Transition to University: An Interplay Driven by Student Agency

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Transition to University:
An Interplay Driven by Student Agency

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Abstract

The transition of students into their first year of their undergraduate university studies is of great interest to higher education institutions, because of its relationship with the relative success of students, including the high attrition rates that can occur during this period of time, and the financial, personal and social costs associated with this attrition. Research into student transition has been conducted over many years and has predominantly followed one of two strands. The first strand investigates the approaches by universities to the support of students as they make this transition, and this research is frequently focused on programs to increase retention and progression rates and reduce attrition rates. The second strand of research into student transition investigates the lived experiences of the students. This approach to research is person-centred and describes states and patterns of experiences. Neither strand entirely addresses the question of how transition is negotiated by the students as they respond to the university’s initiatives and requirements; that is, as they engage with the university and their courses of studies.

This thesis looks at transition as a process of ‘becoming’; an iterative cycle of adaptation that occurs throughout a person’s life course and, in the context of transition into higher education, as students engage with their universities. This research is undertaken from a person-centred perspective using reflexivity as a lens through which to focus on student agency as students make choices and take actions in pursuit of their studies.

This research is framed within a social constructivist paradigm. It adopts a constructivist epistemological stance and a relativist position on ontology. Theoretically it is framed by Interpretivism and has been designed as a narrative inquiry. Ten participants were involved in the study and each provided video diaries (here termed ‘video selfies’) on a weekly basis and participated in up to three semi-structured interviews. Separate narratives were developed for each of the ten participants and an analysis of these ten narratives was
undertaken using Kahn’s (2014) view of student engagement, as driven by student agency mediated by reflexivity, as the analytical framework.

The findings of this narrative inquiry reveal the transition experiences of the participants to be an affect-driven, relationship-oriented process of engagement. This process of engagement entails four key features. Firstly, these participants viewed their transition from a lifetime perspective and this influenced their decisions and actions. Secondly, the participants managed transition through the exercise of their individual agency, mediated by reflexivity, and relied on their student-peer relationships in this process. Thirdly the participants’ exercise of agency involved both affect and emotions. Finally, the participants brought with them to their studies a conception of an existing relationship with the university, which they conceived to be reciprocal.
Acknowledgments

I owe a huge thank you to many people, which is ironic given how many hours I have spent sitting on my own at my computer!

Firstly, to my three supervisors: Associate Professor Margaret Wallace who has been a dedicated guide, mentor and navigator and from whom I have learnt much about the ‘under labouring’ involved in university research; Professor Ian Solomonides with whom I began this journey at Macquarie University and whose support and consistent faith in my ability has kept me going; and finally to Associate Professor Marcus O’Donnell, whose ability to get to the gist of a thing and communicate it clearly has greatly benefited this research.

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Finally, I wish to acknowledge and thank Dr Naomi Parry for providing editorial advice and Kate Matthews for formatting the document.
Certification

I, Joanne Dearlove, declare that this thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the conferral of the degree Doctor of Philosophy, from the University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. This document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Joanne Dearlove

6 July 2018
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Chapter 1: Introducing this study

1.1 Introduction

Both universities and students have an interest in how students make the transition into their first year of higher education studies. Successful transitions, often defined as student retention, affect the funding universities receive (Krause, 2006; Lomax-Smith, Watson & Webster, 2011) while the loss of students, or student attrition, is associated with financial costs to the universities (Adams, Banks, David & Dickson, 2010). For students, the success or otherwise of their transition affects them personally, socially and financially, especially in an environment where their future employment opportunities and remuneration depends on their university qualifications and where study not only costs them in terms of foregone earnings but can trigger debt through the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) and Higher Education Loan Program (HELP).

Research into transition generally reflects these two main loci of interest: students’ lived experiences (for example, Stone & O’Shea, 2012, 2013; O’Shea, 2015, 2016; Brown, Hughes, Keppell, Hard & Smith, 2015; McMillan, 2013, 2014) and research from an institutional perspective that usually has a curricula and co-curricular focus and often measures attrition, retention and progression (for example, Kift, 2015; Kift & Nelson, 2005; Nelson, Clarke & Kift, 2009; Nelson, Clarke, Kift & Creagh, 2011). Research that is focused on either of these two different loci of interest misses the opportunity to investigate the interconnected relationship between students and universities. This has led to an impoverished understanding of the complex process of transition because it does not take into account the ways students make choices and take actions (that is, exercise agency) during transition in response to institutional

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1 HECS and HELP are Australian Government student loan schemes (The Department of Education and Training, 2017)
initiatives and requirements. The exercise of agency in response to unfamiliar university situations is an adaptive process and involves reflexivity, or the deliberating process people use in order to decide a course of action (Archer, 1995, 2000, 2003, 2007; Kahn, 2014), and the pursuit of personal objectives within the university context. This adaptive process constitutes a view of transition as ‘becoming’, defined by Gale and Parker (2014a, p. 737) as ‘a perpetual series of fragmented movements involving whole-of-life fluctuations in lived reality or subjective experience, from birth to death’. This adaptive process is, then; iterative, involves multiple subjectivities, and takes place throughout an individual’s lifetime.

The study reported in this thesis investigates transition from this perspective of ‘becoming’. It focuses attention on students’ choices and experiences (transition viewed from the students’ perspectives) made in response to curricular and co-curricular contexts (transition viewed from the institutional perspective). The framework that supports this study integrates perspectives from two key theorists; Kahn (2014, 2017) and Ahmed (2001, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c). Kahn’s (2014) theorising of student engagement as agency mediated by reflexivity provides the analytical framework for this study. Kahn’s approach to reflexivity separates agency (an individual’s capacity to make choices) from structure (the influence of society on an individual) following Archer’s work (1995, 2000, 2003, 2007). Kahn (2014) linked agency to students’ engagement with their studies in the context of higher education. Ahmed’s work (2001, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c) on the sociality of affect, that is, the way in which emotions serve to connect and disconnect people, provides an interpretive lens through which to understand the socio-relational nature of the connections between institutions and students and between students and other students as they employ different types of reflexivity to support their agency.

1.2 Motivation for the study
In my time as a learning developer/learning skills advisor across three universities in Sydney, I have had the privilege of working with many students as they travel the path from enrolment to graduation – working with newly enrolling students has usually taken up to half of my time. More than two thirds of the students I see each year are in
their first year of enrolment in their degree, whether they are taking undergraduate courses or a postgraduate degree. Their commencement is inevitably an emotional roller coaster, stretching them to the limit. As a learning developer working on a small campus, I am a part of their stories as both audience and participant. They are rich, vibrant, holistic stories of lives lived within and beyond the institutional context and in relationship with others who are also within and beyond the institutional context. These stories involve meanings and purposes beyond the acquisition of knowledge and competencies, beyond retention rates and attrition rates, beyond qualifying for the award of a degree or a job, yet I do not recognise any such purpose-driven, cohesive stories in the research into transition.

My experiences, as I have participated in these students’ lives, have led to my desire to better understand how students negotiate transition – its meanings for them and the manner in which they make choices about this period of their lives – and to add these stories to the research conversations about transition into undergraduate studies.

The following section briefly provides a rationale for the study reported in this thesis by locating the study within existing literature on transition into undergraduate university studies and outlining the importance of understanding transition from the perspective of students’ agency.

1.3 Research context for this study
As I have already noted, transition into undergraduate studies falls largely into two parallel strands: institutional perspectives on transition and research into students’ lived experiences of transition. There is extensive research into transition programs and their outcomes with a co-curricular or curricular focus (for example, Kift, 2015; Kift & Nelson, 2005; Nelson et al., 2009; Nelson et al., 2011); that is, transition is considered from an institutional perspective. Phenomenographic research into the students’ lived experiences during transition is a more recent approach to researching transition. This approach provides information about transition as experienced by the students and highlights the emotionally charged nature of this experience for students (for example, Stone & O’Shea, 2012, 2013; O’Shea, 2015, 2016; Brown et al., 2015;
McMillan, 2013, 2014). However, the transition situation is complex, as is any phenomenon of human behaviour that is influenced by the context within which it takes place. This contextual influence makes it important to pay attention to the interconnectedness of the students’ experiences and their learning contexts and to investigate the choices students make in response to these contexts during transition.

Understandings of transition in response to particular institutional contexts are unusual. Gale and Parker (2014a, 2014b) have categorised transition support programs across the United Kingdom, the United States and Australia into three main types of programs: ‘induction’, ‘development’ and ‘becoming’ programs, each with different assumptions about transition. ‘Induction’ and ‘development’ programs are common and ‘becoming’ programs are rare. However, Gale and Parker point out the value of ‘becoming’ programs in which transition is a shared responsibility between universities and students (Gale & Parker, 2014a), that is, transition involving interaction between universities and students. Such interactions require a thorough understanding of the role of agency (the individual’s capacity to make choices) and of structure (the influence of society on an individual) as perpetuated through a university context (curricula and co-curricular) during transition. This necessitates research that pays attention to students’ lived experiences and choices as responses to and within their particular institutional contexts. The study reported in this thesis uses Kahn’s (2014) work (based on Archer 1995, 2000, 2003, 2007) on student agency, mediated by reflexivity, as the driver of student engagement to analyse participants’ experiences and choices in response to their studies during transition.

The affective experiences of the participants are considered from the perspective of the sociality of affect based on Ahmed’s (2001, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c) work. Combined, the investigation of agency (mediated by reflexivity) and the sociality of affect provides insights into transition as ‘becoming’: an adaptive, iterative process that involves interactions between universities and students as students pursue their studies within the context of their life goals. This study therefore adds significant detail to understandings of what transition as ‘becoming’ (Gale & Parker, 2014, 2014a) looks
like in the higher education transition context.

1.4 Rationale for the study
Despite extensive research into transition, it remains difficult to predict which interventions will work and for whom (Higher Education Academy, 2016). This suggests there is more to be known about transition so as to better predict program and individual student transition outcomes and to provide more appropriate transition support. Understanding transition as ‘becoming’ offers a means to understand and therefore support transition into higher education from the perspective of student agency. The benefits of successful transitions accrue to all the stakeholders; students, and universities.

The costs associated with unsuccessful transitions are high and best avoided. Unsuccessful transitions can result in attrition. Non-completing students who withdraw after the HECS census date in any semester (this date usually falls at the end of week five) still accrue the HECS debt. Those who do not complete their first semester of study also incur opportunity costs related to income foregone, loss or delay of other educational or employment opportunities, and they may experience a loss of confidence or feelings of failure. Students who do not complete also do not develop the capacity for agency that transition as ‘becoming’ can engender.

Attrition also impacts universities negatively. Adams et al. (2010) estimated the economic costs of attrition to the Australian higher education sector in 2008 and averaged them to estimate the costs borne by each university. Their estimates are based on the loss of revenue to universities accruing from non-completion by both international and domestic students as well as the lost income from unrealised student enrolments (domestic and international) and the actual marketing and recruitment costs. Adams et al. (2010) calculated the average financial loss for each public university in 2008 to have been $36 million (p. 17). Adams et al. (2010) also calculated the rate of savings per one percent reduction in attrition to be $2.6 million per university, based on the income savings that accrue to the retention of domestic and
international students, and the reduction in the costs of recruiting students to take the place of those who would leave their studies.

In contrast, the benefits of remaining in university accrue to universities and to completing students and include financial, social and personal benefits. The university benefits financially because of the funding attached to retention rates (Krause, 2006; Lomax-Smith et al., 2011; Adams et al., 2010). Students benefit financially by improving their earning capacity as a consequence of obtaining a university qualification (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016). Socially and personally, the students also benefit through their achievements and the sense of self-worth that accrues to the achievement of goals and objectives (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Students can also benefit from successful transitions by increasing their capacity to exercise agency (Case, 2013, 2015b), giving them greater flexibility in how they negotiate their lives.

1.5 Research question
To guide this study, I developed the following research question:

*How do first year undergraduate students experience their transition into university studies and how might the stories they tell of this time illuminate their processes of agency?*

To address this research question, I developed a person-centred and longitudinal research design to capture student agency, as exercised through reflexivity in the process of engagement with studies, throughout the early period (first semester) of transition. The following section briefly explains the research design choices used in the conduct of this study.

1.6 Overview of the research design
To explore the research question I used a qualitative research method to permit a focus on the complex web of interactions that occur during the process of transition. I employed a narrative case study design to provide a spotlight on the agency of the individual research participants as they made choices during their transition into undergraduate studies. This design enabled a longitudinal research focus suitable to the investigation of processes. It also provided a person-centred approach to research,
suitable to the highly individualised nature of the process of transition.

1.7 Significance of the study

The focus on student agency used in this study offers a view of transition as ‘becoming’ (Gale & Parker, 2014a, 2014b), which has, to date, been more an aspiration or a goal than any particular practice (Gale & Parker, 2014a). The process of enacting agency in conditions of unfamiliarity and uncertainty, such as entering undergraduate studies, can lead to changes in an individual’s capacity to manage situations as they forge paths for themselves through the unknown. This study responds to calls for an ontological view of learning (Dall’Alba & Barnacle, 2007) in conditions of supercomplexity (Barnett, 2007) by focusing on the process of engagement, driven by student agency, as students transition into their higher education studies.

The findings of this study are of practical significance to the higher education sector and individual institutions in the areas of pedagogy and curricular design. The findings of this study can inform programs that enhance student agency through assessment design, co-curricular support programs and supporting the rethinking of student-staff interactions. These areas for potential application of the findings of this study are explored in the final chapter of this thesis.

Finally, this study begins to open a space for further research into transition as ‘becoming’; a process driven by student agency. Conducting research into transition from a person-centred perspective can support investigation of transition as ‘becoming’ by focusing on the individual as the unit of analysis and not on pre-determined time periods or particular academic outcomes measures.

The rest of this thesis expands on this introductory chapter by providing detailed arguments for the study’s placement within existing research into transition, a detailed rationale for the conduct of the study and a description and analysis of the findings. The final chapter provides a summary of the study, including its contributions to
1.8 Outline of the thesis

This first chapter, the introduction, is an overview of the study reported in this thesis and explains its genesis, the research design and a brief rationale for the design choices, the significance of the research and its connections with existing research and literature.

Chapter Two: Literature Review outlines the existing literature relevant to this research. Kahn’s (2014) view of student engagement is proposed as a lens from which to investigate the interactions of students within the institutional context of programs policies and practices – a means of bridging the two main research strands into transition (curricula or co-curricular and the students’ perspective) by focusing on student agency. In the review, I identify and discuss areas of thematic overlap in the literature on student engagement and transition.

Chapter Three: Methodology outlines the methodological perspectives framing this study and the research design. The study is framed epistemologically within social constructivism and theoretically within Interpretivism in order to support the person-centred, longitudinal research design necessary for the investigation of individual student’s agency during transition. A narrative inquiry is adopted for its capacity to capture the interactions between students’ understandings and their in situ choices.

In Chapters Four and Five, I present the narratives of each of the ten participants on the basis of the data collected using their individual video diaries and semi-structured interviews. Chapter Four presents the narratives from the participants who participated in interactions with their student-peers for comparative purposes or who avoided interactions with their student peers. Chapter Five presents the narratives from the participants who interacted collaboratively with their student peers. Together, these chapters provide a rich picture of the embodied, holistic and student-controlled processes of transition as ‘becoming’.
Chapter Six: Interpretive Restorying provides an interpretation of the narratives presented in chapters four and five using Kahn’s (2014) framework of engagement through agency mediated by reflexivity. The ten narratives reveal four key features of transition as becoming. These four features, when combined, provide details of transition experiences that show social engagement and academic engagement are inextricably entwined.

Chapter Seven, the conclusion, summarises the findings of the research and outlines the implications of these findings for understanding transition into university studies and identifies the limitations of this research, as well as areas for future inquiry.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction
As outlined in Chapter 1, this study seeks to understand transition as an ongoing, person-centred process of engagement with university studies that is driven by student agency. It draws on two main areas of research: research into transition and research into student engagement. This chapter reviews the chaotic literature on student engagement (Trowler, 2015) and the complex literature on student transition.

In the field of transition, there is an extensive body of work investigating transition from co-curricular (orientation and support) and curricular (planned learning) perspectives. Outcomes are often summarised as attrition, retention or student progress throughout a subject. This body of work provides important information about the outcomes of transition from an institutional perspective. However, rates of attrition, rates of retention and other forms of institutional measures of outcomes reflect a pre-existing definition of transition employed by researchers who have tended not to seek student experiences and views of successful transition. There is a growing body of research into students’ lived experiences, largely undertaken using phenomenological research methods. Still, the linkages between research into institutional approaches to, and responsibilities for, transition and that into students’ lived experiences, remain poorly articulated. This impoverishes understandings of transition. This study lies at the intersection of these two bodies of research into transition. It connects the emotional, social and relational experiences of students to their decision-making within the educational context of entering into first year undergraduate higher education studies.

This study uses the concept of student engagement to investigate the processes of student agency, mediated by reflexivity, by which students interact with and within higher education studies during their first semester of their first year of enrolment. It draws on Kahn’s (2014) theory of student engagement, which is in turn based on the sociologist Margaret Archer’s (1995, 2000, 2003, 2007) work on structure and agency,
to provide a theoretical framework for the analysis of the experiences of transition obtained for this study. This study, then, draws on the literature on student engagement and on transition to provide insights into transition as a process driven by student agency and mediated by student reflexivity.

Both the terms ‘transition’ and ‘engagement’ have been used in multiple different ways for multiple ideological and practical purposes. One of the challenges of research in the fields of transition and of engagement is to be certain of the particular ideological perspectives used in any single study. This review, then, discusses the perspectives and definitions underpinning the use of these two terms in the existing literature. I begin by defining transition and then present three themes that emerge at the overlap of the literature on transition and on student engagement:

- Institutional influences and student agency
- The role of student belonging
- Sociality and the affective context of student ‘becoming’

Viewing transition in parallel obscures the essentially interconnected relationship between universities and students. I argue that a process-oriented view of student engagement, which highlights student agency as mediated by reflexivity, can bridge approaches to student transition that too strongly emphasise either an institutional influence on transition or an approach which highlights students’ lived experiences.

2.2 Transition

One of the challenges in making sense of the literature on student transition into higher education relates to the definition of the concept of transition. As Trowler (2015) writes, ‘Research needs to have conceptual clarity if it is to be useful’ (p. 295). However, it is not unusual for research in this field to contain no definition of the term ‘student transition’ or, alternatively, to offer a definition that relates only to a particular point or period of time (Nelson et al., 2011). The ideological and theoretical framework of such works can be difficult to discern. There are multiple ways of
considering the concept of student transition and this is explained by Ecclestone, Biesta and Hughes (2010): ‘Since the idea of transitions function in different practical and theoretical contexts, it should not come as a surprise that there is no agreed-upon definition of what constitutes a transition’ (p. 5). These different conceptualisations of transition influence who is considered responsible for transition, what changes during transition and when transition is believed to begin and end.

