selves, but also a greater honesty in admitting their initial confusion in their original personal choices of flight lines, again suggesting that a cohort identity privileged on an understanding of mutual goals might be challenged by the individual responses of its members. This differently experienced studenthood was acknowledged by several participants.

> Participant 2: [Describing a conversation she'd had with a peer who was also taking part in this element of the research] "It's been really interesting to me to talk about this with another dancer as we've never talked about this – this navigating of London and what it's like and how we do it on our own. We've just done this thing without realising we were doing it and it's really difficult and it's quite lonely."

> Participant 4: "I was kind of confused when I got here because I'd always thought my life would be something different and so Hendon was a bit of a fall back."

> Participant 7: "I know this sounds wrong but I think I was just in the wrong mindset to make that decision then [of where to study]."

These students had most usually responded to this alterity by reflecting on their confusions and developing alternative routes to the studenthood they desired – using a range of re-orienting practices such as international exchange, volunteering, or immersion in a more vocationally oriented identity. However it is clear in their language that these moments are often experienced as loss or pain.

Participant 1: "There are only bits where you go oh hang on I don't want to be doing that. I actually want to do something different. I mean yeah that does happen."

Participant 2: "I went to visit my friend in Exeter University and she was living in halls and like she was a real student and I realised that was not my experience."

Participant 3: "So I was so engaged on that level but I just wasn't very interested in it and I knew it wasn't really what I wanted to do at all. "

Participant 5: "I remember in second year I was like not looking forward to it all and then I was like 'Oh I'm actually looking forward to this and I want to go back and do really well,' and it felt like I'd turned a corner and it didn't turn out like exactly that way that I wanted it to."

Participant 7: "I think I just did that [the first choice of study] because I I didn't really know what I wanted to do at that stage."

As indicated, in addition to the anxiety of the loss of this sense of desired self, the other prevalent theme within the students' reflections was their concern for social inclusion with the wider student group, with a number of participants, now seemingly confident and satisfied with their social group as evidenced in their other reflections on cohort cohesion (section 2, this Chapter), nonetheless reflecting at some length on the ongoing kinship tensions across the student group, as indicated by the following contributions.

Participant 1: "I don't think I had friends for the first two months… I didn't live in Hendon and I didn't know the area."

Participant 2: "I was excited when I first started – but then I got here and I was like 'oh my gosh what am I doing?' and I ended up in a shared flat with other girls … of course I didn't really get on with all of them. [Later, reflecting on a Maltese exchange] "It was different… the university was very small and we were in halls… and everyone was having fun. So I actually felt I got my colour back like the person I am."

Participant 5: "I found it really difficult because it sort of felt like everyone knew each other and I'm like I didn't know anyone and then you go up to people and you feel they're thinking "oh god, everyone's made friends already', too.

Participant 3: "I went home and then I came back and everything just seemed to get a bit messy. Everyone had big fallings and out and it was, I don't know. At the time it just felt really overwhelming."

Participant 4: "People don't really keep in touch [talking about exchange] – just like the odd person did."

These two elements – confused ambition and a sense of isolation – only emerged in the individual sessions. Indeed, it would seem that a sense of loss was much to the fore in the students' reflections – which frequently referenced a confusion or obfuscation of the desired self that provided a pause and re-orientation of the journey, again, perhaps suggesting the pain or dis-ease of the journeying student. However, in reading between the two sets of results, those of the focus group and those of the individual sessions, it is possible

to conclude that students seemed to suggest that the need to be in-group publicly over-rode their internal desire for their particular imaginary selves, with the pain of exclusion – or the fear of it - significant in their reflections on their journeys.

5. Findings: moments of vision

Again, within this sense of themselves as at the edges of their future selves, the students seem to show some commitment to an ongoing nomadic approach to/experience of identity formation – which might also be seen as a sense of their desired selves as continuing to learn, or a response in anxiety to the unknowns of their developing futures. However, their reflections on their journey also indicated that their understandings of individual change had been prompted by lightbulb moments, often in response to this sense of loss; sudden appreciation of self and context that allowed them to direct personal change. Heidegger's conception of moments of vision allows that in being open to the world one can move from a state of disconnected busyness to one of authentic resoluteness (Gibbs, 2011) – and this would seem to be demonstrated in the students' reflections of their journeys during their time at university – where they seemed to see their shift to what in these terms might be considered an authentic practice impact both studenthood and other selves.

> Participant 1: "I only realised once I'd had my session … So at that point it made me realise that I needed to be on top of things and in touch with the course otherwise it was just going to make it more difficult but when you start to do this you know in the process of doing so you are going to have to try to make sense of some it just by trial and error."

> Participant 4: "So for me there was a key point of realising that it was self motivation was going to take me through. Yes. This is what it's got to be this is how I'm going to be – I can

see how to make this change if it is what I want. But I guess I have them both. I can sit back and do nothing too."

Participant 1: "So I definitely think I was studying differently in my second year … So this journey has made me a different person – it's made me think about different things."

Participant 2: "It's not like I haven't grown up so much. But what does that mean? I know what I want from life and like I know what makes me happy and I know like it's actually the little things so I hate and I love, love, my home. Hmm. So yeah I just feel like I appreciate everything a lot more. I only realised [that she had changed] when I went home that first Easter and my mum was a bit shocked… So now I'm completely fine. So that was it. Was it a conscious thing? I realised that this is what happens to me if I don't look after myself. So that was big learning."

Participant 8: "… it's been difficult this year. In a way it's being me getting used to being myself in a different way. I have to I have to change my understanding of myself and who I am."

Participant 5: "There was a point where I – it was difficult moving away from home and moving away from friends and there was a point in my second year where I realised that it didn't matter what people were doing and that if I didn't see them all the time that didn't matter and I was like a good enough person and a liked enough person to move away and to do different things and I didn't need to be – I think it was like the realisation that being away from people doesn't mean that I don't have relationships with them and I still love them."

As indicated at the start of this chapter, there is a challenge in considering this as process is sited in its collection through reflection. As Trubody describes it,

all activity takes place in being-in-the-world, however, it can't be considered in its moments, only through later consideration of it as ready-at-hand (2013). Nonetheless the student commentaries would seem to suggest that throughout their studies there had been moments of seeing that allowed them to adopt new ways of being ready in the world, in each of these slightly realigning their identity position within the communities of practice available to them. This then would provide a strong foundation from which a phenomenological interpretation of the work can be read against the moments of seeing required for nomadic development. This correlates with Heidegger's consideration of Augenblick, and the possibility that in a moment of seeing, Dasein is opened to an appreciation of alternative possibilities and imagined futures, in the process allowing that individual desire can demonstrate itself in public practice (Heidegger, 1962, p338), in the process allowing that something to take form that had previously been simultaneously present as both there and not-there (Heidegger, 1995, pp60-62).

Participant 1: "I didn't have the time or want just to sit back and be bored in class – there was an opportunity to get involved and have your say but it's better when you have done the work. If you look at the subject then you can contribute in a useful way."

Participant 2: "When I first came up it was like you want to be cool and be like oh yeah I'm in London I'm working in London. … I went home and I think that's when I realised I think like a grown up now you know – I don't care what anyone else thinks. I don't know if it's like getting older and you don't really care so much or whether it's because the social stuff isn't such a high point- I think my initial thinking was mainly because of the social thing… So I'm here because of my passion for dance not because I like it here."

Participant 3: "It does make you think maybe I should have done what … followed what I was thinking [referring to a

previous reflection on wondering whether to start again in another subject] when I realised it wasn't really for me."

Participant 4: "Once I had it sorted in my head it was like oh so good. It's so different to before but when I'd understand it – it was like a slow dawning or a realisation [on how she was meant to be learning]– that's what it was like as for me, so not a moment as I guess I couldn't figure it out for a long time like I say and then it's sort of all of sudden it's like ah that's what it's like I'm okay and I've liked it - then yeah realizing that this was about me and what I wanted to do … So I remember coming back after Christmas break excited because I was thinking there's only different things I could do and achieve what I want to here - and someone else might not do that."

Participant 5: "Coming back I was actually looking forward to being here and that was what made me feel good because I remember in second year I was like not looking forward to it all and I think I was like oh I'm actually looking forward to this and I want to go back and do really well and it felt like I'd turned a corner."

Participant 4: "I've tried to put things in perspective a bit more in Malta it started to make sense because I was so far away from home that I thought life was actually is more important for me than the dancing….. And I guess I saw the realisation there [in Malta]. When I was doing those classes she [the instructor] used to say ah if you want to perform you've got to be strong and you can't cry you know people won't employ you if you are like that and I thought do you know what maybe I don't want to do that. Maybe that's not for me. And then actually I looked into other things. But something from then changed and I relaxed."

Participant 5: "So I think third year is where I've probably matured the most, not so much my personality, more the

way that I'm learning in the way I'm taking on information and the way I'm thinking about after uni and the way that's going to work it seems less scary to me and more like an opportunity and something exciting and something to explore. Yeah like I mean I think they they were things they have been saying to me for a while but I've only just understood them. And I always had that fear doing things wrong and they said, 'OK you need to take more risks'. And I don't because in my head I'm like I don't want to do stuff wrong I don't want to get this wrong. I've been thinking more about that than trying things out and doing it right and even just feeling whatever and taking a risk."

Participant 8: "So yeah I was yeah I compare myself with myself not with other people have I done everything that I could do. Yes. And to some extent it's really boosted my enthusiasm to do other things. It's like if I could go through such a tough thing then then I can go through a lot of things I can really I can do what I want to do but I need to make sure that what I want to do is going to work for me. So yeah I'm pleased with it, not pleased that I was ill but I'm pleased with my learning from this."

6. Findings: the consumer self?

The earlier focus groups of the project demonstrated the consumer identity as being a shared and unifying theme, with the majority of students within those sessions enthusiastic in their to conversations in which they aligned themselves with a collective consumer identity that sat in largest part as in critical opposition to institutional practices. Therefore that this theme was completely absent from all but one of the participants at this stage of the research was the most surprising finding of this stage of the work.

Here, the students' commentaries suggested that the financial aspects of the previous three years had impacted on their understanding of themselves as students only in the sense that is provided an environmental context of being short of money, rather than an identity position constructed in connection with a value-for-money narrative. Indeed only one participant seemingly co-opted this into language that suggested that they saw this as framed within their relationship with the institution, and thus positioning them as consumer.

It is useful to consider this against the context of the institution. Boyer (1997) and Shor (1997) have both pointed to the importance of a collective institutional approach to framing the student experience, shared between academic and professional services domains, but the current fees climate may serve to insinuate considerations of transactional relationships beyond the administrative domains to colour all interactions within the university within this commercialised frame. However, other commentators have pointed to the potential of positive influences within the academic realm in particular which can serve to nuance and restrict this influence (Arboleda and Alonso, 2017). And certainly in this stage of the project, their perceived achievement within the academic realm appeared to have influenced the students' individual perceptions. In contrast to the approach of the focus groups, those participants describing the financial constraints of their experience as individuals positioned it with less rancour, instead seemingly accepting it as a steady, but nonetheless blameless context to the experience of their study.

> Participant 1: "Yeah yeah if you need money you can't do the unpaid internship because the time it would take would mean you can't work. And if you don't have the money you can't live…. I can't do it if I do it unpaid…… I didn't expect it to be as important as it is – there is stuff I can't do and it's

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always on my mind – mainly because I have to work so much to keep it together. I'd planned to cut back on work in my third year so I could study but it hasn't worked out like that."

Participant 2: "No just having that money thing - …. [living] in London means you can't do anything for free."

Participant 3: "In the summer I'd gone back home to work because it just seemed easier to get work … than to live in London because like it's just expensive and it was cheaper to be at home... So yes so I just went home and earnt some money."

As indicated, only one participant co-opted the financial transaction to frame his university experience as an individual consumer.

Participant 6: "We'll pay for service and then we are customers because this is a business and this is how we're being treated, as customers."

Indeed, at this stage of the research the concept of value appeared to be used more widely – with students more interested in the value they perceived their academic teams placed on them as individuals – with this a cause of some dis-ease, but not driving an identity position.

Participant 2: "I don't really feel like part of the community here – I mean I like my teachers here… but I don't feel like there's a connection. In Malta the teacher and I had an understanding and there was something that meant she wanted me to do well. Whereas here I feel like I'm just one of a lot of people."

Participant 6: "It's a shame because I feel the academics we have do not want to engage with pastoral care… they just want to come in and teach you and walk out."

Participant 8: "So a lot of the stuff I was doing I was it could have been different if I had been pointed to the right place at the right time. So the program leader did get me there in the end but it wasn't where they pointed me first and that would have been better."

Conclusion

It is noticeable in the students' individual reflections of their journey that aspects that seemed central to the studenthood of the social group constructed through the focus group stage of the project are absent – most particularly the student as consumer identity – and had extremely limited representation when the students described their journeys. Given the strength of this theme in the social environment, this absence is notable, although it should also be considered against an appreciation that these individual interviews took place with a different sample of students, and importantly, at a different point in the student journey. This tranche of the research took place with about 10 weeks of the final year teaching left, and the visual outlay of the three-year journey used to guide their reflection also then pulled their focus forward into commenting on this thing of being a student that would soon be finished, the end of this phase of studenthood, and all bar one of the students alluded to this within their reflections, in the process indicating an appreciation of the temporality of their adoption of studenthood that had also not been present during the focus groups that took place at an earlier stage in the student journey.

> Participant 1: "I have loved this experience. I'll stop at the end of my third year so happy because I learnt a lot…. There are always deadlines and projects and things I am involved in. I like it – feels like big wins to me – happy moments – both when you are working on and when you have completed a project."

> Participant 2: "So yeah I just feel like I appreciate everything a lot more."

> Participant 3: "I'll be glad to be finished because yeah I know this isn't really what I want to do although I am I don't know. I guess I'm quite proud of myself for doing it knowing that."

Participant 4: "So at the moment I might look forward towards the end of uni but I know when it gets to being out of here I'm going to cry. I'll be crying when it is over because like I have loved it, loved it, here."

Participant 5: "So I'm definitely not the same person but I like the person I've become."

Indeed, these comments go some way to setting the tone in answering the first of the project's research questions: **How and what is it to be and become a student?** And in this phase of the research it is probably fair to say that the students almost see their studenthood as a past thing, their reflections on who they are now position their earlier studenthood as other, with their commentaries in part characterised by a notion of resilience and resistance, an overcoming of obstacles along the path of the previous two and a half years, and the benefit of their being student sitting not in itself but in its contribution to who they have become. Indeed, this commentary on change and transformation is consistent across all bar one of the participants within this phase of the project, the benefit then being the achievement of the self akin to that they desired at the start of the journey. However, the other benefit ascribed to the process of being a student was a coming to know another desired self. This othering of desire was clear in Participants 3, 4 and 5 – for whom the benefit of the transformational studenthood sat in ability to imagine an alternative better self, with the emancipatory project thereby releasing the student from what they now saw as imperfect imaginings.

However, these ambitions and journeyings of self were complicated with some frequency across the students reflections by two forms of loss: the loss of the connection to the desired self, and the loss of the connection to the kinship group of the progamme – with these two elements potentially sitting in some dialectic – with the

students trading resource across the two to meet the needs of particular contexts.

This then allows additional consideration of the second question of the project; **Whether, and if so, how, does the environment of study affect this being?** This question requires more careful unpacking if the essence of the benefit of studenthood emerging from these individual accounts is considered to be a space of transformation. Thus care is required as to draw a defined line between the ready at hand that allows for moments of change, and an external event that is noted, but does not change the individual's trajectory. This said, three of the participants, (4, 5 and 7) speak to a coming to seeing through the same eyes of their academic practice community in a way that has supported a particular shift in their perceptions of themselves and their environment. Participants also commented on the particular environment of their study, although less for its positive contribution to the way they developed and understood their studenthood, and more for moments of anxiety that thereby required them to redefine their engagement with the environment in order to shape their particular engagement with the transformation with the transformation project. In this then it would seem that the environment does shape their transformation, but not their perception of the benefit of it. Indeed, the conversations with the majority of these third year students would seem to indicate that the benefit of studenthood is a very personal one, developed and shaped by the spaces allowed by the university, but driven by the emancipatory self, not these external contexts.