2.2.1 Research from an institutional view of transition

Research into transition frequently focuses on institutional roles and responsibilities and on institutional measures such as attrition and retention (Harvey, Drew & Smith, 2006). In Australia, Kift and colleagues have published widely in this area over the last decade (for example: Kift, 2015; Nelson & Clarke, 2014; Nelson et al., 2011; Kift, Nelson & Clarke, 2010; Nelson, Clark & Kift, 2009; Nelson, Kift & Creagh, 2007: Kift & Nelson, 2005). Kift and colleagues have promoted a whole-of-institution approach to transition that they have described as ‘transition pedagogy’ (Kift et al., 2010). This research evolved from a focus on co-curricular approaches to supporting transition that has been termed a ‘first generation approach to transition’ (Wilson, 2009). The ‘second generation approach to transition’ (Wilson, 2009) focused on curricula. The ‘third generation approach to transition’ referred to the implementation of both co-curricular and curricular approaches in combination (Kift et al., 2010) and this third generation combined approach was followed by a fourth approach, called the student engagement success and retention maturity model (Nelson & Clarke, 2014). This fourth approach built on the ‘generational approach to allow an assessment of institutional capacity to initiate, plan, manage, evaluate and review institutional FYE [sic] practices.’ (Nelson & Clarke, 2014, p. 23). These four approaches to supporting transition were all institutionally-driven and focused on universities adjusting and aligning services such as student administration, counselling, learning support and careers as well as subjects and courses to better support student transition. They typically associated transition with a defined time period such as first year (eg Nelson & Clarke, 2014) and evaluation frequently involved measuring outcomes such as attrition, progression and retention rates.
Kift (2015) argued that an institutional focus is the alternative to using what she defined as a deficit understanding of the students. That is, rather than locating the responsibility and, often, blame for unsuccessful transitions with students, institutions must take responsibility for the conditions they create which hinder or help students make the transition into university. This counteracted a previously dominant assumption that transitions would be successfully completed (James, 2011, p. ii) and so represented acknowledgement by institutions of a need to support student transition.

This focus on institutional responsibilities for transition is widespread. For example, the briefing paper developed by Harvey and Drew (2006a) and based on a UK Higher Education Academy literature review, included the following implications for practice:

Gradual induction through a week-long program (or longer) appears to be positive. However, this needs to be linked to the program of study and involve active participation by students. If this involves informal contact with staff as well this appears to be beneficial. Integrated induction (for example, to academic requirements and skills) throughout programs and contextualised for a program is particularly helpful. Induction is important for retention, mainly because it provides an opportunity to assist adjustment and integration (p. 11)

Approaches that prioritise institutional responsibility in helping students to transition have led to reconsideration by universities of the manner in which they treat their students and the difficulties students face as they enrol, participate and study.

Research and initiatives which focus on the institutions’ responsibilities and on student outcomes measures make valuable contributions to the complex picture of transition, but are largely silent on the students’ perspectives and agency; how students make choices and take actions in response to the institutions’ initiatives.
Other literature that investigates institutional measures of attrition and retention during transition focuses on the student as the locus of change, identifying demographic markers of likely success and failure. Some examples of this includes research by Cantwell, Archer and Bourke (2001), by Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak and Terenzini (2004). The increasing massification (Trow, 2000) of higher education has contributed to greater diversity in incoming student cohorts and this has drawn more recent institutional attention to the retention and attrition of non-traditional demographic subgroups such as first-in-family (for example: Seay, Lifton, Wuensch, Bradshaw & McDowelle, 2008; Spiegler & Bednarek, 2013; Coates & Ransom, 2011; Ishitani, 2006), mature-aged students (for example: Tyler-Smith, 2006) and underrepresented groups (See, for example, Hicks and Wood’s (2016) meta-synthesis of the experiences of students enrolling in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) courses in historically black colleges and universities).

These two approaches to transition – a focus on institutional responsibilities for transition support and a focus on identifying features of students likely to lead to success – each obscure the interconnectedness of students’ actions and choices in response to the institutions’ demands and initiatives. This obscurcation necessitates consideration of the interactions between students and institutions (Case, 2015a; Dyke, 2015). These considerations require an understanding of the roles of student agency and institutional power in such interactions.

The need to understand student agency and institutional power in concert during transition is highlighted by Gale and Parker’s (2014a, 2014b) analysis of transition programs in Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom. Gale and Parker developed a typology of transition programs (see following section) based on the programs they reviewed by focusing on the assumptions underpinning the different types of transition programs. Kahu and Nelson (2018) aligned the three types of transition programs identified in this typology with developments in the field of academic student support (see, for example, Association for Academic Language and Learning (AALL), 2017).
2.2.2 Institutional influence and student agency: a tripartite model of transition

Gale and Parker’s (2014a) typology of transition programs, which was based on their review of transition programs in the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia, brought to the fore a consideration of both student agency and institutional influences on transitions:

Transition understood as the capability to navigate change also alludes to the mutuality of agency and structure in transitions (Ecclestone 2009; Ecclestone, Biesta & Hughes 2010); navigation evokes agency in relation to structure (Gale & Parker, 2014a, p. 737)

Gale and Parker’s typology described three main types of transition programs: ‘induction’ programs that are relatively common and that aim to assimilate the student into the university culture; ‘development’ programs that are relatively common and that assume the students’ transitions occur as part of the normal growth and development of the student; and ‘becoming’ programs which are rare and which consider transition within the life course context, along with other, non-problematic transitions students might make in their lifetimes. A summary of Gale and Parker’s work along with brief descriptions of each type of transition program is provided in Tables 1a, 1b and 1c below.
Table 1a: Summary of Gale and Parker’s Induction type of transition program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>T1 – induction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Examples</td>
<td>For example, academic skills-based programs at orientation targeting the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>necessary writing skills to successfully complete university assignments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Features</td>
<td>Transition is a linear progression through a number of phases; it does not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>occur on entry but takes time (typically first year); is best managed by</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>institutions using a whole-of-institution approach.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumptions</td>
<td>Transition starts on enrolment and is a forward-only process; identities are</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>fixed and students move between them; a problem-orientation; the process of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>transition is controlled by the institution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approaches to Academic Support in the Context of Transition (based on Kahu and Nelson’s (2018) alignment of academic support to types of transition support programs)</td>
<td>A skills approach to transition. If the relevant skills are taught to bridge the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>differences between incoming students’ skills and the skills needed to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>successfully complete university, then transition will be successful. (Warren,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2002; Wilson, 2009; Kahu &amp; Nelson, 2018)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1b: Summary of Gale and Parker’s Development type of transition program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>T2 – development</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Examples</td>
<td>For example, programs which target demographic sub-groups pre-entry, such as</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>first-in-family or mature-aged students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Features</td>
<td>Transition is a staged progression involving forward movements through stages;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>stages are linked with time periods, frequently the first year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumptions</td>
<td>Progression occurs through time and temporally defined stages but duration of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>stages is not a feature; since stages are often socially-controlled (e.g.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>drinking is controlled by the state), there is a normative agenda (Field, 2010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>which, by default, means that deviance is the alternative to completing stages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>in the order accepted as ‘normal’; the transition is an internal-to-the-student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>process and therefore the student bears the responsibility for its success,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>although helped by the institution. Transition happens unless there is a problem.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘Discrete, singular, consecutive identities’ (2014a, p. 738) are assumed by this</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>approach.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approaches to Academic Support in the Context of Transition (based on Kahu and Nelson’s (2018) alignment of academic support to types of transition support programs)</td>
<td>An academic socialisation approach to transition. If students are socialised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>into the relevant disciplines, they would be able to understand and succeed in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>that discipline and transition would be successful. (Lea &amp; Street, 1998; Lea &amp;</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Street, 2006; Kahu &amp; Nelson, 2018)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The two most common approaches to transition support identified by Gale and Parker – ‘induction’ programs and ‘development’ programs – prioritise the responsibility for transition differently, as either predominantly a university responsibility (‘induction’ programs) or as a process inherent to the student (‘development’ programs). However, in both these types of programs, the goal of the transition process and transition programs is for the student to accommodate to the institution (Gale & Parker, 2014a). Gale and Parker (2014a, p. 741), citing Bernstein (2003), point out ‘induction’ and ‘development’ programs ‘fail to respond with transition strategies that move beyond students’ socialisation and induction into dominant norms’. That is to say, the university acts to perpetuate existing social structures.

‘Induction’ transition support programs assume that universities have the capacity and the responsibility to provide conditions and teaching that assimilate students into the university’s ways of doing things; that is, transition needs to be addressed organisationally. In these programs, universities exercise their power overtly to guide students to the desired ways of thinking and acting. In contrast, ‘development’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examples</th>
<th>T3 – becoming</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>For example: flexible modes of study and pathways into, through and out of higher education; curriculum affirming marginalised student histories (Gale and Parker, 2014a)</td>
<td>For example: flexible modes of study and pathways into, through and out of higher education; curriculum affirming marginalised student histories (Gale and Parker, 2014a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Features</td>
<td>Transition is considered in terms of broader social views; anxiety and risk are inherent but not necessarily problematic; transition is not a crisis but a normal part of the life course; identities are multiple and overlapping, not fixed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumptions</td>
<td>Transition is an adaptive process and responsibility is shared between institutions and students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approaches to Academic Support in the Context of Transition (based on Kahu and Nelson’s (2018) alignment of academic support to types of transition support programs)</td>
<td>An academic literacies approach to transition. If incoming students’ embodied ways of knowing are valued, acknowledged and incorporated, then transition will be successful (Lea &amp; Street, 1998; Lea &amp; Street, 2006; Kahu &amp; Nelson, 2018)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
transition support programs conceive of transition as a developmental stage; that is, as an attribute of an individual. Consequently, ‘development’ transition programs target individuals and groups – for example, mentoring programs – and have an internal-to-the-student focus on transition as an internal shift from one identity (high school student) to another identity (university student). However, the internal-to-the-student focus of ‘development’ transition programs is complicated by the amount of change individual students require to achieve their new identity. For some students, university presents familiar values and accords with their existing experiences and identity, whereas for others it does not (Bernstein, 2003). The ‘development’ transition approach can privilege those students whose values and experiences are reflected by the university and so it can help perpetuate existing societal structures.

The ‘becoming’ type of transition program described by Gale and Parker (2014a, 2014b) offers the potential for a more equal and overt sharing between universities and students of the conditions for agency. Gale and Parker’s transition as ‘becoming’ is based on a view of transitions as normal, recurring and not necessarily problematic life events that do not involve shifts between fixed identities because individuals live multiple identities simultaneously (Gale & Parker, 2014a). Transition as ‘becoming’ is akin to Zepke and Leach’s (2005) ‘emergent discourse of adaptation’, within which transition is a shared responsibility between universities and students (Gale & Parker, 2014a). The common ‘induction’ and ‘development’ transition programs demonstrate the influence of universities on transition, whereas transition as ‘becoming’ approaches assume that the responsibility for transition is shared by the university and the student. The roles of structure and of agency, then, are inherent in discussions of transition as ‘becoming’. The implicit conceptualisations of time that underpin each of the three types of transition programs developed by Gale and Parker (2014a, 2014b) point to their different assumptions about structure and agency, as I discuss in the following section.

2.2.3 Transition and time

One key difference between the three types of transition programs described by Gale
and Parker (2014a, 2014b) is their implicit assumptions about the role of time during transitions. Both the ‘induction’ and ‘development’ transition types of programs assume a unidirectional and temporally linear approach to transition into university. This view of time reflects the universities’ goals and requirements for measures of transition success. ‘Induction’ programs assume that time marks both the start and finish to transition. ‘Development’ programs assume the passing of time contributes to the development and therefore the transition of the student (Gale & Parker, 2014a). In contrast, transition as ‘becoming’ views transition from a lifelong perspective and with an end goal of identity self-formation: who we are and where we fit socially. As Gale and Parker (2014a) have argued, ‘becoming’ is a ‘perpetual series of fragmented movements involving whole-of-life fluctuations in lived reality or subjective experience, from birth to death (T3).’ (p. 737).

The lifelong perspective on transition that is part of transition as ‘becoming’ assumes a subjective experience of time. Subjective experiences of time are past, present and future views from the perspective of the individual student in relation to their own lives and experiences. There is research evidence for the relevance of subjective views of time in transition. For example, Horstmanshof and Zimitat (2007) connected first year university students’ future-oriented views of themselves to their learning outcomes. These findings concurred with the earlier findings of Simons, Vansteen, Lens and Lacante (2004) that were based on an overview of literature concerning the conceptual development of time by college students. Brown and Jones (2004) conducted quantitative research into future temporal orientations and student success for African-American high school students in the United States and found it predicted other variables of interest, suggesting it is very influential in success. Colley (2007, 2010), following Emirbayer and Mische (1998), supports a view of subjective experiences of time in transition that is linked to dominant types of actions taken to achieve an individual’s objectives:

1) Iterative orientations to the past

2) Projective orientations to future possibilities

3) Practical-evaluative orientations to engagement with the present

(Colley, 2007, p. 431)
Such subjective views of time in transition involve focusing on ontological, holistic and person-centred perspectives of transition.

In summary, Gale and Parker’s international review of transition programs points to the importance of exploring transition as ‘becoming’. A better understanding of student agency can inform understandings of transition as ‘becoming’. This better understanding requires investigations into student agency during transition (linking students’ lived experiences to the institutional context within which the student exercises their agency) and consideration of time from the students’ perspectives. This view of ‘becoming’ requires the study of transition as it occurs over time and from a person-centred and situated perspective; that is, person-centred, longitudinal and localised investigations, such as the study reported in this thesis. Such investigations into transition as ‘becoming’ take an ontological perspective on transition.

2.2.4 An ontological approach: sociality and the affective context of student transition

An ontological focus on transition moves the investigative emphasis away from any institutionally determined time period for transition, such as the first year, and away from outcomes measures such as retention rates and grade point averages (GPAs). Instead it supports investigation of students’ ongoing considerations and decision-making. An ontological focus is better aligned with the investigation of student agency (Kahn, 2009, 2014) in the potentially messy and complex process (Quinn, 2010; Holdsworth, 2006) of transition into higher education, where institutional influence and student agency interact. Following is a discussion of mostly phenomenographic research findings that capture the student voice and point to the highly emotionally charged experience that is transition.

2.2.5 The sociality of affect: an emotional journey

One finding frequently reported in studies of transition using phenomenological research approaches is that the transition experience for students is highly emotional and therefore embodied and situated. However, the role of these highly emotional experiences in relation to student agency remains unexplored. Stone and O’Shea
(2012, 2013) and O’Shea (2015, 2016) researched the experiences of mature-aged women in their first year of university in Australia. O’Shea (2015) argued, ‘for these students, coming to university was an emotional experience that [could not] be measured solely in terms of vocational or knowledge outcomes, but also involved public and private transformations.’ (p. 511). Cramp, Lamond, Coleyshaw and Beck (2012) identified huge swings in the emotions of foundational students’ transition into undergraduate studies in the UK. Brown et al. (2015) also reported the highly affective and emotional nature of the experiences of a cohort of distance education students in New Zealand. McMillan (2013, 2014, 2016) in her South African-based research similarly identified the highly emotionally charged nature of students’ experiences of transition. Stone and O’Shea (2013) explored the gendered nature of the students’ emotional experiences, reporting that guilt, self-sacrifice and time are three aspects, which appear to be experienced differently by male and female students. This supported earlier work by Britton and Baxter (1999) that showed women structured their experiences around the self-in-relation, self-denial, and unfulfilled potential whereas men structured theirs around self-transformation and unfulfilled potential. McMillan (2014) found that the emotional reactions of mature-age students were influenced in part by social class. McMillan’s findings were consistent with Reay’s (2005) argument that affective features of lived experiences are linked to social class. These emotional experiences, then, are widespread and may even be patterned according to demographic features.

One of the contributions of qualitative research into the emotional experiences of students studying in higher education is recognition of the sociality of affect; that is, its inter-personal impact. As Walker and Palacios (2016) have argued, emotions in learning can occur ‘at both a personal and collective level; and as relational, situated, structural, contextual, non-dualistic, and social’ (p. 176). Qualitative research into the emotional experiences of students studying in higher education focuses on the occurrence of emotions between people, as well as within people; that is, its sociality, and its activation both internally and externally with intra- and inter-individual effects.
(Cromby, 2011), including influences on learning. For example, Beard, Clegg and Smith (2007) found that in the first year of studies, a time period frequently associated with the concept of ‘transition’, students experience ‘a real emotional journey which they describe as affecting every aspect of their being’ (p. 248). Beard et al. (2007) pointed out that ‘the data from all our sources showed the importance of the affective, the bodily and sociality in relationship to [students’] engagement with learning’ (p. 249).

Beard, Humberstone and Clayton (2014) conducted research to follow up a study conducted in 2007 by Beard et al. (2007) and confirmed that emotions played an important part in students’ experiences of learning. For Beard et al. (2014), changes in the objects of emotional attachments were central to becoming a student:

> We hypothesise the existence of a transition, a maturational shift in emotional awareness, from neophyte anticipations of the first-year experience through to transitional emotions, initially associated with engagement with referential objects, to a moving on to complex, potentially transformational experiences associated with changes in the self (p. 641)

The research into students’ lived experiences reported in this section points to the ubiquity of the experiencing of emotions during transition and to the sociality of affect, that is, the way in which affect and emotions serve to connect individuals to each and to the institution.

Affect in the context of interpersonal relationships is a feature of students’ transition into higher education. Research that provides some insight into the student-peer and student-institution relationships that are formed through affect during transition and the impact of these relationships explores students’ ‘sense of belonging’.

2.2.6 The role of student belonging: affect, expectations and outcomes

The sociality of affect is evident in the context of the relationships students form with the institution and its staff. Students’ relationships with the institution and its staff, along with relationships with student-peers, are all shaped by affect and form part of students’ ‘sense of belonging’ (Yuval-Davis, 2006).
The concept of sense of belonging helps explain the connection between affect, student expectations and student outcomes.

Yuval-Davis (2006) offers three analytical levels to consider when studying belonging:

a. the social location of belonging;

b. the individual’s identification and emotional attachments to groups; and

c. the individual’s relationship to the ethical and political value systems used in judging belonging

In the literature on transition there is evidence of all three of Yuval-Davis’ analytical levels of belonging. Yuval-Davis (2006) emphasises that constructions of belonging ‘cannot and should not be seen as merely cognitive stories. They reflect emotional investments and desire for attachments.’ (p. 202). Hardy and Bryson (2016) point out that the concept of sense of belonging privileges an affiliative meaning but that it could also reference a focus on identity. It is possible that the affiliative and identity meanings of the term ‘sense of belonging’ are related, with an affiliation preceding the development of a sense of identity. In particular, two types of relationships are recurring features of the research on transition into university; relationships with the university and its representatives, and relationships with student peers. Both these types of relationship can contribute to a sense of belonging in both the affiliative and the identity dimensions of the term.