However, the role of the external policy environment in creating this understanding seems less prevalent in these individual reflections. As indicated in the main body of the chapter, a number of students alluded to the financial circumstances of study, but

seemingly only to describe the context of their experience, not to position themselves as disenfranchised consumers of higher education in either a national or institutional context. There was one exception to this, with Participant 1 maintaining a position of outsider consumer throughout his description of his educational journey. It was noticeable that this participant's reflection included very few moments of seeing – and potentially begs the question of whether his dissatisfaction with the University experience was predicated through his being situated as present at hand throughout his journey.

Chapter 8: Discussion

"No wise fish would go anywhere without a porpoise."
Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, Lewis Carroll, 1865

Introduction:

This work set out to explore and provide answers to the following questions: **How and what is it to be and become a student?**, and, **Whether, and if so, how, does the environment of study affect this being?** This chapter collates the findings of this work in both its focus group and individual reflection stages, themed thus far as: the employable self; the self in pain; the consumer self; self-improvement; and moments of vision, alongside themes of intentionality and collective endeavour. It then works to position these against the thematics both of the findings from the examination of policy and those of the literature framing the project. Further it will in these collected thoughts explore how this work serves to extend the sum of existing knowledge in this area.

In the introduction to this project, I draw upon Battaglia's work and suggest that following her idea of personhood being a verb, rather than a noun, signifying the way in which two or more beings perform a relationship (1995), studenthood too might be constructed as a verb – a way of relating in effect as a way of being. I fell into this conceptualisation of being a student very early in this project, not least as it provided a conceptual link to a nomadic consideration of student identity, providing a space in which I could construct a dialogue between Braidotti and Battaglia that allowed the premise of nomadism through a reconceptualisation of student as aspiring citizen within the academic realm. This connection feels prescient against what I believe to be the essence of studenthood demonstrated to me by the participants within this project. In the public realm of the focus group, this relating took the form of a

performative element in the shared public space, in which individuals adopted and recited common understandings that allowed them a relatable kinship, thus providing a sense of belonging. Simultaneously, individually, students appear to be engaged in projects of interior self-development, in this demonstrating a desire for a becoming of some sort, either professional or personal. My reading of this, in both contexts, was that studenthood indeed demonstrates itself as a doing – with being a student demonstrating itself as an engagement in a variety of activities.

Studenthood as flux?

In support of this reading, four of the core themes arising from the work (a drive to employability, self-improvement, self-in-pain, moments of vision and self as change) all signal this movement, this continuous travel, and as such serve to demonstrate studenthood as a project of flux, a shifting thing. In answer, then, how and what is it to be a student, it would appear that within this work, the answer to both how and what is that to be or become a student is to be in flux, and to be committed to that flux. Additionally, the literature suggests the student journey can be considered as a continued progression into the not-known, underpinning this positioning of temporality and flux within the project. Therefore it would seem, the continually- new nature of the academic space, at least as experienced by its student inhabitants, means identity might also be potentially directed by different benefits at different times, for example, the need to graduate well, or to find a placement, or to feel secure in a friendship group. The landscape the participants described was also clearly marked by the hierarchies of power within the institution, which insist that regardless of their desire for a vocational identity within their discipline of choice (a strong theme in this post '92 context), they find themselves primarily occupying a community of practice

bounded by the practices of higher education, which appear to take precedence over their aspirant professional identities and thus provide additional contexts against which students need to relate to maintain their membership of the academic community.

In this way then, both through desire and necessity, this commitment to and requirement for flux was threaded both in the individual and collective responses to studenthood, with comments alluding to travel and change littered across both the focus group and reflective sessions.

Focus Group Participant 2: "It means taking a step back to take a step forward. I don't think of myself as a student. I think of being a student as a means to an end. It means studying hard."

Focus Group Participant 4: "I thought I would be more involved. That first year really confused me, it wasn't what I was used to and I didn't understand it. You only understand it looking back and I could then see what they were trying to get me to do but I couldn't see it at the time."

Interview participant 1: "This is a place where you can see differently coming out of your first year going into a second year."

Interview participant 4: "Once I had it sorted in my head it was like oh so good. It's so different to before but when I'd understand it that a slow dawning or a realisation – that's what it was like as for me, so not a moment as I guess I couldn't figure it out for a long time like I say and then it's sort of all of sudden it's like 'ah that's what it's like'."

These comments suggest a collective and individual appreciation of studenthood as being one in which flux comes to be accepted as a continuous state – and as such would seem to speak not to a denial of an ontological certainty of studenthood but rather to position the flux as that certainty, thus accepting studenthood as nomadic at its essence, ie, that the nature of doing that is being a student is in fact a travelling, in which the thing that changes is the thing that stays the same. Zizek (1999) speaks to the cause maintaining its identity in the effect – and for many of the students describing their journey, this cause is their studenthood – with both the practice and being of studenthood linked not just by the acceptance of flux, but the necessity of it in this it is speaking not only to the idea that the universal is understood only in the particular, but also exemplifying this through the individual and shared descriptions of the becomings of studenthood drawn out in conversation with the participants. However, considering studenthood as a doing, a way of being, then also allows that at certain points, the only way for some students to be students is through a studenthood of not doing studenthood – i.e, that in being other than student they are responding to a point of a loss of desired self, and being other as a process of movement that responds to the dissonance between identity positions (Zizek, 1999, Hall 1996).

This then might suggest that studenthood for those claiming no-studenthood is there, but sitting as alterity to the form of identity refused at that moment of journeying. Indeed, if we acknowledge that this openness to flux could be the universal of studenthood, the theme that appears to emerge from this group of student participants in both the individual and collective environments of research, begins to map the vision of student held dear by the academy itself, that of the student committed to a transformative educational process (Beard *et al.*, 2013; Mezirow, 2004; Shor, 1996;). This version of studenthood in the student body would

seem to sit in contrast to the consumer position held more dear by current political administrations and writ large in the policy literature – a theme I will return to later in this chapter. It also provides fresh understandings for those students working to belong to the student group while denying their own position as student – who in the moment of questioning, or the moment of reflective observation, have alternative versions of themselves driving their activity.

> Focus Group Participant 7: "I say I work in film. I don't claim to be anything in particular but I want those people to see me as part of their community. I don't want to suggest I'm not part of it."

> Focus Group Participant 5: "I don't think I am a student. That means something else. I do what I can to make myself a success despite the university. Being a student is something you can do if you have the time."

> Focus Group Participant 2: "It means taking a step back to take a step forward. I don't think of myself as a student. I think of being a student as a means to an end. It means studying hard."

Flux as nomadism?

This reading then also aligns with the thinking in earlier chapters positioning student identity formation as a nomadic process, in which a sense of the emancipatory provides both the energy and the sounding board against which students set out with agency against their ever-new environment, with this work now suggesting an acknowledgement that flux is not only the process but the goal. However, the nature of this movement, at least as described by these comments from within the focus groups, has links not only to

the nomadic emancipatory but also those themes of self-improvement and employability which emerged within the project, the latter, in particular, prevalent within the group phase of the project.

Therefore, I should be careful in labelling these students as participants in an emancipatory project of growth as part of their developing identity without considering also how this project may also be problematised against the outcomes I claim for it. Cresswell has engaged critically with the co-option of nomadic practice – suggesting its co-option as a tool of resistance is troubled (2007). His criticism suggests that the focus on flux as more beneficial than an appreciation of concrete achievement is not unproblematised. One concern, sitting more neatly alongside the political imperative to drive productivity, is that these wistful nomads, while pursuing a path to continuing enlightenment, are in fact, working to an ethical demand to display an ongoing critique of self, to develop more skill and to better master the challenges of the day (Cresswell, 2007). Sutherland too takes issue with the romanticising of the nomad – and the insistence that in transition the nomad is transitory in contrast to transient – with movement anticipated and agential within a knowing subjectivity, rather than reconsidered and reframed at leisure (Hall, 1996).

Thus, while not refusing a nomadic route to the development of studenthood, or more specifically, studenthood as nomadic route, such critique does have a bearing on the positioning of the project of being student as being one of individual emancipation through the circumstance of joining a collective engaged in this transformational practice. Instead it could be seen that the individual is working to a project of personal self-advancement and change that has previously been co-opted by the state in the service

of its larger ambition for the reframing of higher education in more transactional terms. In this then Sutherland (2014) sees little substantiation of any claim for the desired other of the journeying nomad in fact working to achieve a form of citizenship set up to resist modern capitalism. And indeed, I must acknowledge that within the work, even listening to the participants within a considered phenomenological approach in a bid not to transmit to the students my own desire for this form of emancipatory studenthood to exist, it is impossible for me to be sure that within my interactions with students will not have been without any transfer of my hope, either in informing their engagement with me, or in my interpretation of their voices. However, what may begin to rescue the outcomes of the project from this pessimism is the interesting contrast between public and private students – and the moments when the student voice, as described in Chapters 6 and 7, was shaped by their affective domain and revealed their love of their transformation.

However, while Chapter 7 describes this sense of the individual enjoying a nomadic journey fuelled by the desire for change, Chapter 6 identified an additional facet of the group identity performance that sits more tightly against policy representations of students as consumers – and dissatisfied consumers at that.

> Focus Group Participant 5: We're paying all this money and all we hear at course meetings is 'we can't afford this and we can't afford that'."

> Focus Group Participant 4: "This is the trouble – there isn't enough support. They say there isn't enough money for this and there isn't enough money for that but we're paying and they don't ask us what we want. It doesn't feel like it isn't enough money when it's things the university wants to do

but when it is the things we want they don't come
through."

Focus Group Participant 6: "They should ask us what we
want to spend the money on? There aren't enough
services." [Participant 5] " but they can find £370k to pay
the vice chancellor."

Focus Group Participant 1: "They should think more about
how it is to be an international student. It's a lot of money
and I have to borrow it from my parents and I'm not sure it
always feels like you get value for money. This university
has a lot of international students but it doesn't think about
how it is for us."

As described in Chapter 5, this narrative held strong traction for all
students within the focus group – in this apparently allowing a
space of shared experience that formed the basis of some collective
to which students could belong, for it had no visibility within the
individual reflective sessions.

In it together?

So then, this work suggests that what and how it is to be a student
is both an identity shaped by flux and has this flux as its essence.
However, the work further suggests that studenthood is
experienced concurrently with a need for becoming/belonging that
requires the individual to periodically align with shared group
identities, these group identities emerging in this work in two
forms, firstly as consumers, and secondly as peripheral members of
their disciplinary communities of practice. Thus, while individual
studenthood demonstrates itself in a desire for essential flux, in
social identity, these two additional modes appear sitting at
different degrees of remove from the individual representations of

self. Here then it might be seen that the driver to the collective desire for the nomad cohort is the desire for change/to change/of change but that resting places of certainty are necessary across these lines of sight, with externally provided narratives offering easily visible perches in what might otherwise be an alarmingly unstructured landscape – and therefore understanding these positions of group think becomes important in considering the collective performance of student. Certainly, this sense of the continuing unknown emerged in both focus group and reflective interview sessions:

Focus Group Participant 1: "When I started I didn't know what I should be doing. I didn't live with other students and I had to work out what do… But it is difficult. And then it gets difficult again because you think you understand what's needed in the first year and then in the second year the work gets much more difficult."

Focus Group Participant 4: "That first year really confused me. It wasn't what I was used to and I didn't understand it."

Interview Participant 6: "I was really excited but I think it started to go wrong for me at enrolment - I was I think left in the dark and didn't really know what was going on freshers was kind of borderline for me."

Interview Participant 2: "I don't know because it just felt different at the beginning of this year. "

Interview Participant 1: "It made me realise that I needed to be on top of things and in touch with the course otherwise it was just going to make it more difficult but when you start to do this you know in the process of doing so you are

going to have to try to make sense of some it just by trial and error."

However, these differing identity positions offer a complication in research that is built upon a framework for considering the development of social identity within a model of symbolic interactionalism. For my project is in part predicated a consideration of how nomadism may be co-opted as a process through which to understand how the collective experience of becoming can drive an interior understanding of personal student (or non-student) identity. It seems a resolution of the tension between these themes and the resultant student descriptions of themselves might be found in a review of any assumption that symbolic interactionalism is a conscious and deliberative process. An alternative positioning removes it from the intentionality attached to the nomadic project, instead seeing it as a set of processes that allow sense-making in the absence of the direction of the subject – in this perhaps doing the heavy lifting before the lightbulb moments of seeing that allow for a more conscious resetting of self. This then speaks to Lyotard's conception of a subject concurrently in two forms of existence – the general and the secret – with the general being the public observable region in which, in this case, the student demonstrates their citizenship within the university context. In Lyotard's conception, the secret life is unknown even to the subject, instead operating as a space beyond conscious thought in which ways of being can be interrogated and developed in an internal alterity (Lyotard, 1993). Certainly it seemed clear in working with the students that they had not given any conscious thought to being a student, only to doing within studenthood.

Consuming studenthood?

A consideration of this idea of moments of seeing within the lines of flight of the nomad might then start to offer a positioning of student social identity as consumer. It is perhaps useful here briefly to return to Braidotti's observation that moments of pain allow the subject to choose to co-opt learning that supports their journey only at points where they can free themselves from blaming others (Braidotti, 2009). Certainly, in the student comments from the focus group there is little sense that the collective position allows any moving beyond blame, as indicated in the examples given earlier in this chapter, this is then perhaps amplified through a consideration of the importance of the social sphere of the student group:

> Focus Group Participant 1: "I didn't live with other students and I had to work out what do and I felt quite disconnected."

> Focus Group Participant 3: "I love being with my friends and all the opportunities it offers."

> Focus Group Participant 6: "It's funny that we are all wanting to be more part of things."

> Focus Group Participant 8: "I enjoy working with the others here and I really enjoy my course."

> Focus Group Participant 5: "I thought it would be more student-y.".

> Interview Participant 5: "And then I met a girl that I met at my audition and we became friends and from there I start to feel that more positive because I had someone that I knew."

Interview Participant 6: "I was just enjoying life because I was in halls which was new for me as well which was amazing because I didn't get halls in Brighton and I just enjoyed that community."

Interview Participant 3: "We talked about the work more and we were yeah we were doing more of the practical stuff together and that was better."

This reconsideration of these desires for shared social experience as reducing the possibilities connection to the internal alterity because of the group's strong attachment to blame in the external world might suggest that this social identity becomes bound and static, and disconnected from any personal agency in this domain, rather than evolving and emancipatory as demonstrated by the students' behaviours stimulated by their desire for flux. This then begs an understanding of the benefits that might accrue from adopting this as part of a collective identity stance. This links clearly to the findings of Thomas's *What Works* series for the Higher Education Academy, now Advance HE, (Thomas, 2012) which drew on both literature and practice to demonstrate the importance of creating and maintaining institutional cultures and structures to provide students with a sense of belonging that will support them in the completion of their studies. However, drawing on the work of Butler and others outlined earlier in Chapter 2, the occasional disconnects between the individual and social identities represented by the participants in this research project might suggest that aspects of the performed social identity are developed instrumentally as a mechanism to support group membership, rather than to inform any individual's personal understanding of studenthood.

Certainly in my work, it would seem that the students' co-option of consumerist and value-for-money narratives of the experience of studenthood emerge only in the collective space - with only one of the individual reflections maintaining any strength of commitment to this position once no longer policed by the group. This might therefore seem to indicate that Butler's thinking on the performativity of social identity (1999) is being seen here in the students in group describing back to each other a version of studenthood that is given life by its constant repetition (Klein *et al.*, 2007). In working with the students through this work and therefore beginning to better understand that they are inhabiting (in the case of Middlesex) a remarkably heterogenous space, and maintained within it by their commitment to flux, it is possible, as indicated earlier in this chapter, to consider that finding the commonalities necessary for group cohesion might be problematised, leaving students in search of off-the-peg descriptions provided to them by the wider cultural sphere. And consumer might well fall into this categorisation.

Here then, as indicated in Chapter 2, in order to maintain the group in which the nomad can explore their commitment to flux, the individual has first to be sure that this group is created. Therefore, as previously described, this then requires that community is held together through like-mindedness. In this way, the literature also allows that the individual contribution to the group identity may also bring benefits to the group, and thus benefit the individual through their association with the wider group (Klein *et al.*, 2007). Again, this positioning of individual effort in group formation continues to speak to the theme of the nomad, allowing the multiplicities of identity of the nomadic troupe to be assembled under some named faction, as indicated by Deleuze and Guattari (1987).