Relationships between students and the university that are characterised by affect are evident in research focusing on belonging. In her study of doctoral students, Cotterall (2013) identified an associative link between the expression of emotions and relationships:

The rich data obtained in the longitudinal study exposed significant links between participants’ heightened emotions and their interactions with key
individuals and situations in their doctoral lives (p. 174)

Similarly, qualitative research into the experience of first and second year part-time students in a university in Hong Kong (Kember, Lee & Li, 2001) found that a sense of belonging was a form of connection to peers or a class group, teaching staff, a department or the university and that:

A sense of belonging is, therefore, more likely to develop towards smaller units. A logical consequence is then to attempt to build a sense of belonging with relatively small units such as departments rather than large impersonal bodies like a university (Kember et al., 2001, p. 339)

No information was provided on the timing of Kember et al.’s (2001) research, so it is not possible to know what relationships students might have had on entry, before the development of relationships in classes. This is important because Thomas (2012) found that belonging was a subjective feeling of relatedness and connection that began before classes commenced. This finding by Thomas (2012) resonates with Harper and Quaye’s (2009) findings. Harper and Quaye (2009) found that ‘various groups of students show up expecting to see evidence of what they have been sold’ (p. 11). This suggests that a sense of belonging relates to positive affect in relationships that begin very early in transition, even before classes begin.

2.2.6.1 Student expectations: the socio-emotional ‘fit’ in belonging

Harper and Quaye (2009) also point out that a sense of belonging has a component of ‘fit’, or the match between student expectations and their experiences. Devlin and Jade (2014) have further explored ‘fit’ and the lack thereof and Moles and Wishart (2016) have also examined the lack of ‘fit’ between student expectations of the academic skills needed for university and the reality. Crisp et al. (2009) report on a large-scale survey in the United States that indicated the expectations of students entering university directly from high school did not match the reality with respect to feedback processes and Beaumont, O’Doherty and Shannon (2011) also report mismatches between the expectations of students entering university from high school in relation to feedback processes. McInnes, James and Hartley (2000) found that
‘students expect quite a high level of new material in their courses but found less than they expected’ (p. 13). All these writers assume a cognitive-rational view of ‘fit’ that relates to students’ expectations of issues such as workload, type of learning, feedback and resources. Such a cognitive-rational view of ‘fit’ can be resolved early in a student’s enrolment with information or skills development.

However, this cognitive-rational view of ‘fit’ is challenged by Araújo et al. (2014), who developed a socio-emotional view that ‘fit’ is a ‘holistic perception of belonging as a lifecycle issue central to the student experience, and not merely a first week, first semester, or first year problem’ (p. 30). This is a more embodied view of fit that involves an ongoing, emotional relationship between the student and the institution in which the student feels they ‘fit’ emotionally. This view of ‘fit’ is derived from the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology’s (RMIT) Belonging Project (Carlin, Clarke, Wilson, Lukas & Morieson, 2011), which was a suite of activities designed to embed ‘essential social and academic literacies while facilitating positive social, cultural and academic transitions’ (p. 21). These two views of ‘fit’ are not mutually exclusive. This socio-emotional view of fit could be influenced by the match between students’ expectations and their experiences, for example, expecting a certain workload could lead a student to feel deceived and result in a lack of trust in the institution, a socio-emotional lack of ‘fit’. A socio-emotional view of fit reflects the importance of sociality and affect during transition. Socio-emotional ‘fit’ is also connected positively in some research into learning outcomes (Ballantyne, 2012; Edwards, Radloff & McMillan, 2016; Kember et al., 2001; Johnson, 2016).

### 2.2.6.2 A sense of belonging, student staff relationships and learning outcomes

Positive student-university and student-staff relationships can form the basis of a sense of belonging and these positive relationships are also associated with positive learning outcomes.

Ballantyne (2012) discusses the nature of the students’ beliefs and the expectations they have for reciprocal and meaningful relationships with the university:
The students interviewed are calling for a more meaningful relationship with the university, and specifically one in which they hold significant rights and specific expectations as committed and goal-oriented consumers who are valued by the institution...there is an element of "give and take", and...the personalisation, humanisation and communication involved in such an experience is key (pp. 48–49)

As well as having expectations about belonging in student-university relationship, students have expectations about student-staff relationships. Countryman and Zinck (2013) report that students involved in a Bachelor of Music indicated they wanted to feel cared for and reassured of their progress, have their experiences validated, feel respected and accepted and that they had agency (the opportunity to make choices and take actions) during their first year experiences. Lizzio and Wilson's (2013) findings support the sociality of affect involved in these student-staff relationships. They found that:

...students’ perceptions of the fairness of their learning environments were strongly influenced by the extent to which they both feel personally respected by academic staff and the adequacy of the informational and support systems provided for them to ‘do their job’, of which assessment was a core component’ (p. 391)

This work confirmed findings from an earlier study by Kember et al. (2001), who reported a strong association between college-enhanced retention and learning outcomes and concluded teachers could enhance a sense of belonging through the relationships they developed with students. Similarly, Harvey and Drew (2006b) found that relationships between staff and students and between students and students were crucial to achievement and perseverance. More recently, Edwards et al. (2016) reported that positive student-staff relationships correlated with improved retention. Larkin, Rowan, Garrick and Beavis (2016) and Johnson (2016) found, respectively, that relationships with staff mediated students’ views of technology-delivered teaching and that STEM students adjusted more successfully when they were supported by family, peers and program staff. The evidence suggests that student-staff relationships that involve reciprocity of positive affect positively influence learning outcomes such as retention.
However, these positive student-staff relationships are not always present in students’ lives. James, Krause and Jennings (2010) conducted a sector-wide Australian study into the first-year experience in 2004 and 2010 and found in the second study that ‘fewer students believe one of their teachers knows their name. Fewer believe academic staff show an interest in their progress.’ (p.1)

In summary, research into ‘sense of belonging’ shows the positive impact of affect in student relationships with institutions and with staff during transition. The impact of affect in these relationships can be positively connected to student learning outcomes and is shaped by students’ expectations of the relationships. Another important type of relationship connected to student success and which reflects the role of affect in student transition is the student-student, or peer relationship.

2.2.6.3 A sense of belonging and peer relationships

The value of peer relationships, including the roles that such relationships might play in transition, success and retention has been well recognised (Kember et al., 2001, McMillan 2013, 2014, 2016; Tinto, 1993, 2006; Kantanis, 2000). McMillan (2016) found that:

Those students who made new friends at university indicated how these friends supported their academic integration…Friends modelled study skills…They provided academic support…They reinforced academically appropriate values and attitudes…Friends coerced those whose commitment to studying was flagging…They helped to reduce stress by providing encouragement when students were experiencing academic challenges…and they motivated those experiencing self-doubt (p. 116)

Christie, Tett, Cree and McCune (2016) supported Ballantyne’s (2012) interpretations of the value of peer relationships:

…learning is a social and relational process where people bring a cluster of beliefs about the nature of knowledge, a conception of learning and a belief about how teaching should take place that are reconceptualised over their learning journeys through engagement in valued educational practices (p. 488)

Beard et al. (2014) confirmed their previous finding that emotions were intricately
linked to social relationships with other students, lecturers, friends and family. Shields (2015) researched feedback on first year students’ initial assignment and wrote:

Recent research has shown that if others share one’s emotional reactions to an event, one is more likely to regard oneself as sharing group membership with them (Livingstone et al. 2011); therefore, shared emotional experiences may turn several individuals into a social group (p. 615)

McMillan (2013) has also pointed out that transition may involve ‘forming a powerful guiding coalition’ (p. 174) of peers, and university staff to help manage the transition. More specifically:

New friends contribute to adjustment to university by assisting with university academic tasks and by socialising each other into greater academic engagement through modelling, support, reinforcement and coercion. They also help to reduce stress by providing encouragement when students experience academic challenges or self-doubt (McMillan, 2013, p. 113)

On the basis of in-depth, longitudinal, qualitative research involving interviews with 24 students Bryson and Hardy (2012) have noted the relationship between social engagement and retention:

The roles of social factors, and a sense of belonging and becoming a member of communities (academic and otherwise), were very important. Indeed, it was strong social networks that sustained the students during moments of doubt and crisis, and a lack of such networks that led to withdrawal (p. 40)

More specifically, Vaccaro, Daly-Cano and Newman (2015) investigated the role of social and emotional engagement in a cohort of eight students with disabilities and found that students linked social and emotional engagement to effective self-advocacy skills and mastery of the student role, which led to a sense of belonging. Finally, Christie et al. (2008) acknowledged the importance of affect in learning and specifically include alienation and exclusion as examples of the impact of negative affect; that is, affect that is not conducive to maintaining social bonds.
These research findings reinforce the association of both positive and negative affect with the learning process through its inter-individual role – the sociality of affect during transition. They point to the importance of positive peer relationships in developing a sense of belonging, a connection between the student and the institution that forms during transition.

2.3 Bringing together institutional views of transition and students’ lived experiences

This broad range of research into the various types of student relationships that occur during university studies demonstrates students’ transition experiences are emotional, socio-relational and situated. In the field of school engagement, Juvonen, Espinoza and Knifsend (2012) pointed to the importance of the quality of student friendship and peer support (p. 393) to academic engagement. These findings echo early models of student retention in higher education, such as Tinto’s (1993) interactionist model that posited both social integration and academic integration as essential to student retention. Although Tinto acknowledged that it was difficult to be certain of any individual student’s particular influences, Tinto prioritised academic integration. His approach has been criticised as assimilationist (Zepke & Leach, 2005) because it assumes the student will do all the accommodating to fit into the institution; that is, it prioritises the influence of the institution on academic success. This criticism, while valid, does not detract from the value of Tinto’s model in pointing to the importance of both the social and the academic in student success. Early work by Kantanis (2000) was more descriptive than explanatory, but she also suggested that social transition underpins a successful academic transition and that peer friendships impact on persistence.

It should be noted that not all forms of social integration contribute to academic success. Wilson, Devereaux and Tranter (2015) found high levels of a sense of belonging in their research cohort, but in their research this did not relate positively to academic engagement or to motivation to study. Solomon (2007) used Lave and Wenger’s (1991) communities of practice model to explain how transition into a learning situation can be derailed by membership of competing communities of
practice. For example, an undergraduate community of practice might value appearing to be unperturbed by study demands, which could work against the goals of individual students by discouraging the students from seeking assistance or asking questions. In contrast, a community of practice that revolves around achieving good marks by working hard and sharing concerns or difficulties in order to overcome them could be beneficial. This example highlights the situational nature of transition experiences. It also demonstrates the difficulty of knowing from an institutional perspective what will work, for whom, and when. It is not possible to accurately predict the outcomes of any particular transition support initiative on the basis of research into features of and associations within the transition situation alone.

The more recent research into students’ lived experiences of transition describes ongoing and more detailed investigations into the role of the social in successful transition. This more recent research points to the highly emotionally-charged nature of the transition experience; the ubiquity of the sociality of affect in the relationships students develop with staff, peers and the university as an institution; and it reinforces the potential value of these relationships to student learning outcomes and to transition. Beard et al. (2014) developed a ‘Positive Affect Transitional Framework’, which conceptualises learning as a shift from transition to transformation as a ‘broadening of emotions’ (p. 640). Pleasure derived from achievements broadens to pleasure derived from changing; pleasure from knowing, doing and getting (for example, getting feedback and praise) broadens to pleasure from being (a conscious self) and becoming (a changing identity). This view of changing affect conceptualises the locus of change during transition as a shifting identity with emotions attaching to different things. It does not, however, coherently account for how these changes occur.

Models that might explain transition by considering both the students’ experiences (emotional, embodied and situated) and the institution’s outcome measures and objectives (attrition, retention and pedagogy) are few. Palmer, O’Kane and Owens (2009) draw on the notions of threshold and liminality (Meyer & Land, 2005) in order to describe transition. Palmer et al. (2009) suggested:
...there is a wide range of turning points associated with the students betwixt transition, which shapes, alters or indeed accentuates the ways in which they make meaningful connections with university life. Moreover, transitional turning point experiences reveal a cast of characters and symbolic objects; capture contrasting motivations and evolving relationships; display multiple trajectories of interpersonal tensions and conflicts; highlight discontinuities as well as continuities; and together, simultaneously liberate and constrain the students’ transition into university life (p. 37)

Palmer et al.’s (2009) model focused on the features of transition: what it looks like. However, how students negotiated their transition, their exercise of agency as they interact with the university, remains implicit.

A focus on the processes by which students enact transition; that is, their agency, is needed to draw together the research findings concerning students’ lived experiences of transition and the universities’ understandings of transition as study outcomes. An account of transition from the perspective of student agency can help illuminate the complex interactions between students and universities and begin to describe how these interactions shape students’ transitioning experiences and their study choices and outcomes. The research reported here is such an investigation.

Following is a discussion of student agency that underpins the analytical framework used in this research.

2.3.1 How to best account for student agency during transition

In summary, transition has been investigated from two main loci of interest – the institutional perspective driven by universities’ interests, and from the perspective of students’ lived experiences. The institutional perspective reflects tension between the role of the university in supporting transition and the role of the student in a successful transition. This tension emanates from the opaque operation of structure and of agency during transition: who is responsible for transition outcomes, the student or the university? How do structure and agency influence transition? Transition as ‘becoming’ points to the importance of the interaction between universities and individuals. Understanding transition as ‘becoming’ necessitates an understanding of
the functioning of student agency in students’ interactions with universities during transition.

An accepted concept in the field of higher education that encapsulates this student-university interaction is student engagement. However, just as with transition, the concept of student engagement has a multiplicity of definitions and not all definitions support an understanding of student agency. The following section discusses the definitions of student engagement and their implications for the study reported in this thesis. It argues for the relevance to this study of the perspective on student engagement offered by Khan (2014) and Kahn, Everington, Kelm, Reid and Watkins (2017), as it has the capacity to elucidate the processes by which students employ agency in the context of their studies, as well as accounting for the sociality of affect during transition. The following section begins with the thorny question of what the term ‘student engagement’ can mean.

### 2.4 Student engagement

Student engagement, like transition, is defined in multiple different ways, referencing different ideological and theoretical perspectives.

#### 2.4.1 Definitions of Student Engagement

In general, student engagement can be thought of as the process by which students mediate the ‘inputs’ (student and institutional features) and the ‘outputs’ (the learning) of their learning situation; that is, the ‘black box’ of how they interact with their learning situation. It is recognised for its value in understanding learning and teaching in the higher education context: ‘the phenomenon has achieved recognition in the last decade as a cogent means of guiding higher education research policy and practice’ (Krause & Coates, 2008, p. 493). It has also been highlighted for its relevance to the first year of studies:

…the broader issue of engagement of students with learning and the learning community is now internationally recognised as a prominent indicator of the nature and quality of the first year experience and retention of students’ (Adams
et al., 2010, p. 6) However, as Baron and Corbin (2012) point out, ‘ideas about student engagement in the university context are often fragmented, contradictory and confused’ (p. 759). In an attempt to clarify these multiple understandings, Zepke (2017) has categorised them under four frameworks for practice as summarised below:

a. Generic pedagogic: developed in the United States, implemented and refined through survey methodology (see Kuh, 2001, 2009). This approach focuses attention on student engagement as student participation in ‘empirically derived good educational practices’ (Axelson & Flick, 2011, p. 40); that is, it assumes that ‘the nature and degree of learning is dependent on how the student makes use of his/her environmental resources’ (Krause & Coates, 2008, p. 494).

b. Cognitive learning focussed: developed in the United Kingdom, Australia and Sweden using phenomenologic research methods (see Marton and Säljö, 1976; Biggs 1978; Entwhistle 2005). This approach focuses attention on the meaning that students find when engaging with their studies and it commonly involves the concepts of a deep approach to learning (meaning-focused), a surface approach to learning (memory-focused) and a strategic approach to learning (high academic goals achieved using a mix of deep and surface learning). These three approaches to learning refer to the intentions and meaning students find in their studies and ‘connect to engagement in that they reveal the degree to which learners actively involve themselves in finding meaning in what they learn’ (Zepke, 2017, p. 25). Consequently, they are variable rather than fixed or trait-like approaches.

c. Holistic, psychocultural approach: developed in the United Kingdom and Australasia (see Barnett 2010, p. 31; Lawson & Lawson (2013); Kahu 2011; and Kahu & Nelson, 2018). This approach to engagement draws attention to the entire socio-ecological context within which students engage in their studies; that is, a life-wide and lifelong view of engagement involving social and psychological constructs and dynamic processes such as self-efficacy.

d. Holistic, sociopolitical approach: a democratic-critical view of student engagement (see McMahon & Portelli (2004); and Barnett & Coate (2005)) in which ‘engagement is dialogic, leading not only to academic achievement but success as active citizens’ (Zepke, 2017, p. 29)

Each of these frameworks offers a different perspective on students’ engagement with
their studies; from a teaching perspective, from a learning perspective, from a psychocultural perspective and from a socio-political perspective.

Each framework directs attention to different features of the student-institution interactions: the learner’s behaviours; the learner’s intentions; the context influencing the learner; and the social meanings of the engagement outcomes. Kahu and Nelson (2018) point to the importance of student agency in their concept of an educational interface (p. 6) as the means by which the student-institution relationship is negotiated. However, the ways in which student agency might operate in this model (the spaces between the factors identified in the model) were not explored. Consequently, the model described engagement as ‘a variable state that is influenced by a wide array of student and institutional factors, as well as by the socio-political context within which the students, teachers and institutions are situated’ (p. 61), rather than considering the processes through which these influencing factors operate to result in the variable states of engagement. Understanding the mechanisms through which students negotiate their interactions with universities, their engagement, can provide a point of reference from which to better understand and support transition as ‘becoming’. The operation of student agency, then, needs to be considered as a process that operates in the context of student engagement during transition.

2.4.2 Student agency and student engagement

Student agency can be considered from multiple perspectives, such as identifying features of agency (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Klemenčič, 2015), objects of agency (Ashwin & McVitty, 2015), and the process by which agency is enacted (Kahn, 2014). The perspectives on agency that identify the objects of agency (Ashwin & McVitty, 2015) and the process of agency (Kahn, 2014) have been used to theorise the concept of student engagement.