It is, however, useful to consider the political positioning of nomadic travel too – with this iterative approach to identity formation also being situated in the emancipatory – Braidotti (2010) situated it as part of a deliberative approach to impact the status quo and grow power for the marginalised group(s). This would appear to have pertinence in this circumstance, with the asymmetry of the power balance in the university also reflected in the student comments. Revisiting the student comments with this in mind allows an additional interpretation (emphasis below mine):

> Focus Group Participant 4: "This is the trouble – there isn't enough support. **They** say there isn't enough money for this and there isn't enough money for that but we're paying and **they** don't ask us what we want. It doesn't feel like it isn't enough money when it's things the university wants to do but when it is the things we want **they** don't come through."

> Focus Group Participant 6: "**They** should ask us what we want to spend the money on? There aren't enough services. [Participant 5 "but **they** can find £370k to pay the vice chancellor."

> Focus Group Participant 1: "**They** should think more about how it is to be an international student it's a lot of money and I have to borrow it from my parents and I'm not sure it always feels like you get value for money. This university has a lot of international students but **it** doesn't think about how it is for us."

Read in this way, the student voice is clearly situating itself beyond the academy, and positioning the experience of being a student as being at odds and remove from the academic community of the

university which is seen as unsupportive and resistant. In his critique of Deleuze's nomadology, Bogue alludes to geographic nomads being required to negotiate "complex relations of dependence, resistance, and accommodation with contiguous states (2004, p174) – yet this description might also accurately describe the circumstance of studenthood in the modern university – with students required to navigate the differential power plays across managerial, administrative and academic functions. In their comments the students would seem to be asserting the desire for deterritorialisation familiar from Deleuze and Guattari (1987), but acknowledging the strength of decision making power that sits beyond their agency. This strength of feeling was perhaps demonstrated more broadly recently in 2018 with over a thousand students signing up to a group action to reclaim fees for contact time withdrawn during the recent UCU industrial action re the USS pension fund, where the opportunity to reclaim agency now seems likely to attract still greater support from the national student community.

But while this oppositional positioning may feel an emancipatory space for students representing as the marginalised nomad of the academic community, my professional knowledges of the nature of the academy make me wonder if adopting these ideologically-laden off-the-peg descriptions instead runs the risk of disadvantaging the students they most clearly target in their personal ambitions for change and growth, with work demonstrating the adoption of a consumerist approach to the project of student being associated with lower academic performance (Bunce *et al.*, 2016). And in this I return to my opening remarks in this work – there is a significant body of literature that suggests the importance of a sense of belonging to ensure students "stick" to their institutions to complete their qualifications successfully. (Thomas, 2012; Tinto, 1990). Put simply, at a point in time where received sector wisdom

is that membership of the collective will support success, the legislation might be seen to be emphasising the individualism of students joining the system. However, with the social driver for kinship strong, these individualised consumer labels appear to be co-opted as badges of group membership. This then prompts questions of whether students, in readily donning on their consumer robes in opposition to the academic community we are attempting to entice them to join, might they be positioning themselves closer to failure by moving to the periphery of an environment designed to provide them with support. Again, this work would seem to suggest that for all students some of the time, and some students all of the time, the community spaces we are developing can leave students isolated – perhaps allowing them to position themselves collectively as consumer within institutions that offer a limited potential for them to engage as such other than in frustration and irritation.

> Interview participant 3: "I don't really feel like I'm part of the community here - I mean I like my teachers here. I go in and be taught by them but I don't feel like there's a connection."

> Interview participant 4: "The teachers do .. projects with like of all the years that become [a] bit awkward when they sort of put you all together. It's the only time they try to make you feel part of anything. I guess it's just because the staff are really distant we have a different lecturer for each subject say depending on what you take."

> Interview participant 2: "But when I got back I was worried because my classes had been rearranged as with different people. I don't know them that well. And I think there was much more things to do like choreographies and stuff. So like it felt a lot more pressure than the year before had."

Interview participant 6: "But you know I don't really feel like I can associate myself with people from other schools because I really feel … there's a totally different mindset."

One of the reflective interviews offered still more light on this. In this particular example, the student had discussed participation in this project with a peer in her cohort who was also involved in the research. She was beginning to look to the next stage of her journey and a commitment to stay in London to begin auditioning to work as a professional dancer and this provided an additional standpoint for her reflection.

Interview Participant 5: "It's been really interesting to me to talk about this with another dancer as we've never talked about this – this navigating of London and what it's like and how we do it on our own. We've just done this thing without realising we were doing it and it's really difficult and it's quite lonely. Because of my passion … and then as a result of being here I've become this thing... And it's difficult. Like I did not want to be in London; I did not like the on-the-go of it. But to do dance they sort of like recommend London…. And that's very scary because I don't know what I'm doing. On the one hand I want it to be over and on the other I don't want it to stop because after school I've just got to audition all of the time and I don't want to do that because I don't want to stay in London but I don't see how I can compete if I go home."

Practising community?

The comment, from interview participant 5, above, points to the other social identity developed within the student body – that of entrant to their varied communities of practice connected to their subject interest. This emerged as a series of descriptions of the

connection of the imagined self at the start of the student journey. And this was an emergent theme within the focus group discussions, where a number of participants spoke at length and with certainty about the instrumental nature of their engagement with education as a necessary precursor to employment. This theme then surfaced again in the reflective interview sessions – where the students began to reflect on identities situated within these practice communities, and to make connections between this version of themselves against their early imaginings of themselves as practitioners as the pre-determined outcome of their activity.

Chapter 2 explored the potential of communities of practice to shape individual identity – through an appreciation of a set of practices that allow the individual to explore and develop shared meanings through participation in these spaces – and to allow each student to position themselves against their vocational community (Wenger, 1998). This was further explored in considerations of focus group outcomes in Chapter 5. However, within the frame of the development of collective identity, it is possible to reconceive this community practice identity not solely as a route to the professional self, but also as an opportunity to fix on other off-the-peg social identities available within the institution that provide access to the group, and the associated benefits of belonging. In contrast to the consumer identity position, the adoption of these identity positions does reposition effective agency back with the nomadic student who can use their desire to become the imaginary other to fuel the necessary resource investment to achieve it. Here then, this practice of becoming, as part of the project of the nomad, may start to create a space of belonging. That is, when the essence of student as being one of flux is nonetheless situated in a desire for a defined other, this seemed to be accepted as part of the repertoire of performance of self, after Butler, that was accepted as in-group identification, even across disciplinary boundaries, as shown in the conversations emergent in the focus group sessions:

Focus Group Participant 7: "If I'm doing something connected to film I say I work in film. I don't claim to be anything in particular but I want those people to see me as part of their community. I don't want to suggest I'm not part of it."

Focus Group Participant 5: "I describe myself as an artist. I'm a spoken word artist and … I feel it's important that I'm seen as part of that community. It's like my programme is just the platform for me to show who I am so I would rather actualise as an artist than as a student."

Focus Group Participant 3: "This was the way for me to be who I wanted to be. I'm studying media and journalism and this was the way. There are lots of others in my course who are just doing the course – but I realised that I had to take every opportunity within the university to make sure I could be who I wanted to be."

Focus Group Participant 6: "I want to be a dancer and this is the next step. It's like I went to a dance school and now I had to do this. I wanted to do this not go to a Conservatoire because this is about becoming your own type of performer."

Indeed, Wenger has described his communities of practice model as one based around groups of people focused on their passion for something they do, who are learning to do it better through regular interaction (2006), which of itself also suggests again the unified nature of Dasein and the world – in which the presence of fellow human beings also creates the context, the world and therefore a Dasein which by default is also a being-with-others in the world (Heidegger, 1988, pp297-8). Here then the context allows the emergence of a discourse that allows a shared understanding

(Heidegger, 1995 pp307-9Given the model initially developed to explore apprenticeship models of learning, it is not surprising this can readily be fitted to the learning of a practice subject discipline within the post-92 context. However, it is also possible to apply this description not only to the process of becoming a professional, but also the process of becoming a student, with the former perhaps obscuring the passion of the latter through its ability to disguise a desire for flux/learning/change in the pursuit of the concrete learning outcomes of practitioner within the academy.

Therefore, it seems that in both reactive (consumer) and active (practitioner) modes, the student accrues benefit from engaging within the collective. Indeed, the students themselves identified this desire for belonging – met or otherwise – both in their collective and individual reflections on their experience of being student as demonstrated in Chapters 6 and 7.

My work would therefore seem to correlate and slightly extend the literature on the what and the how of studenthood, with the nomadic framing allowing an understanding of the individual student as desirous of change and transformation, while their social identity is situated more in the performance of the static positions of consumer and practitioner. With this interpretation possibly providing a reassurance for those within the academy concerned with the apparently instrumental engagement of the student body, providing instead a reading of this behaviour as a public defence or performance to protect the ambition and aspiration of the secret self. And this is perhaps unsurprising in a culture of commercialised higher education. Wagner suggests that marketing creates a desire for a vacuous object, and that in adopting a desire for this constructed product, the individual necessarily aims for something that cannot exist – in contrast to existing and deeper structures that are already filled with meaning (Wagner, 1995). Therefore, the marketised versions of the higher education mission may serve to

obscure the real value of the same as experienced even across the temporary lines of flight of the nomadic student within the academy. Such considerations set the scene for a discussion of my second strand of enquiry, whether and if so, how, does the environment of study shape studenthood.

Environmental impact: whether and how?

Against this theme of investigation, this work has taken one core investigative theme, whether the language of the policy environment demonstrates itself in the students' choice of self-identification. Here I explore the findings of the policy research against an understanding of studenthood as demonstrated by the participants in the study, but position this within an appreciation of the micro-climates of the university environment and their potential contributions to developing studenthood, as these are clearly reflected back in the mood of the participants' social performance of student.

My consideration of policy and strategy documents in Chapter 5 demonstrates a legislative shift in the aim of policy such that the market is given primacy as the tool to drive improvement and efficiency across the higher education sector. That is, that competition and informed choice will drive excellence into a less-than-effective system, with the government regulating to ensure students receive value for money. My review also confirms this development as clear extension of earlier policy positions - and further suggests, in a consideration of the concurrent Middlesex strategy that, at least locally, the university administration describes its ambition for performance back to the governmental, as opposed to the student, view. In this then, it appears that the 2011 stated desire for Students at the Heart of the System is now nothing but a rhetorical device designed to co-opt students in the service of policy in a way that might be seen to have more

commonality with hostages for barter than agents of their own ambition.

Klein *et al*. identified that politicians can co-opt rhetorical devices to construct groups useful to political intent through the development of social identities around themes not traditionally applied in the group setting (2007). This then produces an order to the development of social identity that suggests performance is predicated on identity, which is predicated on context (Klein et al., 2007). The context of the national narrative of student as consumer might then be seen to have taken hold in the performance of student identity within this study.

The ongoing confusion here would then seem to emerge from an environment where, as indicated earlier in this chapter, the consumer co-option of studenthood offers but fails to deliver its promise of agency. Here then sits the challenge to the co-option of the student in the marketisation project, in that the power of the consumer sits only at the point of product choice, not product consumption. Therefore, the student-as-consumer identity might seem to be considered to have no choice but to sit as one of frustration within individual institutions. Thus situated, the national narrative on the fees debate might be seen to equate to a jam tomorrow promise – for the nature of the higher education project is predicated on a set of power relations once within institutions which serve to stifle the effective outplay of consumer power.

Acknowledging this internal inconsistency between the rhetoric of the policy makers and the practices of the academy's nomadic citizens then clearly starts to demonstrate a schism in stakeholder engagement in the higher education project (Fairclough, 2003). The challenges to the 2016 Bill en route to ratification clearly

demonstrated that ignoring the complexity of the contextual landscape was unlikely to make for good governance with the developing dichotomy of student-at-the-centre and student-not-part-of-the-process suggesting a confused understanding of the role of student (Klijn and Skelcher, 2007, p595; Rhodes, 2000, p68). This confusion perhaps dates back to the 2004 Act, where again the co-option of student identity in the service of a developing market received no support.

it could be read that the student/s' habitus is operating in relation to their perception of the social, economic and cultural capital of their individual university within a more nuanced appreciation of power relations of the sector as a whole (Bourdieu, 1977). And thus student identities might be differently assumed across the stratification of the sector for the differential individual advantage that they bestow. This offers another significant strand of enquiry - as to whether and to what extent student identities are shaped by the particular environment of their study and considering whether the community is constructing an alternative appreciation of "student" through the normative practices within a particular context/institution? Additionally, programme, department and whole institutions might all claim to be the domain in which identity formation occurs, with participants committed to activity and outcomes demonstrating a particular competence. This then starts to offer the university environment the opportunity to explore and embed identity through the ability to act as a community. With this community work seen in engagement in shared projects, the exchange of information, and, underpinning this, a care for other members of the community and a concern that in these mutual endeavours support the collective value and stature. This framing seeing the need to engage students, to motivate them to learn, is well supported by students considering themselves as participants in valued collaborative practices delivering useful outcomes (Engestrom, 2009, pp61-3), rather than individual consumers

operating only within a return on investment mindset. And were this to be the case it would be likely to emerge within institutional strategy documents.

Indeed, Vygotsky's positioning of individual thinking as making sense only within an appreciation of its social and cultural processes would seem to suggest that any curriculum intending to support transformational educational change in the student has to be developed within an empathy for them as an individual (Vygotsky, 1978) – not least in an environment which operates appreciative of the multiple interpretations possible within an experiential learning environment (Usher, 2009). This then allows a space within which the student's own imaginings of their arc of flight into a future professional identity can be supported within the context of the institution. These considerations take on extra value with heterogeneous cohorts – where pedagogic input is initially coded in the context it is encountered – but with any resultant transformation then necessarily required to be lived out in any number of settings. These positionings in part driving current ambitions for co-created and co-designed curriculum that speak more strongly to the spirit of partnership and community than more traditional models. These pedagogic practices contribute to the production of a culture of empathy and inclusion: in so doing working to the individual student's own feelings of connection to the University (Thomas, 2012), a proposition tested by the projects included in the HEA's research and found to deliver student engagement and achievement.

There are therefore multiple spaces against and within which student identity formation can take place within the context of the institution, and it is of interest that these are not exclusive, but overlap, allowing multiple spaces to be inhabited simultaneously. However it is also possible to see them as challenges to a traditional

hierarchy within the university, perhaps forcing the academic community back on to other conceptions of students in the day-to-day.

> "I am trying to be a critical-democratic teacher in a setting where critical inquiry and power sharing have virtually no profile in student experience. Faced by this democratic vacuum in every day life, I have no choice but to use my institutional authority to ease into a process of shared power… Needless to say, there are serious limits to such use of unilateral authority to create democratic relations."
> (Shor, 1996, p19)

This example begins to describe again the university as a site of multiple fields and associated habitus creating a landscape of confusing identity traps for unsuspecting students. This landscape, then is still further complicated once an appreciation of "belonging" as being not a singular process but rather with multiple interpretations in a diverse, non-traditional student group (Thomas, 2017). This need not by default create a site of challenge for the student – an alternative view sees this as site of respect for diversity that recognises the relationships between the multiple stakeholders within the academy and systematically and synergistically binds them in a coherent whole (Sizer, 1984). This becoming possible when achieved as part of institutional mission, rather than co-opted by individual communities of practice. In this model, administrators become facilitators of trust (Rogers and Freiberg, 1994) in order to ensure a consistency of power relations that give the student self legitimacy and start to open the transformative spaces identity formation through teaching: learning.

The potential for these spaces to disillusion and dehumanise is significant. It is worth considering how much our administration works in all aspects to empower the student body and provide a site for individual transformation. Still more does this have the power to disenfranchise the individual and set up the non-student identity if at institutional level we fail to acknowledge this alienation (Shor, 1996). Shor argues that contrary to the academy's stated benefit in driving democratic and civic engagement, it frequently fails to create classrooms as sites for the negotiation of meaning, or spaces for the communal framing of purpose. This is a position that is in need of reconsideration if research suggesting that educational subculture, as much as prior attainment – has a role in student attrition (Venuleo *et al.*, 2016) and without thinking carefully about whether we are situating students as being deficit the culture rather than examine our own institutional practices (Smit, 2012). In this it becomes more pertinent still to examine institutional strategies – exploring the ways they acknowledge and navigate the external environment with these internal knowledges. This does suggest an alternative way of constructing the local environment may allow students both to identify with and develop identity within a powerful and empowered academic community of staff and students in a way that reduces the emphasis on transactional behaviours and privileges an aspiration for the transformational – while still delivering engagement, compliance and reputation.