A useful starting point in understanding the connections between agency and student engagement is the work by Emirbayer and Mische (1998) because their findings underpin later understandings about student agency. Emirbayer and Mische (1998) understood agency as:
...a temporally embedded process of social engagement, informed by the past (in its ‘iterational’ or habitual aspect) but also oriented toward the future (as a ‘projective’ capacity to imagine alternative possibilities) and toward the present (as a ‘practical-evaluative’ capacity to contextualize past habits and future projects within the contingencies of the moment) (p. 962)

This temporal embeddedness positions agency firmly in the flow of time and as an action that can be taken, not as a state or trait of a person. Agency exists when it is exercised and involves a subjective orientation to time (past, present or future orientation as selected by the individual), rather than being a feature of any one orientation to time itself.

Klemenčič (2015) further developed this idea of agency as an action in relation to studentship. She defined student agency as ‘a process of students’ self-reflective and intentional actions and interactions during studentship, which encompasses variable notions of agentic possibility (‘power’) and agentic orientation (‘will’). (p. 13). She proposed six premises:

e. Student agency emerges when students intentionally act or interact with someone or something

f. Student agency can vary in strength

g. Student agency is temporally embedded

h. Contexts (political, social, educational, cultural and economic) present opportunities, challenges and constraints

i. Student agency is inherently relational

j. There are different modes of agency: personal, proxy and collective

In contrast to Klemenčič’s work, Ashwin and McVitty (2015) and Kahn (2014) both used the concept of student agency to explicitly theorise student engagement; that is, student and institution interaction. Ashwin and McVitty’s (2015) approach to this theorising of student engagement focuses on the object of students’ engagement and the levels or depth of engagement, providing a framework for the development of a
whole of institution approach to supporting student engagement. Kahn’s (2014) theorising of student engagement provides a person-centred view of student agency as a process: a form of reflexivity conducted through the internal conversations students have as they make decisions related to their studies. Like Emirbayer and Mische’s (1998) and as with Klemenčič’s (2015) views of student agency, Kahn’s understanding of engagement is based on a view of agency as temporally embedded. However, Kahn (2014) offers the advantage of explaining agency as a person-centred process interrelated to but also independent of structure.

2.4.2.1 Structure, agency and reflexivity

In formulating his theory of student agency and student engagement, Khan draws on Margaret Archer’s social realist theories of structure and agency. Archer (2000, 2003, 2007, 2012) argues that reflexivity – our internal dialogues that activate our negotiation of our objective circumstances – mediates the enabling or constraining influence of social structure. This view of reflexivity supports understandings of structure and agency as interrelated but separate from each other.

Archer (2003) argues that the interaction of social structures and individual agency is too often understood as the one dominating the other but that it is more accurately explained as follows:

(i) Structural and cultural factors objectively shape the situations which individuals confront involuntarily, and possess generative powers of constraint and enablement in relation to

(ii) agents’ own configurations of concerns, as subjectively defined in relation to the three orders of natural reality – nature, practice and society.

(iii) Courses of action are produced through the reflexive deliberations of agents who subjectively determine their practical projects in relation to their objective circumstances (Archer 2003, p. 135)

Archer’s critical realist perspective brings together objectivist and subjectivist perspectives and takes into account the ‘independent causal powers possessed by both structures and agents’ (p. 135).
Dyke, Johnston and Fuller (2012), Dyke (2015), Case (2013, 2015a, 2015b), Kahn, Qualter and Young (2012) and Luckett and Luckett (2009) have explored Archer’s view of reflexivity and the critical realist perspective in educational settings. Luckett and Luckett (2009) argue that Archer’s view of reflexivity, based on critical realism, overcomes the problem of differentiating between the influences of structure and agency in learning.²

Reflexivity, as used by Kahn to theorise student engagement, is the mechanism by which students make choices about their studies as they negotiate their studies. Kahn’s (2014) types of reflexivity describe students’ internal deliberations as they identify their concerns, prioritise their concerns and act to resolve their concerns (Kahn 2009, p. 263) in response to the limitations and opportunities offered by their higher education curriculum. These decisions lead to established practices and a way of negotiating their studies; that is, their engagement with their studies. Kahn’s (2014) view of reflexivity is that it separates the influence of the curriculum (structure) from the students’ choices (agency) about their engagement.

Kahn et al. (2012) report findings that support the view that reflexivity is a generative mechanism that results in various empirical outcomes. Dyke et al. (2012) and Dyke (2015) argue for a connection between reflection in education (following Dewey) and reflexivity, suggesting that Archer’s view of reflexivity expands existing theories of learning in the higher education context. Case (2013, 2015b) argues that changes in reflexivity are an outcome of higher education.

In the arena of higher education, we are centrally focussed on the morphogenesis of student agency; we aim for students to leave higher education with different knowledge and capacity for action than that with which they entered (p. 843).

² Bourdieu explains the reproduction and transformation of the social world (Reay, 2004) in ways that are frequently cited to explain the impact of society on students through education generally and during transition specifically. O’Shea (2016), for example, has used Bourdieu’s view of social and cultural capital to explain how students draw on their cultural reserves during transition into higher education studies. However, Bourdieu’s concept of habitus, in particular, has been critiqued for its “latent determinism” (Reay, 2005, p. 432). Habitus refers to a determining situation that is unconsciously adopted by an individual. Kahn does not adopt Bourdieu’s views, instead following Archer (1995, 2000, 2003, 2007). In Archer’s opinion,
Bourdieu’s views mean that the effects of individual agency and the structural constraints of society influencing that agency are only apparent in an individual’s actions. If the individual is unconscious of these constraints and influences, they are unable to intentionally act in response to them. This means that, for Bourdieu, structure is only visible in an act of agency; structure and agency are analytically inseparable. In contrast, Archer proposes a view of the influence of society’s structures and individual agency that separates, analytically, the influence of structure on agency and vice versa. Her view permits an understanding of the individual’s agency as occurring in response to structural constraints and opportunities but not as determined by them. Kahn adopts this view.
Case’s (2015b) argument that the purpose of a higher education is the morphogenesis — literally the change in shape — of student agency seems a logical proposition. However, there is limited empirical evidence available to support this argument. Research that lends this argument some support is Kahn et al.’s (2017) study of online postgraduate students, which found that individual students made posts indicative of a range of types of reflexivity. This range of types of reflexivity indicates that ranges of types of agency were employed.

2.4.2.2 Co-reflexivity

An important feature of Kahn’s theorising of student agency and student engagement is his theorising of co-reflexivity. Co-reflexivity is “a form of distributed agency” (Kahn, 2014, p. 1005) where students share their concerns and mutual objectives and through a process of shared reflexivity, come to make choices about the exercise of their agency. This process relies on students forming peer relationships. Peer relationships are important features of students’ transition experiences and are based on affect. In Kahn et al.’s (2017) research into online engagement, reflexivity was directed by students towards shared goals and concerns and this led to shared deliberations by students in order to meet their current objective; that is, to study. This contrasts with Archer’s (2000) view of reflexivity mediating agency with the goal of achieving a particular social position in society. Kahn’s (2017) findings align with Case’s (2015b) argument that the objective of a higher education is to develop agency and that courses of higher education study lead to a morphogenesis of agency; that is, changes in the exercise of agency.

Co-reflexivity involves affect, not as an inner drive or as an outcome of an action but as a social ‘glue’ to create, develop and maintain peer relationships. In addition to this role for affect, an individual’s feelings provide a commentary on that individual’s competing concerns in the process of reflexivity. On the basis of these ‘emotionally-tagged’ competing concerns, an individual makes choices about their actions to achieve a *modus vivendi*, a set of established practices constituting a preferred way of life. During transition into higher education, a highly emotionally-charged process
with many unfamiliar and competing demands, choices need to be made by students to find a balanced and liveable way of being, unique to each individual, one amongst many individuals all with shared goals, objectives and concerns.

Kahn’s co-reflexivity provides a possible account for the highly social and relational features of transition reported in the literature on students’ lived experiences of transition. Khan’s complex investigation of reflexivity and co-reflexivity allows for consideration of the decision-making undertaken by the students during transition in response to the university context without assuming that either structure or agency necessarily determines the other. This approach theoretically aligns with ‘becoming’ types of transition programs proposed by Gale and Parker (2014a, 2014b) because it addresses the tension between structure and agency in such a way that student agency can be considered independently of the university’s control of the study situation.

2.4.3 Kahn’s process view of student engagement: An analytical framework

Kahn proposes three types of reflexivity in the educational context that provide the analytical framework used in this study. These three types of reflexivity can be conducted individually or collectively (co-reflexively):

a. **Restricted reflexivity and restricted co-reflexivity**: this type of reflexivity and co-reflexivity occurs when a student prioritises concerns other than the educational tasks, resulting in evasion of learning through, for example, habitual or formulaic responses, and involving performance goals where ‘the intention is either to outperform others (performance-approach goals) or to avoid being seen as incompetent in relation to others (performance-avoidance) (Pintrich, 2000)’ (Kahn, 2014, p. 1010). This could be characterised by high levels of social involvement but low levels of academic involvement.

b. **Extended reflexivity and extended co-reflexivity**: extended reflexivity can take the form of trying different types of reflexivity, deliberating for long periods of time and pursuing an educational goal for its own merits (Kahn, 2014, p. 1010), resulting in taking responsibility for learning. This can include studying individually or in groups.
c. **Fractured reflexivity**: this type of reflexivity leads to alienation, a feeling of being disconnected from studies and peers. It is characterised by distress and reflexivity that does not lead to action.

As well as accounting for the role of student agency independent of institutional power, Kahn’s framework supports an explanatory view of the function of affect and of emotions. Affect contributes to the type of reflexivity students employ (individually or in concert with others) by providing the social ‘glue’ that supports reflexivity that includes others. Emotions provide an internal commentary for the individual, prompting them to identify, prioritise and act on concerns. As I have demonstrated, research indicates that emotions are an important component of learning and engagement experiences in higher education (Beard et al., 2007; Christie, Tett, Cree, Hounsell & McCune, 2008; Solomonides & Martin, 2008; McMillan, 2013). Research into students’ lived experiences of transition that focuses on the function of affect and emotions in students’ choices during transition, such as the investigation reported in this thesis, can complement the existing literature that descriptively reports affect and emotions as features of transition.

Kahn’s attention to affect as it operated in the student engagement process is unlike the extensive work conducted in psychology into the role of emotions in learning and in engagement. That work focuses on emotions as internal to the individual (for example, see Deci & Ryan, 2000; Newbery, 2012; Elliot & Pekrun, 2007; Pekrun, 2006; Pekrun, Frenzel & Goetz, 2007; Gummadam, Pittman & Ioffe, 2016; Kahu, 2011; Kahu & Nelson, 2018; Kahu, Stephens, Leach & Zepke, 2015; and Voelkl, 2012). Kahn’s view of affect is consistent with the phenomenographic studies into transition, which do not assume that emotions are an expression of motivational drives or needs, nor an outcome of them. Kahn’s reflexivity assumes a view of affect that allows for the exploration of what emotions can do at the level of a group or of a cohort and permits more of a focus on the sociality of emotions and affect. An understanding of emotions that targets the sociality of affect (for example, see Ahmed, 2001, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c) rather than the experience of emotions within an individual is used in the investigation reported here to support analyses of student
engagement that focus attention on the connections and interactions between students and institutions, rather than only within the student.

2.4.4 Affect, alienation and student engagement in the higher education context

One final area that needs to be acknowledged in this survey of the literature on student transition and student engagement is the concept of alienation. Holistic views of student engagement that foreground the influence of social and political contexts on the engagement of students (Mann, 2001; Case, 2007, 2008; Zepke, 2014) and consider affect at the level of student-institutional relations through the concept of belonging also describe the disconnect between students and universities as alienation or disengagement (Mann, 2001; Case, 2007, 2008; Christie et al. 2008).

Mann’s (2001) ground breaking work on alienation is perhaps the best-known account of the impact of negative affect in the field of student engagement in higher education. Her focus was on the opposing views of “alienated or engaged experiences of learning” (Mann, 200, p. 8) and she proposed seven possible theoretical perspectives on alienation (see Table 2 below).
Table 2: Summary of Mann’s (2001) theoretical perspectives on alienation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theoretical Perspective on Alienation</th>
<th>Features of the theoretical perspective on alienation</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type 1: The postmodern condition—the sociocultural context</td>
<td>This perspective is premised on the idea that the focus of the individual is on becoming a neo liberal subject (positioned in discourses of performativity, functionality, efficiency and effectiveness) rather than on finding what Mann terms ‘a meaningful personal purpose’ (p. 9) in higher education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 2: Positioned as subject/object—the primacy of discourse</td>
<td>This perspective describes student enrolment into university as the student entering a pre-existing discourse and being positioned and treated in a particular way as a result, for example, as a first-year student.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 3: The student as outsider—knowledge, power and insight</td>
<td>This perspective describes the individual as an outsider to the higher education system. Most commonly this is applied to non-traditional university entrants who enter a system designed for the young and continuous-trajectory student who completes their studies in university straight from school, with no interruptions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 4: Bereft of the capacity for creativity—the teaching and learning process</td>
<td>This perspective describes how the lack of creativity in higher education can cause a loss of contact with the whole self. For example, the necessity for universities to identify and assess course learning outcomes restricts opportunities for creativity by students by limiting their self-expression.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 5: Exiled from the self—loss of the ownership of the learning process</td>
<td>This is a Marxist perspective and describes alienation from the product of learning as ‘exiled from the self’. In this type of alienation, the student experiences meeting assessment tasks as pressure to produce outputs that conform to the requirements of the university. This occurs in relationships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 6: Disciplined into docility—assessment practices</td>
<td>This perspective describes how assessment practices discipline students into docility and compliance. This type of alienation refers to the effects of observation and normalisation, or forms of examination and confession, (Foucault, 1976) in education students’ work is assessed (observed and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 7: Leave me alone—alienation as a strategy for self-preservation</td>
<td>This perspective describes how the student can instigate alienation. In this form of alienation, students choose not to engage to any great extent with anything that troubles their sense of a unified self.</td>
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</table>
Mann’s work on alienation is extended in research by Case (2007, 2008). Case (2007) identified six relationship areas in which alienation could occur, pointing to the lifelong impact of negative affect on students’ sense of belonging. These six relationship areas are:

- to one’s studies;
- to the broader university life;
- to home;
- to the career;
- to one’s classmates; and
- to the lecturer (Case, 2007, p. 123)

These six relationship areas in which alienation could occur echo and extend the research findings into students’ lived experiences of ‘sense of belonging’ to universities discussed earlier. Case (2007) defines alienation in terms of relationships as, ‘disconnection in the context of a desired or expected relationship’ and considers engagement to ‘represent a connection in the context of a relationship which a student desires or expects to belong to.’ (p. 120).

In later work Case (2008) argued for a temporally-staged view of alienation, combining Mann’s seven types of alienation into three categories while retaining the notion of connection developed in her 2007 work, as Table 3 (below) shows.
Table 3: The relationship between Mann’s seven theoretical perspectives of alienation and Cases’ three categories of alienation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mann’s Seven Theoretical Perspectives of Alienation</th>
<th>Case’s Three Categories of Alienation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type 1: The postmodern condition—the sociocultural context</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 4: Bereft of the capacity for creativity—the teaching and learning process</td>
<td>Entering the higher education community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 2: Positioned as subject/object—the primacy of discourse</td>
<td>Fitting into the higher education community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 3: The student as outsider—knowledge, power and insight</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Type 5: Exiled from the self—loss of the ownership of the learning process</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 6: Disciplined into docility—assessment practices</td>
<td>Staying in the higher education community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 7: Leave me alone—alienation as a strategy for self-preservation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Case’s extension of Mann’s categories of alienation (see Table 3 above) has highlighted the impact of negative affect throughout students’ enrolment and affirmed the importance of the sociality of affect to students’ ongoing enrolment and study success. Case’s (2008) work complements Beard et al.’s (2014) positive affect model of transition. The positive affect model of transition considered the change in positive attachments over the course of a degree, whereas Case’s work points to the possibility of negative affect occurring throughout a degree. The positive affect model suggested positive outcomes, while Case’s suggests less positive outcomes.

In summary, the research reported in this thesis draws on a synthesis of the reviewed literature on affect and alienation, agency, reflexivity, the socio-emotional contexts of study and institutional contexts of study. These bodies of work discuss the processes and contexts that underpin this study and are conceived as related to each other as described in diagram 1, below. The dotted lines indicate the two-way permeability of each level of context.

Figure 1: Summary representation of the relationships between the processes and contexts underpinning the study reported in the thesis.
In the context of transition into higher education, a highly emotional time for students, examining affect (the middle of the three contexts in Diagram 1) can provide a person-centred window into the process of student agency as students engage with their studies, their institution, staff and peers in pursuit of their personal projects and take steps towards their future-imagined selves. The personal projects during transition include the steps needed to complete their courses of study. Kahn’s theorising of student engagement as different types of reflexivity leading to different types of engagement provides one explanation for how students make decisions about these steps. Because Kahn’s theorising of student engagement is underpinned by a critical realist philosophy, it analytically separates the influence of structure from agency. This separation means that Kahn’s theorising of engagement as a form of student agency, independent of the power of structure, can be used to explain transition from the perspective of the student and reveal the mechanisms used by students to transition within the context of institutional power, without control of the student by the institution.

The aim of my research, then, is to take up the challenge of investigating transition from the perspective of students’ agency in order to understand how students interact with the university as they make decisions and take actions in the pursuit of their studies during this time. This approach to transition complements the existing strands of research into transition: an institutional perspective often described through measures of outcomes (such as retention and attrition rates) and the phenomenographic strand of research that describes the experiences of students during this time. My research, then, involves the investigation of transition through as person-centred and situated, as individual students make their choices and take actions in response to their specific individual situations. As a result, I developed the following research question to guide the research:

*How do first year undergraduate students experience their transition into university studies and how might the stories they tell of this time illuminate their processes of agency?*
2.5 Conclusion

Transition as ‘becoming’ in the higher education context involves transitions similar to those that occur in other parts of a person’s life. They are ongoing, adaptive and involve subjective experiences of time and consequently require investigating from a person-centred, longitudinal perspective. In the context of higher education, transition as ‘becoming’ entails consideration of the students’ capacity to make choices – their agency – and the influence of the university curriculum – structure – on these choices. Kahn’s (2014) theorising of student engagement as driven by student agency and mediated by reflexivity provides a means of connecting students’ choices with the context and purpose of their studies and supports consideration of the curriculum as influential but not determinant on this agency. Kahn’s process view of engagement driven by student agency offers a number of benefits to investigating transition as ‘becoming’. It supports an explanatory investigation of the process of transition as ‘becoming’. It recognises the connectedness of the student’s decisions and the university context during transition yet analytically separates the influence of each on the other. Finally, it supports investigations that recognise the role of the sociality of affect as an integral part of the process of transition as enabling co-reflexivity, rather than as a feature of the experience. Consequently, the study reported in this thesis investigates transition from a person-centred, longitudinal perspective with a focus on student agency, mediated by reflexivity, as the explanation for transition as ‘becoming’ and uses affect as the lens through which to investigate the process as it occurs in its real life context. The following chapter provides the methodological rationale and detail of this study.
Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction
As I have outlined in the previous chapter, the three main approaches to supporting transition – induction, development and becoming – each make different assumptions about the role and influence of structure and agency. Transition as ‘becoming’ requires students to exercise agency in the context of their studies. I argued that student agency is mediated through reflexivity – a process of deliberation that involves individualised, person-centred constructions of meanings based in subjective experiences of time (past, present and future). The individualised and subjective nature of these experiences is best captured using a qualitative research approach because of the opportunity this approach affords to explore variations in meanings (ideographic research) rather than research that searches for generalized meanings (nomothetic research). I use methodological perspectives from social constructivism, interpretivism and narrative inquiry to frame this study’s qualitative investigation of student agency as the process driving the ten participants’ engagement with studies during transition. These perspectives support an understanding of transition as a subjective and individualised experience that can change over time. My interpretation of the findings rests upon analytical methods that focus on the participants’ views of themselves and their worlds. I interpreted participants’ experiences as individual narratives and only then compared the ten narratives to identify any common patterns. These meanings provide the basis of an in-depth, localised understanding of transition as ‘becoming’, driven by student agency, mediated by reflexivity.

This chapter begins with a discussion of the methodological perspectives that frame this study: social constructivism, interpretivism and narrative inquiry. This is followed by an outline of the research design, including the ethical values underpinning the research design and its implementation, recruitment processes, descriptions of participants, data collection methods, data transformation methods, data presentation and the rigour of the research, based on the four tenets of qualitative research outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985) (see also Guba & Lincoln, 1982).
3.2 Epistemological, ontological and theoretical underpinnings

Research is framed either explicitly or implicitly within paradigms that can provide a rationale for the approach taken by that research and that can explicate what is considered legitimate. Crotty (1998) describes this framing as involving four elements: epistemology, theoretical stance, methodology and methods. The following sections outline the paradigm underpinning the research undertaken for this thesis using Crotty’s (1998) four elements.

3.2.1 Epistemology and ontology: social constructivism

The aim of the research outlined here is to investigate the ways in which students’ experience transition and how their stories of this experience shed light on their agency. Epistemologically, then, this focus on the experiences of different individuals is underpinned by the belief that ‘knowing’ is constructed by people and is therefore variable, rather than something that is fixed and can be discovered within objects or phenomena. Furthermore, the collection of participants’ stories over time, as in this research, reflects a belief that ‘knowing’ can change over time. These two beliefs, that ‘knowing’ is constructed by individuals and is variable rather than fixed, are also based on the ontological view of reality as relativist (meanings exist in consciousness) rather than of realism (meanings exist outside of consciousness).

Such views of knowledge, that is, as meanings constructed by individuals and involving the interactions of people with objects and of people with each other, sits comfortably within the epistemological position of social constructivism (Crotty, 1998; Creswell, 2007; Schwandt, 1994). Both social constructivism and social constructionism, two terms that are sometimes used interchangeably, understand all meaning as originating socially. There are three main tenets to this epistemological position:

1. Meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting…
2. Humans engage with their world and make sense of it based on their historical and social perspectives…

3. The basic generation of meaning is always social, arising in and out of interaction with a human community (Creswell, 2009, pp. 8-9)

This epistemological belief draws the researcher’s attention to interactions, to people’s lived experiences and to the researcher’s role in the construction of meanings through the research process, that is, researcher reflexivity.

Although the terms social constructionism and social constructivism are sometimes used interchangeably, they can also be used to refer to different emphases within this broader epistemology. Following Schwandt (1994) and Crotty (1998), the term ‘social constructivism’ is used here to refer to a view of meaning-making that focuses on meanings as constructed by individuals in response to phenomena on the basis of the mental and social constructs they hold. Although these constructs are developed on the basis of shared social practices and understandings (that is, they are culturally, historically and socially shaped), they can and do change; and they are not fixed. This means that the researcher’s attention is drawn to a search for variations in meaning and the contexts of these variations. Contextual details are important to understanding the meanings reported in this research with its focus on the different experiences of ten research participants as they transitioned into university.

This research aims to achieve an understanding of the experiences of transition into university of these different individuals by paying detailed attention to their stories about this time, as told by them to the researcher. The methodology chosen is a narrative inquiry. The theoretical perspective that outlines the assumptions behind the methodological choice of narrative inquiry within a social constructivist epistemology is interpretivism.

### 3.2.2 Theoretical stance: interpretivism

Interpretivism is epistemologically congruent with social constructivism – both understand meaning-making as socially situated. Interpretivism focuses on an
interpretive understanding of social action (Crotty, 1998, p. 76) with the purpose of achieving Weber’s (1962) Verstehen, an understanding of our actions and of those with whom we interact (Crotty, 1998; Schwandt, 1994), based on empirical inquiry. This leads to the use of methodologies that support a search for the ideographic: the “unique, individual and qualitative” (Crotty, 1998, p. 75). Such research employs approaches that allow the individual participants’ voices to be heard and to influence the research direction. For example, in the research reported here, prompts for the video diaries were open ended and the understandings constructed by the researcher were constructed with the participants.

Different forms of interpretivism afford different value to the role of culture in an individual’s meaning-making. Symbolic interactionism tends towards a general acceptance of the influence of culture in meaning-making; phenomenology requires the researcher to withhold their immediate interpretive stance as shaped by culture in order to look beyond this interpretation to others; and hermeneutics treats texts as transmitting culturally-shaped meanings with varying emphases on the role of the author, the text and the reader in the interpretive process. The research here relies on a general acceptance of the role of culture on meaning-making because the role of culture is not problematized in this research nor is it regarded as problematical to the research process. Instead, the ways in which individuals negotiate the influence of culture, as instantiated through the structure and processes of a university, is the point of this investigation.

3.2.3 Methodology: narrative inquiry

To conduct research into the individual experiences of research participants as they transitioned into university, this research adopted a narrative inquiry methodology. Narrative inquiry pays attention to the stories as told by individual participants and then the researcher interprets these as narratives (Clandinin & Connelly, 1989). This interpretive process entails a responsibility by the researcher to provide sufficient contextual information for these interpretations so that others can determine the meaning-making processes employed and the influences (situational, participant and researcher) on these meanings. It also has implications for researcher reflexivity, as discussed later in this chapter.
Decisions about the representations of meanings are made by both the participants and the researcher. The aim of narrative inquiry, then, is not so much to determine the views of the participants as expressed through these stories, as if an observer’s understanding of the experiences conveyed is possible. Instead, the aim is to explore and co-construct meanings in the development of interpretive narratives, here termed ‘restorying’ in the narratives presented in Chapters 4 and 5.

Stories, such as those told by the participants in this research, comprise events linked causally and sequentially by the narrator, as Bamberg (2012) explains:

Narratives are about people (characters), who act (events) in space and time; typically across a sequence of events (temporality). The narrative form (structure) is said to hold the content together (what the story is about — its plot) and sequentially arrange the story units (orientation, complication, resolution, closure) into a more or less coherent whole (p. 203) [italics from the original]

The research participants made choices when sequencing and conveying their stories and these choices reflect their subjective realities and purposes (Riessman, 2008). When stories are in the first person they act as ‘self-disclosures that reveal aspects of the speaker’s autobiography and subjectivity’ (Bamberg, 2012, p. 203). This provides a space for these participants to construct their own meanings of the transition process. Narrators (in this research the ten research participants) become involved in reflecting on themselves (Esposito & Freda, 2016), when, in ‘moments of self-reference’ they, ‘step outside of [their] bodies and look at [themselves] and refer to [themselves]’ (Bamberg & Demuth, 2016, p. 15).

The research context that created the space for these stories was designed by myself and the stories were told to me and for me by the participants. I was then involved in the restorying of these stories, a highly interpretive process of meaning-making (Mulholland & Wallace, 2003). My presence and influence, then, shaped these stories. Researcher reflexivity, then, is of importance to understanding my own contributions to the meanings presented in this research.
3.3 Researcher reflexivity

In this qualitative research, I am in large part the research ‘instrument’. My own reflexivity, an embodied and situated practice that requires ‘the integration of thought and action’ (Barnacle & Dall’Alba, 2011, p. 466), is part of the rigour of the research reported here. Reflexivity can be understood as:

- examining one’s own personal, possibly non-conscious, reactions when undertaking research (Butler, 2015);
- exploring the dynamics of the researcher–researched relationship (Butler, 2015; Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000); and
- focusing on how the resultant research is co-constituted, polyvocal or socially situated (Finlay, 2002).

These three processes of reflexivity have all been applied to the research reported here.

This research was initiated on the basis of my professional practice. Professionally, I felt I had practice-based knowledge about transition that could only be heard and acknowledged if it were subjected to research processes (Barnacle & Dall’Alba, 2011) so I set out to pursue this research topic and designed it to explore my practice-based observations and interpretations of transition. My own interpretations of these observations, that is, that they involved much more than cognition alone, directed me towards research that explored the meaning of transition for the research participants and this, in turn, led me to qualitative research methodologies situated within a social constructivist epistemology and an interpretivist stance.

The researcher-participant relationship is highly influential in interpretivist research such as that reported here. A key relational feature of this study that deserves attention is my role as both Learning Developer (responsible for academic...
support of students) and as researcher. Researcher reflexivity requires not only an understanding of the researcher’s personal identity and its influence on the findings but also an understanding of the power relationships involved (McCorkel & Myers, 2003) in the research context. My professional role enabled an emic perspective on the participants’ experiences. I was aware of the situations to which the participants were referring and I used this knowledge to better explore their stories and to interpret meanings within a broader shared contextual understanding of the university. From the participants’ perspectives, my role as Learning Developer involves helping them to succeed in their studies by teaching skills and explaining requirements. As well as conducting workshops and designing learning resources, I am available to students for individual consultations. My approach to the work I do involves the development of learning communities through peer interaction within groups and across years of enrolment. I am not involved in assessing students’ coursework. This means, I believe, students usually view me as helpful, filling a role designed to support them in their studies in response to their requests. The participants’ narratives show they were conscious of me as their audience, but the content and telling of their narratives does not indicate concern over potential conflicts of interest between my two roles that might impact them.

However, once the research commenced I became aware of my own assumptions. For example, during an orientation workshop that included some of the research participants, I realised that my assumption that some workshop participants were likely to be lacking some of the skills needed for successful study influenced my manner of interacting (for example, choice of content). Later, I realised that some workshop participants were aware of this assumption and seemed to contest this deficit positioning. This highlighted the potential for my own unintended influence on the meanings of this research through my interactions with the research participants. Consequently I kept a research journal to help me reflectively think through my influences and assumptions. To support the confirmability of the findings and therefore the rigour of this study, some of these influences are noted in the narratives.
Finally, my role within the research as interlocutor meant that the research participants shaped their stories with myself in mind. As an older working mother as well and, from the participants’ perspective, an expert (as denoted by my professional position), these stories sometimes assumed knowledge and understandings on my behalf, such as understandings of university procedures, understandings of family-work life balancing strategies and assumptions that I might provide nurturing of some kind. Or, I interpreted these stories as making these assumptions. As McCorkel and Myers (2003) point out, sometimes we see ourselves in our research. These understandings and interpretations are noted in the narratives. Their inclusion is consistent with the theoretical stance of interpretivism: they are inextricable components of meanings constructed through my interactions with the research participants, but ones that are best made explicit for reasons of research rigour. The relational context within which the research took place was further influenced by the power differential between researcher and participant that accrues to an employee of the institution and a newly enrolling student. Specific identifiable instances of the influence of this power on the storied and narratives is also noted in the narratives. This researcher reflexivity, then, is outlined in order to enable readers to come to their own interpretations of the poly-vocalism of the stories and narratives presented here.

3.3.1 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations in research serve to support research processes based on values such as respect, integrity, justice and beneficence. In research, such as that reported here, that investigates meaning-making by and between people, it also guides the interpersonal relational context of meaning-making and so is an influence on the meanings.

Ethical considerations for this research were guided by the four values outlined by the National Health and Medical Research Council in conjunction with the Australian Research Council and the Australian Vice-Chancellors’ Committee. These four values are, ‘respect for human beings, research merit and integrity, justice and beneficence’ (National Health and Medical Research Council, Australian Research Council & Australian Vice-Chancellors’ Committee, 2007 (updated May 2015), p. 9). My intent was to monitor researcher-participant
relationships at all stages of the research and address issues of confidentiality, informed consent, voluntary participation, involvement in the study and withdrawal from the study in accordance with these values. As summarised in Tables 4a, 4b and 4c below, I took steps to implement these principles throughout the study, beginning at the planning stage.

Table 4a: Ethical considerations and the decisions taken during the planning stage of the research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethical Issues and Underpinning Principle</th>
<th>Action Taken</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Issues: voluntary and informed consent, confidentiality, participant autonomy and the right to withdraw from the study were considered. These issues were underpinned by the principles of respect for human beings, research merit and integrity, justice and beneficence.</td>
<td>Applications were submitted to the Human Research Ethics Committees of Macquarie University (initial location of my PhD candidature) (Approval reference number 5201300731) and to the University of Wollongong (the site of the study) (Approval number NSA14/03). Upon transfer of my candidature from Macquarie to the University of Wollongong, all research was continued under approval number HE16/073 from the UOW Human Research Ethics Committee (see Appendix A: Ethics Approvals for copies of all these approvals) Ethical considerations were monitored throughout the study and amended as required (see ‘Study presentation’ in this table, below)</td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage of the Research</th>
<th>Ethical Issues and Underpinning Principle</th>
<th>Action Taken</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment</td>
<td>Issues: voluntary and informed consent and participant confidentiality were considered. These issues were underpinned by the principles of respect for human beings, beneficence and distributive justice.</td>
<td>Participant information sheets were provided and the activities comprising participation were explained (see Appendix B: Participant Information and Consent forms; see Appendix C for Notices) Voluntary participation was checked and rechecked before participants were included in the study. The right to withdraw from the study at any time and without penalty was explained and reinforced in all interviews. All volunteers were included as participants because a benefit could accrue to participants in the sense of feeling a greater sense of belonging and connection with the university because of their participation (distributive justice). Also, potential participants could have interpreted refusal of participation at such an early stage of enrolment as a form of rejection by a staff member and this could have jeopardised their sense of a positive relationship with staff and the institution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data collection</td>
<td>Issues: participant confidentiality. These issues were underpinned by the principles of respect for human beings and beneficence.</td>
<td>Participants chose their method of data collection (video selfies, audio recordings), the extent to which they revealed their physical identity (the visual content of the video selfies) and their methods of making submissions (via a shared Dropbox, on USB sticks or as email attachments). Participants chose their own pseudonyms and these were used in the video selfie submissions and interviews.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data storage</td>
<td>Issue: participant confidentiality. This issue was underpinned by the principle of respect for human beings.</td>
<td>Data stored (password protected) only in conjunction with pseudonyms and behind password protection. The list containing pseudonyms, participants’ names and email contacts was stored in a locked filing cabinet in my office on campus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data manipulation</td>
<td>Issues: voluntary and informed consent and autonomy. These issues were underpinned by the principle of research merit and integrity.</td>
<td>Participants were consulted at the mid-semester and at the final interviews to ensure my interpretations of the data reflected the participants’ meanings and that the participants felt their views were accurately reflected</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4c: Ethical considerations and the decisions taken during the presentation stage of the research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethical Issues and Underpinning Principle</th>
<th>Action Taken</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Issue: participant confidentiality.</td>
<td>I could ensure confidentiality when representing the participants’ views in the research. However, participants could not be de-identified because the information they provided about their transition experiences could make them identifiable to anyone who knew them or knew of their personal situations. Following discussions with the supervisory team, it has been decided to place an embargo on this dissertation until 2019, when all participants will have completed their studies. This embargo is to ensure that there are no repercussions for the participants while they continue their studies. No visual images of participants will be used without their permission. Participant approval for the use of narrative material in publications will be sought.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These guidelines defined the parameters for the relationships between the research participants and myself that formed the meaning-making interactions in this research. This relational context also contributed to the rigour of this research by defining the ways in which the participants could participate without negative repercussions. This ensured a safe space for their stories of transition and so contributed to the rigour of the research by facilitating open communication.

3.4 Research rigour

The four tenets of qualitative research outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985) (see also Guba & Lincoln, 1982) support the rigour of the study reported here. The four tenets of qualitative research are designed to:

- support confidence in the 'truth' of the findings (credibility);
clearly articulate the transferability or otherwise of the findings to other contexts (transferability); demonstrate the replicability of the findings (dependability); and clearly identify the ways in which the context and myself as researcher have shaped the findings (confirmability).

In the narrative inquiry reported here, confirmability is of particular importance because of my involvement with the research participants in my roles as both Learning Developer and researcher. As has been mentioned earlier in this chapter these two roles supported my involvement in the research from an emic perspective that enabled me to explore participants’ meanings in an informed manner. However, this emic standpoint and its influences on the research needs to be clearly identified to permit readers to determine for themselves the reliability and transferability of the findings presented in Chapters 4 and 5. Sections ‘3.3 Researcher reflexivity’ and ‘3.3.1: Ethical considerations of this thesis’ provide information that can assist readers understand my influence on the participants’ stories and this serves the confirmability of the research and enhances its credibility. Actively checking my interpretations of meanings during the semi-structured interviews with the participants, and discussions with my research supervisors concerning my interpretations, also served to enhance the credibility of this research.

In order to enable readers to gauge the transferability of the findings from this research, extensive material has been taken directly from the participants and a clear, but separated, interpretation of the material is provided. Contextual information is provided to enable readers to understand the context and my own interpretations as part of their judgements concerning transferability.

Finally, the oversight by my research supervisory team is supportive of the dependability of the research findings. It has also further prompted my own reflexivity and challenged me to consider alternative interpretations.

In sum, iteratively, consideration of any of these four tenets of research rigour has supported consideration and implementation of other of the tenets throughout the research process. Throughout this chapter, the reader is further reminded of the steps I have taken to promote
the rigour of this research.

3.5 Methods: data collection

The final of Crotty’s (1998) four elements for the framing of research is ‘Methods’. Methods describe the actions taken in the conduct of the research and, as such, are an instantiation of the epistemological, theoretical and methodological choices made. The following sections detail the methods chosen in this research to investigate the individual meanings of transition as told to myself by the research participants in a narrative inquiry investigation of transition from the perspective of student agency, mediated by reflexivity.