Increasingly too, universities find themselves operating at a time when an understanding of the sites of student identity formation, and a need to reduce any sense of alienation, becomes central to the university mission and reputation. September 2016 saw the publication of a revised set of National Student Survey questions from Hefce – ready for use from the Spring of 2017. These include a new consideration of learning community, namely "I feel part of a

community of staff and students" and "I have had the right opportunities to work with other students as part of my course."

This consideration that our mission becomes situated around an acceptance that there is a need for a student identity that situates itself within the institution is interesting - and despite my enthusiasm for some of the orthodoxies of the learning and teaching communities in attempting to provide an environment in which students belong, it does perhaps serve to obscure the fact that these communities are described by those that inhabit them continually, but rated by those that pass through them with a degree of transience - again suggesting that we construct these identities of belonging for students at some risk. Not least because to allow sites of identity formation within the practices of the academy is difficult. Not least where the main practice in the eyes of the student is teaching. Because teaching well is difficult. Heidegger has it that teaching is more difficult than learning because of the requirement to let learn – and this letting learn within a community of practice requires that learning be connected to the personal meaning of the student in order to facilitate the type of transformative deep learning the university aspires to deliver – with non-inclusive practice delivering what might be considered as surface learning or "learning from the neck up" (Freire, 1970).

But implicit in these statements sits part of the problemendic. The ambition as educators may well be to drive transformational learning – but to achieve this with any authenticity are required to work with the flight lines of individuals within the cohort, not force them to demonstrate those of a previous generation. The particular dominant ideology of Freire's context may not be our own – but it is useful to consider how institutional strategies genuinely approach student groups with the humility, consistency and tolerance

required to value their heterogeneity in the process valuing and respecting the student group (1970).

In this way, if practice is taken as being, perhaps, a contemporary description of Dewey's experience (1938), might we be looking to achieve communities of experience where the nature of exchange is as valid a measure of institutional efficacy as the quality of the resources exchanged. This confluence of the cognitive and affective domain (Best, 1995) starts to reposition achievement and development as not simply seen as an acquisition of skill and/or knowledge but as an evolution of the moral structure of the community itself. This is a development more tricky to establish against the learning outcomes of much of sector provision – albeit speaking more directly to some of the global claims of the benefits of higher education: democratic and civic responsibility and of contributing to their own wellbeing and the wellbeing of others. However, even in this it is worth recognising the institution is requiring not just learning, but also the adoption of a value set, a change requiring the individual to align to our own pre-determined view of an appropriate self.

Additionally, suggestions that the contemporary world has seen a shift from disciplinary power to pastoral power (Tennant, 2009) might be seen to be demonstrated in the pedagogies of co-creation that emerge around the partnership/engagement agenda. However, the inclusion of the biographical and adoption of reflection in learning and assessment are only proxies for the measurement of a shift in institutional culture; the real test, as previously indicated, sits in the culture in which these are produced. In other cases, the role of confessional pedagogies as a route to the creation of a reflective student self might be thought to be providing an alternative discourse as a route to student engagement (Usher, 2009) – but this is potentially seen by students

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as an alternative tool of oppression if the necessary preconditions of this experiential learning, such as self-esteem, have not first been fostered. From this perspective it can been seen that pedagogy must genuinely work in empathy with the individual in order to support them in engaging with the collective: in the process adding pragmatic value to student experience and pulling them back from applying that individuality within a consumerist model more likely to damage their own educational outcomes than be registered as an act of resistance. For here, in the absence of any real power, the only tools students have to work with are the rationing of their own resources of time and effort, with concurrent implications for their own projects of identity formation.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

"Begin at the beginning," the King said, very gravely, "and go on till you come to the end: then stop"
Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, Lewis Carroll, 1865

This work concerned itself with two questions: **How and what is it to be and become a student?** And, **whether, and if so, how, does the environment of study affect this being?**

In responding to the first - **how and what is it to be and become a student?** the work determines that at its essence, studenthood is experienced, after Battaglia, as a verb, rather than a noun, with this be-ing taking the form of the transformational both as goal and as process of achieving this goal. Therefore, the essence of studenthood as experienced by the individual is a commitment to this openness to change. In-group, the social identity of studenthood is then pegged to more concrete titles, and here the political and institutional contexts providing consumer and professional labels would seem to be providing useful handholds for cohorts to catch on to while navigating complex landscapes – thus suggesting both the truth of environmental impact, and its nature.

This then provides the nub of how this work contributes to our existing knowledge. For it would seem to add to our understanding of the consumer student, allowing a suggestion that this identity is performed, public and impermanent, against an alternative interior project of self that ties students more tightly to a transformative model of higher education. In this it is possible to suggest that the policy environment of English higher education may well be producing a student identity which sits in opposition to the University, but one which, nonetheless, serves to bind students to

their cohorts, in this responding to the question of how the environment of study therefore affects this being of studenthood.

It can therefore be read to suggest that studenthood exists in two domains, the becoming and the belonging responding to these private and public spaces. From a practice perspective, it might prompt further consideration of our institutional commitments to this sense of becoming, in the process perhaps allowing the signing of alternative social identity labels that may help students belong in a less oppositional frame than those that took part in this study. There might also be reason to undertake further investigation to consider whether this effect is found beyond the bounds of this one university, in this part of the sector.

This has implication in practice for the university sector. In the particular case of this research, there is an absence of student agency in the strategic documentation surrounding the student body at the time of investigation. It is possible to conceive that an alternative framing of institutional strategy might provide a set of alternate labels available to the anxious student collective, thus allowing a set of handholds to a collective belonging more likely to support a non-oppositional engagement with the 'parent' institution. Indeed, the particular Middlesex strategy under consideration (now replaced by a more student focused one) was to a degree out of kilter with sector practice, particularly towards the end of its lifespan.

Indeed, more frequently now within the academy we focus on the notion of students as partners as an alternative framing of the academic relationship, with myriad internal and external projects both requiring and predicated on a partnership agenda of co-creation or discovery. However, I believe this positioning needs more critical consideration: naming something as partner does not necessarily resolve the power imbalance within the relationship and

I am conscious of multiple spaces within the academy where students are offered, at best, junior partnership and, at times, lip service.

To unpack this and link it back to the implications of this work for shifts in institutional practice, it is perhaps useful to consider the 'who' of this student partnership agenda, and consider whether this offers useful labels within which the student body can cohere in a beneficial social identity. Earlier in this work I alluded to the National Union of Students' Manifesto for Partnership, with this publication usefully detailing the tension between the co-option of the 'representative' (my emphasis) body of the Union as co-producers of curriculum and collaborators as agents of change against the need for the individual student to be engaged in the practice and context of their own learning. In this then, the NUS itself identifies that the future of the Union may lie in acknowledging that the model of individual students as operating as representatives of the student body may need to be re-considered in Union practice, in order to refocus on the empowerment of individuals, in the process recognising that increasingly heterogenous student communities are unlikely to coalesce behind traditional representative structures. This point demonstrated in large part by the proportion of students engaged even in the election of officers at many student unions.

And if this provides challenge for the NUS itself, it becomes further complicated in the practice of University administration, which needs to be able to demonstrate and operationalise relationships with students in a coherent fashion both for external requirement – at institutional review, Teaching Excellence Framework submission, National Student Survey response – and for ease of operation of institutional initiatives.

My work would seem to suggest therefore that the university (and my wider experience, universities) need to consider working with their student unions to drive agency across the student body and allow us to identify and describe the student body in ways that resonate more broadly than might seem to be case at the moment. This work most prominently pushes this conversation to explore the priorities of the student body on its own terms and across its breadth – rather than through either a series of questions predicated on our priorities, or a representative system in which a minority of students vote for individuals whose views most closely reflect their own. In this way, we may all benefit from the opportunities offered by placing institutions in the service of the concerns of their communities. My observation, after working with students for nearly two decades, is that there would be nothing to lose for either party in this activity, rather that the ability to frame our collective problems from multiple perspectives may offer useful solutions beyond our current sight – our own moments of seeing, perhaps.