3.5.1 Research context – the research site

The research site chosen for this study was suitable for the ideographic nature of the meanings under investigation. However, it is not representative of all universities, nor are the participants representative of all first year university students at this university. This necessitate that I provide sufficient information to enable the reader to take into account the specific contextual influences on the meanings of transition reported in this study. Contextual information can relate to the institution, to the participants and the researcher. The following section describes the institutional context for this research, details of the recruitment methods used and descriptions of the participants involved in this research.

This study explored the transition experiences of students enrolling at the University of Wollongong Southern Sydney (UOWSS) campus at Loftus, which is a satellite education centre of the regional University of Wollongong (UOW). Loftus is a suburb of Sydney that has been identified as ‘not [one of] the most advantaged localities in metropolitan Australia’, but one which has performed ‘relatively well in socio-economic terms’ (Baum, O’Connor & Stimson, 2005, p. 67). Compared to the rest of the Sydney metropolis, Loftus has more high than low income households, higher proportions of educated professionals, low levels of unemployment, and below average rates of single-parent and non-earner households (Baum et al., 2005, p. 68). Most of the participants lived locally to this research site, as did most of the cohort from which the participants were drawn. At the time of the
research, this centre offered three undergraduate degrees (Bachelor of Nursing, Bachelor of Commerce and Bachelor of Business). These degrees offered different study contexts and these contexts could have influenced the transition experiences of the students.

The Bachelor of Nursing has a fixed course structure; the degree must be undertaken full-time, all subjects are mandatory, and the sequence of subjects is strictly controlled using an intricate set of pre-requisites and co-requisites. Students are enrolled into the same single class of around 30 students for all their subjects.

Although lectures are delivered on-line, tutorials, clinical laboratory sessions and workshops are conducted face-to-face on campus. The structure of this degree and its classroom organisation may influence the student experience in particular ways (as identified by Scott, Green & Cashmore, 2012). This structure creates a context where frequent face-to-face interactions occur with the same student peers for all three years of the degree. This degree structure also creates many opportunities for peer and staff interactions. Subjects are taught by staff with practical experience of nursing that also have theoretical understandings of nursing, and this can encourage students to consider the future practical application of their learning. The Bachelor of Nursing involves a clinical placement in the students’ first semester, providing them a sense of the professional context and experience. In my experience at the site, since 2011, the clinical placement seems to provide a strong professional focus for the students of nursing. The fixed structure of the course and the fixed tutorial groups, combined with the shared experience of nursing during clinical placements seems to encourage interactions and cohesion within the cohort.

The Bachelor of Business and Bachelor of Commerce subjects are delivered somewhat differently to the Bachelor of Nursing subjects. Lectures in the Bachelor of Business and Bachelor of Commerce are also delivered on-line (via podcasts on a subject e-learning platform) and there is a single one- or two-hour face-to-face tutorial for each of the four Bachelor of Business and Bachelor of Commerce subjects taken each semester. Students are enrolled in different classes of about 30
students for each subject, so they are not always with the same student peers. Seven of the eight first-year subjects are mandatory but Bachelor of Commerce students must choose a major in their second year of studies and the Bachelor of Business students can choose a set or sequence of subjects to provide them with a cohesive set of subjects. This structure means that not all first-year subjects will be directly relevant to a student’s chosen major and students are aware of this feature of their course.

In summary, the structure of the Bachelor of Business and Bachelor of Commerce degrees provides for less face-to-face contact with student peers and fewer classroom interactions with staff than the Bachelor of Nursing degree.

3.5.2 Recruitment

Recruitment is the first direct contact initiated by the researcher in the relationships that form the context for this research. The researcher recruited participants both directly and indirectly, following the guidelines approved by the Human Ethics Research Committees that provided guidance and oversight of this study (see Tables 4a, 4b and 4c above and Appendix A). Criteria for inclusion in this research were: that involvement was voluntary; and that participants were enrolling in the first year of their undergraduate degree at the site of the research.

I placed notices advertising the research (see Appendix C) on noticeboards at the research site in the rooms where enrolment took place, on the day when students attended to enrol in their courses. I made direct contact with all students attending for enrolment during orientation sessions. I followed a purposive sampling method during the recruitment process, in order to capture variations in transition experiences consequent upon the different social contexts comprising the student cohort at this site. That is to say, the sampling was ‘tailored’ in order to ‘build in variety and create opportunities for intensive study’ (Stake, 2006, p. 24). Owing to my limited resources as a single researcher, I decided to attempt to recruit ten participants for in-depth investigation. Active recruitment continued until no more volunteers made contact and 11 volunteers were subsequently included in the study.
The decision to include all volunteers was made for two reasons: there could have been a benefit to students’ participation through making a connection with a staff member at the university and feeling their experiences were valued (that is, the socio-relational context of the study was positive and the findings of the research were potentially improved); and because inclusion of all volunteers increased the richness and variations of the data. Only ten of the initial 11 participants continued past the first week and my findings are based on these ten participants’ submissions.

3.5.3 Description of the participants

Eleven volunteers were recruited into the study as participants. All participants were enrolled full time. The 11 participants represented a variety of students; there were male and female students; direct HSC entry students and students returning to studies following a break; students entering on the basis of alternative entry mechanisms (that is, with no HSC or TAFE qualifications); students with parenting responsibilities and those without; students studying Nursing and those studying in the Faculty of Business. Of the ten participants who continued past week one, nine continued participation beyond the mid-semester interviews. Eight of the ten were enrolled in the School of Nursing in the Faculty of Science, Medicine and Health (SMAH) and two were enrolled in the Faculty of Business (BUS). Table 5 below summarises the demographic information of the ten participants whose data were used in this study.
Table 5: Narrative inquiry participant demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant’s self-chosen Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Previous formal level of education</th>
<th>Years since previous formal education</th>
<th>Life-stage</th>
<th>Faculty of enrolment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Year 1 of undergrad degree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Living at home with parents</td>
<td>SMAH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lura</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>HSC(^3)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Living at home with parents</td>
<td>BUS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moshton</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>HSC</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>living at home with parents</td>
<td>BUS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olive</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Year 1 of undergrad degree</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Single mother of one toddler living with parents/siblings</td>
<td>SMAH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orange</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>TAFE(^4) Certificate 4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Partnered with no dependants</td>
<td>SMAH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pink</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Year 10 of high school</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Partnered with dependent school aged children</td>
<td>SMAH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sara</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>TAFE Diploma</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Single mother of school aged children</td>
<td>SMAH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scarlett</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Year 1 of undergrad degree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Living at home with parents</td>
<td>SMAH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superwoman</td>
<td>20-25</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>UAP</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Living at home with parents</td>
<td>SMAH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wonder Woman</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>HSC</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Living at home with parents</td>
<td>SMAH</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^3\)The Higher School Certificate (HSC) is awarded at the completion of secondary school examinations and provides an Australian Tertiary Admissions Score (ATAR) that universities use when determining admissions

\(^4\)Technical and Further Education (TAFE) is a vocationally-oriented, post-secondary system of public education colleges
These ten participants provided the stories that were the data for this study through the submission of video diaries (here termed video selfies) and by participating in semi-structured interviews.

3.6 Methods: story gathering

The two data collection methods used in this study – video selfies and semi-structured interviews – created a space for the participants’ stories to be heard by the researcher. As May (2011) points out, semi-structured interviews allow ‘an opening up of the interview method to an understanding of how interviewees generate and deploy meaning in social life’ (p. 135) and as Filep, Thompson-Fawcett, Fitzsimons and Turner (2015) explain:

when combined, solicited diaries and interviews can substantially enrich investigations of those innately human, yet often elusive, places of the mind – revelatory places – in-between people and the environments that move them (p. 459)

In this research, chronological primacy is given to the participants’ exploration of the meaning of their experiences as they tell their stories to me and then these are ‘restoried’ as narratives by myself. This interactive meaning-making process is more synchronous in the semi-structured interviews than in the video diaries. Semi-structured interviews enabled me to further explore the meanings of the video diaries to clarify and check my own representations of the participants’ meanings consistent with an interpretivist theoretical research stance that looks for meanings shaped by interactions.

The video selfies and semi-structured interviews produced a total of 17 hours, 40 minutes and 52 seconds of raw data. Table 6 below provides a summary of the data submissions made by the participants for this study.
Table 6: Summary of data submissions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants’ self-chosen pseudonym</th>
<th>Weeks in which submission were made</th>
<th>Duration of all submissions</th>
<th>Participation in interviews</th>
<th>Duration of all interview participation hrs:mins:secs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>2, 3, 5 &amp; 6</td>
<td>4:56</td>
<td>initial interview</td>
<td>0:29:52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>mid-semester interview</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>final interview</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lura</td>
<td>2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 1 &amp; 12</td>
<td>1:22:58</td>
<td>initial interview</td>
<td>1:18:43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>mid-semester interview</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>final interview</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moshton</td>
<td>2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11 &amp; 12</td>
<td>1:09:49</td>
<td>initial interview</td>
<td>1:11:06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>mid-semester interview</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>final interview</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olive</td>
<td>2, 3, 4, 5, 6 &amp; 7</td>
<td>14:17</td>
<td>initial interview</td>
<td>1:14:40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>mid-semester interview</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>final interview</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orange</td>
<td>2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 &amp; 12</td>
<td>22:04</td>
<td>initial interview</td>
<td>1:03:34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>mid-semester interview</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>final interview</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pink</td>
<td>2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 12 &amp; 12</td>
<td>14:34</td>
<td>initial interview</td>
<td>1:14:42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>mid-semester interview</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>final interview</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sara</td>
<td>2, 3, 4, 5, 7 &amp; 8</td>
<td>37:52</td>
<td>initial interview</td>
<td>1:21:04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>mid-semester interview</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>final interview</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scarlett</td>
<td>2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 11, 12 &amp; 13</td>
<td>27:05</td>
<td>initial interview</td>
<td>1:00:18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>mid-semester interview</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>final interview</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superwoman</td>
<td>2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 &amp; 11</td>
<td>24:41</td>
<td>initial interview</td>
<td>1:19:06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>mid-semester interview</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>final interview</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wonder Woman</td>
<td>2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 &amp; 10</td>
<td>1:09:24</td>
<td>initial interview</td>
<td>1:20:07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>mid-semester interview</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>final interview</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total recording time of video selfies submitted for this research: 6 hrs 7 mins 40 secs
Total recording time of interviews undertaken for this research: 11 hrs 33 mins 12 secs
Total recording time of all material submitted or otherwise gathered for this research: 17 hrs 40 mins 52 secs
Incentives were offered to participants in this investigation in acknowledgement of
the contribution of their time and experiences. These incentives were three
vouchers from a large retail chain per participant: a voucher for AU$30 at the
initial interview; a voucher for AU$20 for attending the mid-semester interview
and submitting any number of video selfies between commencement and the mid-
semester interview; a voucher for AU$30 for attending the final interview and
submitting any number of video selfies between the mid-semester interview and
the final interview. Two participants withdrew from the study by simply not
providing video selfie submissions (one participant withdrew by week 2 and one
participant withdrew following the mid-semester interview). One participant forgot
to take her voucher after the mid-semester interview and did not call for it until the
final interview despite my reminders. On a couple of occasions participants left
the office without their vouchers and I had to pursue them down the corridor to
deliver them. This suggests the incentives functioned as tokens of appreciation
rather than as a motivation for participation. Therefore, the incentives are unlikely
to have influenced the responses provided by the participants and this supports the
credibility and the dependability of the findings, indicating that the participants’
stories are unlikely to have been influenced by the desire to receive an incentive.

3.6.1 Video selfies

Storytelling and videos are both representational practices (Pauwels, 2010) that
culturally foreground a highly individualised view of experience and a reflective
practice that is almost a ‘technology of the self’ (Bragg, 2007, p. 346) and this
representational practice influenced the participants’ stories as they chose what to
tell and how to tell it. To support the rigour of the study by facilitating
confirmability, these influences are noted in the commentary sections of the
narrative findings presented in chapters four and five of this thesis.

Video selfies were used to collect the participants’ stories of transition into the first
year of their undergraduate degree. Such diaries offer the opportunity for
participant empowerment and spontaneity (Jones et al., 2015). As researcher, I was
aware of the power afforded me in the researcher-participant relationship and, consistent with the research question guiding this research, wished to give primacy to the participants’ stories as much as possible. Video selfies gave the participants choice and control over timing, the use of technology (for example, phone camera or computer camera or other) and location (for example, at home in the car or other) of data collection. The offer of a voice recorder in lieu of videoing technology was made but all chose to video-record the diaries.

The video selfies were collected on a weekly basis or as close to this frequency as the participants chose to submit. The participants were given a loose guide of five minutes for each video selfie submission and were provided with open-ended prompts for their own interpretation (see Appendix D) in order to provide some guidance but also to allow the participants to choose what to tell as much as possible. Video-selfie submissions were made via Dropbox folders; a separate folder was shared between each individual participant and myself. If the participant preferred, they could download the video selfie in my office, directly onto my computer. One participant chose this method until they were comfortable using. The prompts provided to the participants were deliberately minimal and open-ended (See Appendix D: Video- selfie prompts), striking a balance between a freeform and a structured approach to data collection (Brown et al., 2015).

3.6.2 Semi-structured interviews

The video selfie data was supplemented by data from semi-structured interviews. All these interviews contributed to the restorying of the participants’ stories (see 3.4.6 Restorying: data transformation, below, for more on the concept and method of restorying). This restorying resulted in the narratives presented in chapters four and five of this thesis and the interpretation of these narratives presented in chapter six. Interviews were conducted on three separate occasions during the research. An initial interview introduced participants to the research and the data collection process and was attended by each of the 11 participants, although data from the participant who discontinued after week one is not included in this study. A mid-semester interview was attended by each of the ongoing ten participants and the final interview was attended by nine of the participants.
During the initial interview I sought participants’ voluntary and informed consent for participation by providing them with an information sheet and a consent form and verbally explaining the study and implications of participation in the study. This initial interview also involved a walking tour of the campus, during which I video-recorded the walk and the discussion. This recording of the walking tour served to introduce participants to the practice of video-recorded diaries. The shared walking tour also provided the opportunity to establish a rapport and answer any questions the participants had about the research.

Participants were given the opportunity to choose the location of the mid-semester interviews and the final interviews but all participants chose the researcher’s office on campus. These interviews revolved around clarification and further exploration of material in the video selfies. The interviews involved a similar power context and relational context as the video selfies and expanded on the video selfie material. Consequently, they were subjected to the same scrutiny and analysis.

### 3.7 Methods: restorying as data transformation

Restorying in a narrative inquiry involves gathering stories, analysing them for key elements and then retelling the story to emphasise these key elements (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002) through the construction of a narrative. The focus of the investigation reported in this thesis was to identify the meanings of the stories and their social significance as stories of transition as ‘becoming’, with particular attention paid to the exercise of agency mediated by reflexivity. This entailed analytical methods that supported identification and exploration of key features of the analytical framework for this study: Kahn’s (2014) theory of student engagement driven by agency mediated by reflexivity. In particular, this research identified the types of reflexivity used by the participants and the agency this reflexivity supported.

#### 3.7.1 Analytical framework: Kahn’s (2014) types of reflexivity

The analytical framework used for the analysis of this narrative inquiry is Kahn’s (2014) theory of student engagement mediated by reflexivity (please refer to...
section ‘2.4.3: Kahn’s process view of student engagement’ for the particulars of this analytical framework and to sections 2.3.1 to 2.4.4 inclusive for a discussion of the broader field of student agency and the location of Kahn’s approach within this broader field. Kahn’s (2014) framework has been chosen because of its relevance to higher education, its philosophical separation of structure and agency and its use in published research, permitting the findings from this research to be readily compared to other research and so extend existing research in this field.

Reflexivity as used by the participants in this research has been identified using features of Halliday’s system of transitivity (1985) (see section ‘3.7.2.1 Discourse analysis: An interpretive approach’ for further details). However, unlike written texts that are designed to construct meaning primarily through words and grammatical structures, spoken texts convey meanings in a constantly changing environment to which language is responsive. “The complexity of spoken language is more like that of a dance; it is not static and dense but mobile and intricate” (Halliday, 1985, p. xxiv) and this mobility involves rhythm, intonation, tempo and volume (Halliday, 1985, p. xxv). Consequently, these paralinguistic features of language and the meanings they convey are considered in the analyses presented here, including an analysis, where appropriate, of the meaning units used by the participants identified by the intonation (Gee, 1986; Riessman, 1993) of their speech, rather than of the clauses alone.

Finally, the role of affect is noted in the narratives. Affect extends beyond language because feelings “have a quite literally unspeakable aspect that renders them elusive to, and always slightly disjunctive with, language” (Cromby, 2011, p. 83). That is, unlike language, affect is not completely speakable but is somatically experienced (see comments on my own reactions to the participants’ stories and descriptions of the participants’ postures and facial expressions) and is an integral component of the situations in which it arises. Ahmed (2001, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c) argues strongly that affect can neither be understood as fully internal nor external but instead “… define[s] the contours of the multiple worlds that are inhabited by different subjects” (Ahmed 2004a, p. 25). Her argument looks not at the source of affect and emotions but instead at their effects. She argues that emotions serve to
create boundaries or borders between subjectivities, that is, that emotions serve to create different sorts of relationships and entities:

Emotions do things, and they align individuals with communities—or bodily space with social space—through the very intensity of their attachments. Rather than seeing emotions as psychological dispositions, we need to consider how they work, in concrete and particular ways, to mediate the relationship between the psychic and the social, and between the individual and the collective (Ahmed 2004b, p. 119)

Their effect, then, is to connect, and therefore also to disconnect (Carena, 2012). This underpins an understanding of affect and emotions as relational and this was used, along with transitivity, to help identify co-reflexivity from other types of reflexivity by identifying the connections between participants and their peers.

3.7.2 Analytical choices

To undertake this investigation, restorying involved a focus on the elements of the stories, the information conveyed and the manner in which the story was told. That is, meaning was investigated by focusing on both what was told and the manner in which it was told. I achieved this by analysing the stories using a combination of:

a. discourse analysis;

b. identification of the paralinguistic features of language (such as pitch, volume and rate of speech) and non-verbal communications (such as mannerisms, movement of eyes, hand movements and orientation to the screen); and

c. an understanding of the sociality of affect.

These investigative methods were used in the process of restorying the gathered stories into narratives that balanced description and interpretation (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994; Mulholland & Wallace, 2003). The transcribed material and the accompanying embodied communications (for example, body movements such as shrugs and smiles and intonation) were analysed for reflexivity and agency. The analyses used in this study involved a process of examining and re-examining the
ideas within the data, constantly comparing the ideas and their expression, looking for the meanings behind particular coalescences of nuances, word choices, non-verbal communications and other bodily responses. The process of restorying to develop the narratives began with the data transcription.