However, alternative conversations of themselves do not alter the fundamentals of power dynamics which see governments prompt students into consumer positions in ideological rather than practice realms – and thus set up anxieties and tension once the consumer has made their only financial agential decision at the start of their studies. We might, therefore, as universities, do more to acknowledge rather than refuse the nature of this relationship, and allow that this ongoing dialogue into the allocation of spend would allow us a more authentic commitment to students as partners internally, even while the external agenda works to disrupt and confuse this relationship.

This becomes important in the current political clime. It seems clear to me – and many other commentators – that since the ratification of the last higher education act, the sector has been

forced into a defensive position of self-justification, with continual attacks on value for money, vice chancellors' pay, Mickey Mouse degrees, and graduate premiums suggesting we operate in a space of self-serving indulgence quite at odds with the commitment to public goods, civic mission and student success that characterises the practices I see in my own institution(s) in policy and practice.

Therefore, that the latest commitment to supporting student mental health comes with an undercurrent of universities having previously not done enough in this domain is perhaps unsurprising. Therefore, we might usefully ask whether this latest observation of our failings (against the evidence base that suggests students are less likely to commit suicide than the wider population) is pure in its intent to drive up standards, rather than sow more seeds of discontent.

Here then again it seems that a conversation with the student body within institutions that acknowledges, rather shies away from the political context for fear of discussion of the uncomfortable or awkward would be of benefit. A transparency of communication that allows for the context to be acknowledged, rather than left unsaid, might allow more nuanced outcomes in determining institutional priority which are shared across our communities with staff and students both appreciating the complexities of our circumstance and developing better solutions in response.

These practices would then speak to this work as identifying that the nature of studenthood is determined both by the student and their environment, these descriptions of it are determined both by the focus and nature of this investigation. By this I suggest that having positioned the work in critical theory, and explored it through a phenomenological framing of symbolic interactionism, its ambition was to surface the interpellation of state (in both governmental and institutional terms) and the construction of

studenthood. Similarly, this framing of the world as ideology no doubt explains the attraction for me of a model of identity formation situated around the emancipatory nomad responding as transient intentional citizen of both their institutional and temporal context. The surprise then for me in this work is less the intentionality of the nomad student towards their desired imaginary self, but rather the intersection of this flight line with moments of seeing that bring alternative futures to life for them. In this then it would seem that the potential for the state and the lifeworld to hold themselves apart might be a fundamental requirement of a nomadic engagement – with emancipation occurring not only against the dominant ideology, but against its capacity to dominate.

This then has echoes in the practice, as well as the findings of my own nomadic journey as PhD student - in that the methods selected for the exploration of the topic, in allowing connections to surface rather than drive them into the project, served to refuse my own initial political positioning of outcome – and drove me to another worldview of studenthood.

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Appendices:

Appendix 1: Participant Information Sheets
Appendix 2: Participant Consent Forms
Appendix 3: Policy Documentation
Appendix 4: Reflective Prompt

Appendix 1: Participant information

Participant information sheet (Focus Group)

Study Title:
An exploration of found value within individuals' perceptions of student identity

My study aims to explore how students choose to identify themselves – and what they perceive are the benefits of the choices they make about their identity while at university.

I would like to invite you to take part in a focus group to support the study. Before you decide you need to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Ask questions if anything you read is not clear or would like more information.

The study will form part of my PhD research.

I will be working with up to 20 students in three focus groups. You have been invited to take part through random selection after you demonstrated initial interest in the project

Please read this information to see if you still wish to take part. If you do wish to do so, I will ask you to sign a consent form to show you have agreed to take part. However, even after signing this, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time, without giving a reason. What will my involvement be?

- There will be one focus group session for you to take part in lasting approximately 70 minutes
- I will use some prompts to encourage the group to speak about topics pertinent to the project:
o How do you currently introduce/describe yourself in different contexts
o Why did you choose to become a student
o What is your own definition of " student"
o When do you feel most/least like a student? Is it your primary identity
o In what ways do you feel part of your subject community?
o Other prompts will be drawn from the policy literature
- It is not anticipated that sensitive topics will be discussed as part of the focus group, but it is not impossible that other participants may introduce topics some students could find uncomfortable.
- The session will be recorded to ensure there is an audio record to augment and check the written notes I will take at the time
- Although I may quote your words within the study, your identity will remain anonymous.
o individual participant research data, will be given a research code, known only to me.
o A master list identifying participants to the research codes data will be held on a password protected computer accessed only by me
o electronic data will be stored on a password protected computer known only by researcher
o However, there are limits to your anonymity as you will be contributing within a focus group, along with other participants to whom you will be known, and the material you contribute may allow you to be identified.
- If you withdraw from the study I will only use the data collected up until the point of your withdrawal.
- If you wish to withdraw from the study, send an email indicating your choice to withdraw to jboddington@cardiffmet.ac.uk.There is no penalty for withdrawal and you are free to leave the study whenever you wish.

I cannot promise taking part in the study will help you individually –
but any information I get from the research may help to increase the
understanding of how students can be better supported at the
university.
If you have a concern about the study, you should contact the
project supervisor Professor Paul Gibbs (p.gibbs@mdx.ac.uk).

Participant information sheet: (Interview)

Study Title:
To be or not to be?
An exploration of found value within student identities

My study aims to explore how students choose to identify themselves – and what they perceive are the benefits of these distinct identities.

I would like to invite you to take part in an interview to support the study. Before you decide you need to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Ask questions if anything you read is not clear or would like more information.
The study will form part of my PhD research.
In this tranche of the study I will initially contact 3 students. You have been invited to take part through random selection after you took part in the focus group. I am intending to use snowball sampling – and would be grateful if you could ask another student to contact me who could take part in this project.
Please read this information to see if you still wish to take part. If you do wish to do so, I will ask you to sign a consent form to show you have agreed to take part. However, even after signing this, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time, without giving a reason.
What will my involvement be?

- There will be an interview for you to take part in lasting approximately 60 minutes – you will be paid for your time (@£10 per hour).
- This will form part of a research project that will last approximately 12 months
- I will use some prompts along the span of the student journey to ask you to remember your sense of being a student at different times.
- It is not anticipated that sensitive topics will be discussed.
- The session will be recorded to ensure there is an audio record to augment and check the written notes I will take at the time
o Although I may quote your words within the study, your identity will remain anonymous, however, the material you contribute may allow you to be identified.
o individual participant research data, will be given a research code, known only to me.
o A master list identifying participants to the research codes data will be held on a password protected computer accessed only by me
o electronic data will be stored on a password protected computer known only by researcher
- If you withdraw from the study I will only use the data collected up until the point of your withdrawal.
- If you wish to withdraw from the study, send an email indicating your choice to withdraw to jboddington@cardiffmet.ac.uk.There is no penalty for withdrawal and you are free to leave the study whenever you wish.

I cannot promise taking part in the study will help you individually – but any information I get from the research may help to increase the understanding of how students can be better supported at the university.
If you have a concern about the study, you should contact the project supervisor Professor Paul Gibbs (p.gibbs@mdx.ac.uk).

Date:

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Appendix 2: Participant consent form

Focus Group/Interview Consent Form

Research project title: To be or not to be?
An exploration of found value within individuals' negation of student identity

Research investigator: Jacqui Boddington

• I agree to participate in the student identity focus group/interview carried out by Jacqui Boddington at Middlesex University, to aid with the research of her PhD project into the benefits of refuting student identity.

• I have read the information sheet related to the project and understand the aims of the project.

• I am aware of the topics to be discussed in the focus group.

• I am fully aware that data collected will be stored securely, safely and in accordance with Data Collection Act (1998).

• I am fully aware that I am not obliged to answer any question, but that I do so at my own free will.

• I agree to have the focus group/interview recorded by dictaphone, so it can be transcribed after the focus group is held.

• I am aware that I can make any reasonable changes to this consent form.

Signed:

Print name:

Date:

Appendix 3: Policy documentation

Success as a Knowledge Economy: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/523546/bis-16-265-success-as-a-knowledge-economy-web.pdf

Students at the Heart of the System
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/31384/11-944-higher-education-students-at-heart-of-system.pdf

Middlesex Strategic Plan 2012-17

https://www.mdx.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0025/49642/MDXStrategicPlan_2012-2017_updated_V3.pdf

Appendix 4: Reflective prompt