The manner in which data is handled, including transcription, is not a neutral process. It is influenced by the researcher’s views and beliefs in the same way the interpretation of the findings is influenced. Consequently, the processes used in data transformation are here made clear so the reader can evaluate the credibility and dependability of the findings for themselves by understanding my interpretive choices. Decisions about the transcription were guided primarily by the necessity to maintain participants’ confidentiality.

Repeated viewings of the video selfies, repeated listening to the interview recordings, and transcription of most of the material helped me, as researcher, immerse myself in the data. I transcribed all the video selfie submissions, the initial interviews, five of the ten mid-semester interviews and three of the final interviews. The remaining five mid-semester interviews and six final interviews were transcribed professionally. Transcribing all the video selfies myself ensured that the non-verbal information was noted, for example, eye movements and body postures. It also prevented identification of the participants, some of whom recorded their faces. The audio-recorded interviews were already familiar to me and a professional transcriber would not have been able to identify participants from the audio-recordings of the interviews as each participant used a self-chosen pseudonym for the interviews.

After repeated viewings and listening, and following transcription, I was able to identify that some data had greater analytic import than other data. These moments are referred to by Charmaz (1991) as ‘identifying moments’ which are ‘telling moments filled with new self-images…telling because they spark sudden realizations [and] reveal hidden images of self’ (p. 207, as cited in van den
Hoonaard, 2013, p. 34). I paid particular analytical and interpretive attention to these sections of the narratives. I then undertook a discourse analysis of these moments in order to provide sufficient information for the reader to make their own judgements about arguments and data transformations in these pivotal excerpts.

3.7.2.1 Discourse analysis: an analytical choice

Discourse analysis of sections of the video selfie submissions of analytic import facilitated in-depth understandings of the meanings the participants conveyed in these sections. The focus of interpretivism on meaning-making through the symbolic system of language points to the two main functions of all languages: to understand the environment and to act on others within the environment (Halliday, 1985, p. xiii). A key analytical method used in this research was an analysis of sections of the stories that carried analytical import using Halliday’s (1985) functional grammar. While this grammar is derived from “a theory of language as choice” (Halliday, 1985, p. xxvii) within a system network, it focuses on the language structure as an instantiation of the system and not on the choices made, such as a system’s approach (following structuralism) to analysis could do. Only the functional system of transitivity (that is, the reflective and experiential aspect of meaning (Halliday, 1985, p. 101)) is used in order to understand how the participants’ used reflexivity to mediate their agency.

The system of transitivity conveys what is happening (the process), who does it or to whom it is done, and the circumstances surrounding the action (Halliday, 1985). A discourse analysis that included transitivity highlighted how the participants represented themselves and their experiences of the world: how they perceived what was happening, how and when they represented themselves as having and making choices or being passive, when they identified themselves as individuals and when they affiliated themselves with others, and whether they saw things as happening in the cognitive, affective or behavioural realms. To capture the influence of the social context of transition, the analysis paid particular attention to the use of pronouns (part of deixis) in combination with the role of the speaker, as an individual (‘I’) or as affiliated with others (‘we’) (Dervin, 2011), at the clausal
level of representation. This was combined with attention to the type of process (verb) used to represent meanings indicating whether the speaker was positioning themselves as having agency or not. The type of process (verb) the participants used to represent their doings or their being-done-to is evidence of how they perceive they act or are acted upon in the world: by doing, through sensing, by speaking, or by simply being. My analysis highlighted the individual participant’s relational and agentive self-representation and the areas (cognitive, perceptual, being or behaving) in which they represented their experiences.

However, because systemic functional linguistics prioritises linguistic communications, it has only a ‘partial and incomplete ability to convey something beyond itself’ (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009, p. 235). In order to take the analysis beyond this limitation, the detailed focus on the ways in which meaning was linguistically represented was conducted within a broader framework of analysis which often drew on affect, following Ahmed’s (2001, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c) work on the effects of affect and emotions. The focus of this framework was not on the source of affect but on its sociality.

3.7.2.2 Affect: an interpretive lens

Ahmed (2004a, 2004b, 2004c) provides an understanding of the sociality of affect consistent with findings of phenomenographic studies into students’ lived experiences of transition, such as those discussed in chapter 2 of this thesis (for example, Stone & O’Shea, 2012, 2013; O’Shea, 2015, 2016; Brown, Hughes, Keppell, Hard & Smith, 2015; McMillan, 2013, 2014). Ahmed (2004a) maintains that emotions cannot always be contained within an individual but nor are they totally outside of individuals. Individuals can use shared feelings to form a collective, using affect as a type of ‘social glue’. This view of the social function of affect is used to understand Kahn’s co-reflexivity as shared deliberations based on shared concerns and leading to distributed agency and to understand reflexivity that is not shared with others.

3.8 Methods: restorying as data representation

As already noted, narrative inquiry involves a restorying of a participant’s story
from the researcher’s perspective. This is a process of constructing meanings from the stories through interactions between myself and the research participants and this is a common feature of interpretivist research. As Clandinin and Connolly (1989) explain, it becomes ‘a shared narrative construction and reconstruction’ (p. 11). The story data is presented in particular ways to make the various elements of this shared construction and reconstruction apparent and as transparent as possible, to promote the confirmability and transferability of this research.

For each of the ten narratives, an orientation is provided which indicates to the reader the ‘who’, ‘when’ and ‘where’ (Johnstone, 2016) of the narrative. Demographic information that helps the reader to ‘know’ the participant (the ‘who’), the early setting of the interactions between the researcher and the participant (the ‘where’ and ‘when’) are included. The ‘how’ of the inquiry process, that is the manner in which the participant told their story, conveys information important to the social and political context of the telling. To make transparent the bases for the inferences made about the manner in which each participant told their story, this information is provided in the section of each narrative titled ‘Contextual Features’.

Each narrative is presented in one of two ways: either as diary-style entries (here termed episodes) or following the Labovian structural features of complication and resolution (Johnstone, 2016). These different narrative structures reflect the approaches different participants took to telling their stories. The Labovian structure is used when participants packaged their stories for me as interlocutor in such a way as to direct my attention to the parts of their experiences and their interpretations of these parts as a complication and a resolution. The complication is a focal point for the story. As Johnstone (2016) explains, ‘they [complications] create a tension that keeps the auditors listening’ (p. 546) and they involve a revision or refinement of the meanings of previous story material to support this complication. Complications involve a cause-effect meaning (Czarniawska, 2010) and to achieve this in a series of separate submissions such as used in the research reported here required the participants to revise the meaning of previous
submissions to have them do duty in the cause-effect relationships necessary for a complication. The resolution involves the release of this tension. This structure is a directed but processed story of lived experience by the participant, designed with myself as audience in mind. In contrast, other stories are restoried into narratives as a series of diary-style entries, here termed episodes. This presentation of the narratives reflects the participants’ reliance on chronology as the organising principle behind their stories. Tension occurs within episodes, yet these participants did not attempt to package this into a single coherent and connected story using the cohesive device of a complication. This structure located the responsibility for making connections between episodes with me as audience.

Some narratives are presented here with a coda. A coda provides a short summary of the entire story or connects the world of the story to the present world in some way (Johnstone, 2016). In the narratives here, codas were used by some participants to connect the meaning of their story of lived experience to their role in life – a past, present or future role. For each narrative a summary is provided with the intention of focusing on ‘the evident perspectives’ (Mulholland & Wallace, 2003, p. 6) that I see in each participant’s story.

For presentation purposes, these ten narratives are organised into two separate chapters based on the dominant type of peer interactions of the participants as a consequence of affect. Those participants whose interactions with peers were for comparative purposes or who avoided student peer interactions altogether are presented together in chapter 4. These participants used similar sociality of affect; one designed to keep peers at some distance. Those participants whose interactions with peers were highly collaborative are presented together in chapter 5. These participants used affect as a social ‘glue’; to maintain their peer relationships. This chapter organisation reflects the key differences in the ten narratives: the socio-relational contexts established and maintained by each participant to support their preferred ways of exercising reflexivity in order to exercise their agency.
3.9 Methods: interpretive restorying informed by theory - between-participant comparisons

The final stage in the restorying (presented in Chapter 6 of this thesis) involves a highly interpretive account of the similarities evident between the ten narratives. These similarities are identified using Kahn’s (2014) theorising of student engagement as the framework to connect the transition narratives of the participants to the process of engagement with studies by focusing on the reflexivity of the participants and their consequent exercise of agency. This interpretive restorying approach follows that of Mulholland and Wallace (2003) who conducted a narrative inquiry of educational practice and argued ‘this weaving of data and theory is still a story, a reconstruction of educational practice in the form of an argued narrative’ (p. 18).

In summary then, the research is framed as shown in Figure 2 below:

![Figure 2: Graphic representation of the framing of this research](image)

The next step in understanding the meanings presented in the research presented here is to be aware of the situational context within which the researcher and the participants were working together.
3.10 Conclusion

The research question guiding the study reported here is:

_How do first year undergraduate students experience their transition into university studies and how might the stories they tell of this time illuminate the processes of agency?_

This question directs attention to the socially constructed, individualised and person-centred meanings and choices which students make as they exercise their agency during transition. Agency mediated by reflexivity is explored using discourse analysis and an interpretation of the sociality of affect in the stories told by the research participants.

The narrative inquiry approach maintained the integrity of each research participants’ individual transition stories and narratives. It guides analytical and interpretive attention to the decisions and choices made by the research participants over time, the outcomes of these decisions and their impacts on further decisions and outcomes and on the participants themselves. This is a focus on transition as ‘becoming’, driven by student agency and mediated by reflexivity as participants engaged with their studies.

The findings of this narrative inquiry are reported in the following three chapters, four, five and six. Consistent with the person-centred view of transition as ‘becoming’, each narrative is reported separately for each research participant. The organisation of the material into these two chapters reflects the findings of different types of peer interactions by the participants: comparative and collaborative. This chapter organisation reflects the key differences between the research participants; the socio-relational contexts established and to support their preferred forms of reflexivity and, therefore, the exercise of their agency. Chapter four presents the narratives of those research participants who sought peer relationships for comparative purposes and chapter five presents the narratives of those research participants who sought peer relationships for collaborative purposes. Chapter six presents a narrative of the between-participant findings in relation to agency and transition – an interpretive restorying.
Chapter 4: Findings: Narratives showing peer interactions for comparative purposes

4.1 Introduction
This chapter, along with chapter five, presents the ten narratives I have analysed for this case study. Each narrative is presented here in its entirety, in the participant’s voice. To highlight the embodied and situated nature of the experience of transition I have provided context to permit the reader to better understand each narrative. The material is organised into two chapters based on the manner of peer interactions used by the participants: comparative or collaborative. This chapter presents the narratives of those research participants who sought peer relationships for comparative purposes or limited peer relationships altogether. Chapter five presents the narratives of those research participants who sought peer relationships for reasons of collaboration.

In this chapter the narratives of participants James, Lura, Moshton and Wonder Woman are presented. These four participants undertook transition decisions largely on the basis of seeking limited peer relationships and for the purpose of personal benchmarking – a mostly comparative purpose. They noted similarities between their own experiences and the experiences of others but chose to only minimally share their experiences with others. This is in contrast to the six participants whose narratives are reported later in chapter five.

The first of the narratives presented in this chapter is James’ narrative. James participated in this research until the mid-semester break. He provided very brief video selfies and participated in two of the possible three interviews. Lura and Moshton are sisters and both participated in this research throughout the study’s duration. Both provided extensive video selfies and participated in all three interviews. Wonder Woman enrolled in university straight after completing her high schooling. She provided very lengthy video selfies and participated in all three interviews. Her narrative is distinguished by the distress it communicates.
4.2 Narrative 1: James – striving to distinguish himself through academic achievement

‘Well, like, even from the start I have put this pressure on myself. Not bad pressure but I do not have time to…I am not seeing if I like this. I just have to do it.’

4.2.1 James at orientation

James is a 29-year-old ‘non-traditional’ male university entrant enrolling in his first year of nursing, a traditionally female occupation. He completed the first year of a different undergraduate degree two years earlier. James participated in this project at the encouragement of his partner, Olive, who elected to participate herself. I heard Olive suggesting to him that he should consider being involved and my impression was that without her encouragement, he would not have chosen to participate. His inclusion in the study occurred around the time of the second recruitment contact, suggesting he took some time to consider his participation before joining the study.

James, like his partner (see Olive’s narrative in Chapter 5), attended my workshop titled ‘Returning to Study’. I designed this workshop to provide a mini experience of study using an experiential approach. It included activities involving first year texts and attendees participated in small groups in a room set up for group participation. Activities were followed by debriefings. Second year students joined the group and told attendees of their own first year experiences, passing on the tips they found most helpful and those they wish they had received. By adopting this approach to the organisation of the workshop, I was foregrounding my own valuing of reflection and reflexivity and of peer collaboration. The inclusion of the elements of peer collaboration and reflection in this program, which was designed to support student success, also indicated the potential contribution of those elements to student success.

The advertising for this workshop targeted those students who were enrolling following a break from studies. This targeting suggests that the institution might
expect these students to be less well prepared than students who are enrolling directly following previous studies. Such targeting positions these students as potentially in deficit, before they begin their enrolled subjects. James’ participation in this workshop hints that he accepts this perception of deficit might be applicable to himself, although it is also possible that his attendance is a consequence of his relationship with Olive. James’ video selfie submissions suggest this deficit positioning was something he later consciously refused. James and Olive and one other participant sat at a group table on the side of the room and I was obliged to actively include James and allocate him turns to have him contribute to the general discussions. He took the turns offered, but I do not remember him volunteering contributions. I would describe James as compliant when invited to participate but not proactive in terms of group participation. He was quiet and kept to himself.

The first walk-around interview was conducted in the first week of session, a few days after the ‘Returning to Study’ workshop. James recorded the interview on his phone and sent me the recording through Dropbox. He does a valiant job of addressing my conception of ‘transition’ as involving the match or mismatch between internal expectations and an experienced reality. He also introduces the notion of ‘community’, the only time in his submissions and interviews that he explicitly does this. In this instance he speaks of ‘community’ as something he values, although not explaining his reasons for this:

James, initial interview

**Joanne:** When you were thinking about coming to nursing and when you were thinking about which university to choose, I guess in your head you had a set of expectations?

**James:** Yep [nods his head once]

**Joanne:** How does all of this that we’ve just been walking through so far match those expectations?

**James:** Um it’s pretty close just sort of on a smaller scale I guess like I’d looked at a bunch of other universities and a lot of them were bigger and had more rooms and stuff
**Joanne:** Right so it’s smaller in size, in what ways does it meet what you thought you were going to have?

**James:** Um well it’s got all the facilities we need here for the amount of people it’s fine

**Joanne:** Okay right let’s go downstairs [walk down stairs together, no small chat]

So, this is the big lecture theatre which we can’t go in now but you’ve been in. I can hear the coffee machine, so, here we’ve got the general area. How does this match what you thought you were getting into?

**James:** Ah yeah it’s pretty close to what I expected

**Joanne:** And has it been a good experience? Has it been a positive match with what you expected is there something that’s been a good surprise or a bad surprise or…?

**James:** The kitchen area’s nice compared to the Wollongong campus where it’s all restaurants and sort of impersonal, everyone kinds of sits in here and chats from what I’ve seen so far so that’s nice

**Joanne:** And you like that?

**James:** Yep

**Joanne:** Why?

**James:** Aahh, just because of the smallness like there’s not, kind of more worth getting to know people than at other campuses like I might never see this person again there’s no sort of community I guess

**Joanne:** Right and that sense of community you find…?

**James:** Oh it’s nice it’s helpful it’s yeah

**Joanne:** So it makes you feel good and it’s helpful so its…?

**James:** Well you don’t just feel sort of lost in a sea of people I guess [laughs]
4.2.1.1 Commentary

James’ responses to my questions are brief and to the point and I find it difficult to obtain expansions without leading him to particular answers. To give us both a reprieve from what was starting to feel like an inquisition, I was silent as we descended the stairs in the middle of our interview. James did not initiate any conversation in this silence, consistent with his relatively factual use of talk rather than a more social use of talk, and perhaps with his maintaining a social distance from me. When asked whether any unanticipated experiences had occurred, he responds with comments on the kitchen area and the positive aspects of the ‘smallness’ and the ‘community’ feel. This valuing of the social seems inconsistent with his use of talk so far but I wonder if his comments on feeling ‘lost in a sea of people’, made in contrast to the ‘smallness’ and ‘community’ descriptions of Loftus, might refer to his previous experience of university, since he is quite specific about the contrast with the main campus environment. If so, James’ selection of Loftus seems to be, in part, to overcome or avoid the aspects of a previous university situation that he found unpleasant or perhaps unhelpful. Interestingly, despite this, James makes no further references to collegial peer relationships in his submissions, although he does mention his partner Olive who is also studying the same degree at this site. The sense of community and its valuing is much stronger in Olive’s narrative and I wonder at the similarity of terms used by these two participants, given they are partners. I wonder if James is enacting solidarity with Olive in his use of the term ‘community’, rather than offering his unique views.

4.2.2 Contextual Features

James’ submissions are very brief (two are less than a minute long and two are between one and two minutes) and he only makes four of them. He attends for the mid-semester interview but after this and his week six submission he does not submit and does not respond to an invitation for a final interview. He says in his mid-semester interview that ‘it is hard just finding stuff that is different to talk about from week to week’, which echoes the final sentence in his week five entry: ‘I think that’s kind of it really, I’m having a hard time elaborating on it, yep’.
This indicates a discomfort with this project and uncertainty about what he might contribute, despite my reassurances that it is good for me to know if things are the same. James is choosing to focus on behavioural aspects of change during transition rather than any internal or even social aspect of change during transition.

4.2.2.1 Commentary

James does not seem particularly comfortable with this project. Both his initial interview and his video submissions involve very brief responses and statements and his early discontinuation is no surprise. His withdrawal involves cessation of all communication. This can feel a little uncomfortable on a very small campus such as Loftus, so I make a point of smiling when I see him so he does not feel it necessary to avoid me and, I hope, understands that his withdrawal truly does not affect his access to my services. This lack of communication again sits uneasily with his earlier mention of ‘community’ and the value of the ‘smallness’ of the campus, the benefit of getting to know people.

James provided four video submissions; one in each of weeks two, three, five and six. Each was a separate diary-style entry, here termed episodes, and the focus in each was on ‘what has changed’ – a reference to my prompts. James begins each of his entries the same way, by introducing himself to me, ‘This is James’ and he ends with no salutation. All his submissions are headshots and his eyes frequently move around the room and his screen as he speaks, giving the sense of searching for something, perhaps searching for something to say? He rarely looks directly at the camera.

James makes almost no eye contact with me through his camera. I feel like I want to speak to him to call his attention to me. His choice of introducing himself to me each week suggests a sense of distance from me, as if he might need to remind me of who he is each time. The absence of greetings or farewell salutations reinforces this is a functional process James, rather than a social exchange. The way he refers to the ‘changes’ I am looking for reminds me of students who construct
assignments carefully around the criteria to be addressed. I feel James is ‘going through the motions’ here rather than sharing his experiences with me and that he is refusing a possible social connection with me.

4.2.3 Episodes

James’ four submissions are dominated by his recounting of his actions and his individual achievement orientation. I have presented excerpts from his submissions with comments based on transitivity following Halliday (1985) and focusing on deixis (Dervin, 2011) in order to demonstrate his self-representation (deixis) and the processes he employs in negotiating his transition (transitivity). In Week 2, his first submission, he discusses his initial impressions and plans actions on the bases of these:

James, week 2

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<th>Transcript</th>
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<td>I’m needing a lot more time than I thought to complete my studies. I’ve had to cut back on work hours. Um, one thing I’ve noticed is like, a lot of the other students seem to be doing a lot less work. Like I’ve spent four hours on certain readings getting that all summarised and people haven’t even looked at it in class, so I’m going to have to work out how that’s going to affect my progress, if I need to do that or if my time would be better spent on other things</td>
<td>This is an explicit differentiation by James of himself from other students James focuses on his individual experiences through his use of pronominal references ‘I’ and ‘my’ and he draws a clear distinction between himself and other students. He uses mental processes of perception, such as ‘noticed’ and ‘thought’ or behavioural processes, such as ‘spent’ and ‘cut back’ to explain his actions; his sphere of control. James is representing himself in isolation from his social and physical surroundings and is managing his study on the basis of his thinking and reasoning. He appears to be consciously maintaining study as an epistemological endeavour</td>
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In contrast, James identifies very strongly with his family unit, as shown below through pronominal reference (see bolding), although even his family relationships are represented in terms of behaviours:

**James, week 2**

*Um, what else? It’s influencing my relationship as my partner is also studying at the same time. We have a child, so finding we have to separate our time a lot where we take turns, or one of us studies for an hour and the other sorts baby out and we switch back and forth, which seems to give us some more time, where we generally do those sort of things together.*

In terms of his student role, James represents himself as a student who processes his world cognitively and with a focus on his personal endeavours and achievement – taking actions to achieve his academic objectives on the basis of his thinking. The exception to this is his strong identification with his partner and their child, although even this is represented in terms of behaviours. In all of his submissions, James makes only one direct reference to himself as part of a cohort (‘we’ve had two assignments due and a test’ in week five) reinforcing this individual approach to study and his differentiation of himself from other students. When he compares his use of time to other students’ apparent use of time he evaluates this difference in terms of its potential impact on his achievements. James’ own view of this individual focus and his reason for it arises in his mid-session interview. Despite three probes by me into the context around his transition, James’ responses remained largely focused on his behaviours – the things he did to make the changes necessary and the rational processes he undertook to decide these changes – until he speaks explicitly of his own goals and motivations:

**James, mid-semester interview**

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<th><strong>Transcript</strong></th>
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<td><strong>Joanne:</strong> What adjustments in particular then have you had to make to enable you to make this change?</td>
<td>James describes his responses to his studies.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>James:</strong> When I started uni I got regular work Monday and Friday. But I was also</td>
<td>These are behavioural responses.</td>
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</table>
**Transcript**

doing really casual work for my Mum’s business, just like a couple of hours in the afternoons. I have just had to say I cannot help you with your business stuff anymore. Just having another thing to try and tick off every week was just distracting. I find there is a process of getting bored enough to do the uni work. You have got to sit there. Eventually you go, fine, I will just do it. If you are busy up until that point it takes longer. Just clearing the schedule of other things.

**Joanne:** So what has been important in facilitating your ability to make those adjustments? What has been important in letting you do those changes?

**James:** Just realising that I am not on top of everything as I would like to be. The first week every pre reading, I read. Important notes taken down. Every little thing you could find to do was done. By the fifth week it is like you have got for some of the labs a hundred pages of prereading. By now you realise no one else seems to be doing it. It would take me three or four hours to get through all that. Perhaps my time could be spent better somewhere else. It is like not being as prepared; coming into class 10 minutes early; filling out the work you had to have completed very quickly; just working out that.

**Joanne:** So that is what you have had to do but what is it that has let you do those changes? What is it that has let you make those changes?

**James:** The pressure of it.

**James cont.:** You can see the progression. The first week everything was done super prepared. Then every week after that is a little bit less. On Thursdays I stick around

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<td>for PASS\textsuperscript{6} sessions learning development.</td>
<td>James’ reaction to this external pressure is felt as a threat to his ability to function; ‘overwhelmed’.</td>
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<tr>
<td>At the start it was like yeah yeah. Then no.</td>
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<td>As you sort of slack off, the pressure increases</td>
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<td>and you feel more overwhelmed</td>
<td>James’ behavioural response to the threat of being ‘overwhelmed’ is to allocate time strategically.</td>
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<td>so you work out where to put your time</td>
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\textbf{Joanne:} Not just what has changed but when you have been making these changes and these adjustments; what is it that has made that easier for you? What has facilitated your ability to make those changes? I reckon people come in; they work out what they need to do; some just do not do it. What has made this possible for you?  

\textbf{James:} Well like even from the start I have put this pressure on myself  

\textbf{Joanne:} Not bad pressure but I do not have time to – I am not seeing if I like this. I just have to do it. I have to do it well if I want to get into other things I want to get into after. It is not just like P’s get degrees and stuff. I want to be able to do postgraduate. I want to do really well at everything. I am not aiming for P’s.  

\textbf{Joanne:} You want HD’s?  

\textbf{James:} Yes. Any other study I have done in my life I have done well. I put that expectation on myself  

The source of the pressure has been shifted from an external source to become an internal source.  

The internalised pressure takes the form of an expectation James has of himself. This expectation is a strongly felt imperative to achieve and seems to be unrelated to the content of the degree. He seeks achievement on his own.  

This internalised pressure is driven by James’ focus on his future but draws on the past as well. As argued by Ahmed (2004a) “…the process of recognition (of this feeling or that feeling) is bound up in what we already know…” (p. 30). James is repeating his past study approaches;  

\textsuperscript{6}Peer Assisted Study Sessions (PASS)
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<tr>
<td>It is perhaps conceited almost but I am going to do well compared to everyone else I am going to do very well.</td>
<td>James draws a distinct divide here between himself and ‘everyone else’. The collective ‘everyone else’ is the benchmark for James’ achievement as an individual.</td>
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<tr>
<td>That pressure helps me to put the time in. It is probably not the most healthy way to look at things but it has always worked for me. I like doing well. If I was going to half arse it, I would half arse it just as well and do very poorly. So if I am doing it I am doing it well. That enables me to put all the time in that I need to.</td>
<td>The pressure helps James pursue his own goal: achievement.</td>
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In this section of the interview, James initially identifies ‘pressure’ as coming from a source outside of himself – ‘it’ – although he later internalises and owns this pressure as his own and under his control. However, this pressure is a threat to him, which he speaks of as ‘overwhelming’; that is, that he will be overcome by it. As proof of his success in overcoming this threat, James seeks to distinguish himself from his peers, to be successful in comparison to them. James seems determined not to be like his peers. Ahmed (2004b) discusses fear and the way in which people avoid those objects and people who represent that fear:

…anxiety and fear create the very effect of borders, and the very effect of that which ‘we are not,’ partly through how we turn away from the other, whom we imagine as the cause of our fear (p. 132)

Despite saying he values ‘community’ at this site, James has avoided identifying with the collective of ‘other students’. This avoidance of belonging to a collective of peers suggests he needed the collective as a contrast against which he could define himself. He has responded to the ‘pressure’ he feels with determination to succeed. This success seems to have more meaning for James than the
occupational role he is training for because success, rather than his future occupation, is the focus of his submissions.

In the process of discussing his actions and goals, James makes comments to me about the specific difficulties the course has posed, perhaps in response to my role as an institutional employee. He points out, coherently and explicitly, the institutional obstacles to his goal achievement and the strategies he feels forced to adopt to manage this situation:

James, mid-semester interview

**Joanne:** So what has been important in facilitating your ability to make these adjustments? What has been important in letting you do those changes?

**James:** Just realising that I am not on top of everything as I would like to be. The first week every pre-reading I read, important notes taken down, every little thing you could find to do was done. By the fifth week it is like you have got for some of the labs a hundred pages of pre-reading. By now you realise no one else seems to be doing it. It would take me three or four hours to get through all that. Perhaps my time could be spent better somewhere else. It is like not being as prepared; coming into class 10 minutes early; filling out the work you had to have completed very quickly; just working out that.

Those are the big things. Working out where to put in time. I think I said on my video, you would like to almost put all your time into studying the coursework and getting to know that. A lot of the assessments almost seem like a distraction to that.

It is almost not really helping you know it more. Often it is just on some tangent and you cannot see how it is relating to helping learn the coursework and then putting that into nursing is like this assignment is almost taking time away from better things you could be learning but that is what it is.

This echoes his submission in week 5:

*I am finding that difficulty with the balance between the assessment tasks and studying for tests and actual subject content. Like it’s easy to let the subject content sort of slip behind by concentrating on the assessment tasks and vice*
versa for different ones, and also balancing the amount of time spent on each subject. Some seem to just have way more content involved and it is hard not to try and spend more time on those subjects when it’s all going to be rated equally.

Although I feel James has kept me at a distance throughout his submissions, he is very happy to share with me the institutional difficulties he is facing – he was one of the few participants who spoke explicitly and clearly with me about what could be called institutional failings. This could be a continuation of his focus on the external world, rather than the intrapersonal or social worlds. What he tells me indicates that he assumed that the institution had planned his workload, giving attention to the workload demands made across all his subjects in total. However, this does not seem to be the case and so the course, as it is currently organised, is preventing him from mastering all content equally and he is being forced to make guesses about where to best put his time. He does this by comparing himself to ‘everyone else’, those against whom he must compete in order to achieve his goal of academically standing out.

4.2.4 Restorying

James’ transition story is one of being the exception by choice: he is enrolled in a heavily gendered course of study and is of the minority gender; he is keen to succeed in contrast to and in competition with his peers. James is consciously oriented towards managing his world cognitively and behaviourally and affect is mentioned rarely. However, James’ own effect of total determination to achieve high marks is the basis on which he differentiates himself from the collective of ‘everyone else’ whom he must out-perform to achieve his goal. He uses affect to create a collective against which he can define himself as different. He compares himself to his peers to identify his concerns and prioritise them as he strives to out-perform them.

James uses the same types of study approaches and goals he has before. James is very clear about his goal and this is to achieve a future, academically successful self; not even the particular degree nor end occupation seems to matter much.
James’ peripheral involvement in the Returning to Study workshop now seems to me a deliberate refusal to be involved in any deficit positioning – a refusal based on fear of failing. James is making the choices he feels will best achieve his future-imagined, academically successful self.

4.3 Narrative 2: Lura – a battle to find a place in the world

‘Hasta la vista’

4.3.1 Lura at orientation

Lura is an 18-year-old ‘traditional’ university entrant, sister of participant Moshton. They are both coming into their university studies directly following their high schooling and on the basis of early entry offers. Lura initiated contact with me over her and then her sister’s participation in this study. Both Lura and Moshton had been offered early entry to two universities and were considering a third. These universities were Wollongong, Notre Dame and University of Technology, Sydney. They both chose Wollongong, specifically courses offered at the Loftus campus.

Moshton and Lura completed their initial interview and walk around together with me. In this interview they spoke together, overlapping in places and finishing each other’s sentences, suggesting they share similar views. This transcribes, as clearly as possible, as follows:

Moshton and Lura, initial interview

**Joanne**: Did you do much investigating before you chose this uni?

**Moshton**: Oh yes, we went to the Wollongong campus, like, a hundred times and I’m like, ‘I love this campus’

**Lura**: But it’s far away

**Moshton**: But an hour each morning

**Lura**: We don’t have our Ps yet

**Moshton**: So transport would have been terrible, so we’re like ‘Oh I hope there’s a closer one’, and then we found Loftus
Joanne: So did you compare Loftus to any other big universities?

Moshton: Yes, Notre Dame, UTS...

Lura: We had really three, Notre Dame, UTS or Wollongong

Moshton: Yes

Lura: Cause we went there and it kinda felt right, but Wollongong felt the best

Moshton: Wollongong felt really good, Notre Dame not as much and we got accepted into early entry for both, so we chose Wollongong, then UTS....

Lura: UTS was kinda...

Joanne: And when you say it felt good, it felt better can you

Lura: Everyone was smiling

Moshton: The atmosphere, everyone I actually know who has come to Wollongong is like ‘it’s the best uni’. You know it’s more, you feel more accepted

Lura: The setting was beautiful

Moshton: The setting was beautiful rather than being stuck in a building of, like, cement

Joanne: How does that (indicating the general eating/social area) match what you were expecting, the tea area and everything that happens there?

Lura: I didn’t realise that there was going to be a little area that we could, like, eat, that we could like, talk between tutors. It’s clean, like, and it’s actually, like, really nice. Since we’re a small university they offer you a lot of food and coffee and that sort of stuff, so it’s much nicer than having to bring our lunch and stuff like

Moshton: Well they don’t offer you food but you can make a coffee, like, who thinks about that? It’s so nice that the um, since it’s such a small university they are able to accommodate the other needs.

4.3.1.1 Commentary

Lura (like Moshton) is shaping her selection of Loftus as the site of her enrolment
as if it were an answer to her wish: a lucky find too good to refuse, that addressed her transport needs (a solution to a potential problem), and considered her personal preferences (such as food) as well. This positions the university as relating to her personally in ways that meet her individual needs, almost as if the university is a sensate being that acts with intentions towards her and with whom she can have a reciprocal and emotionally attuned relationship. Lura even exaggerates this responsiveness by the university to her needs, saying that the institution provides lunch when this is not the case. This belief in the university as a caring and sensate being, I think, partially influences her decision to participate in this study. She looks to consolidate a supportive reciprocal relationship with me, as part of the institution, through her participation. This interpretation is supported in Lura’s final interview:

**Lura, final interview**

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<tr>
<td><strong>Joanne:</strong> Okay. Now why did you choose to participate in this study?</td>
<td>Lura says she might as well get in the ‘books’, by helping me out, referencing the saying ‘getting in the good books’. She believes she is positioning herself favourably to receive assistance if she needs it by creating a personal connection with me. This belief is based on her sense of an implied reciprocal obligation.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Lura:</strong> Well, because I was new to the uni, I was: well, let’s see how I’m going to take uni. Let’s do video recordings of how I’m experiencing everything and then looking at it at the end and be: oop, yeah, that’s how it was. I always like to take videos anyway. I like to document things too and I was: well, if this can help you with whatever you’re...</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Joanne:</strong> You’re very kind.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Lura:</strong> Yeah, it’s okay. I was: might as well get in the books, start off at uni actually doing something rather than a - because it’s a small campus not really the groups to join or anything, I was: might as well do something. You know?</td>
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In Lura’s mind, she was enrolling in a university capable of participating in a friendly, helpful, personally connected relationship with her, including sensing and responding to her needs.
4.3.2 Contextual Features

Lura’s submissions are very much performed for me and involve deliberate visual communication as well as verbal communication. Lura begins each of her submissions with a title and a salutation, usually ‘Hey, this is Lura’s week xx entry’ and she finishes each submission with a visual salutation. Sometimes she gives a thumbs-up but more usually offers a casual military-style salute, accompanied by a verbal farewell such as ‘this is Lura signing out’ or ‘hasta la vista’, referencing Arnold Schwarzenegger in the Terminator movies – a lone fighter in a battle. She sometimes speaks to me directly in her submissions:

Lura, week 2

Transcript | Commentary
--- | ---
*Basically what you want to know is, how I am coping with the transition of being a high school and now a first time uni student?* | The term ‘coping with’ indicates Lura feels she needs to explain her choices as responses to difficulties. This emphasises the difference in authority between our two roles, as Lura justifies her choices to me.

Lura, week 7

So I guess next week’s entry I’ll let you know on how that exam went

Lura, week 9

My week nine entry. See you next week for how crappy the essay was or if I got finished
Lura, week 10

*Because I’m going for my [P-plate driving licence], don’t tell anybody*

Lura, week 11

*In your recent e-mail you asked me to focus on how this transition has been for me as a person*

I am always Lura’s audience and she appears to always be conscious of me as audience, shaping her submissions to address my prompts.

4.3.2.1 Commentary

Lura appears to enjoy making these video selfies but always makes them with me, as audience, in mind. Her frequent military-style farewells reference the difference in authority between our two roles and reinforces that she is following my ‘orders’ or instructions in her submissions. Her use of ‘hasta la vista’ occurs in the submissions for weeks eight, ten and twelve. This indirect reference to herself as a lone fighter is an interesting contrast to her earlier positioning of the institution as very helpful and responsive to her needs and suggests a shift in her thinking about the institution in relation to herself, a shift which is further explained in her submissions, as discussed in the following section.

4.3.3 Complication

Lura’s early assumption that the university understands her personally and attempts to meet her individual needs is quickly challenged. She is very soon surprised at the amount of ‘homework’ that is asked of her and wonders how she can balance this with other areas of her life, such as socialising and undertaking paid employment. In describing this, Lura positions herself as largely without choices. This is indicated by her pronominal references in conjunction with the processes (Halliday, 1985) (types of verbs) she uses in her video selfie submissions:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Commentary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I didn’t expect</td>
<td>Lura, as ‘I’, owns the erroneous perception</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>there to be this much homework...I’m nearly finished</td>
<td>Lura, as ‘I’, takes responsibility for the incomplete action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>but there are parts where I have no idea</td>
<td>Lura, as ‘I’, owns the lack of knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>what to do and um I’m just I don’t know</td>
<td>Lura, as ‘I’, owns the lack of knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>how to handle it all because you know I need social time</td>
<td>Lura, as ‘I’, owns this need</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as well...but then at the same time I’m hoping</td>
<td>Lura, as ‘I’, owns the emotion of ‘hope’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>that I do eventually get to have some social time</td>
<td>Lura, as ‘I’, is recipient of ‘social time’ in this clause but is not responsible for making it happen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>because they were saying that, cause I’ve never, I don’t have a job</td>
<td>Lura, as ‘I’, in this clause is recipient, and therefore not responsible for making something</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and they were saying that you should hold off getting a job until you kind of</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>how to handle it all because you know I need social time</td>
<td>Lura, as ‘I’, owns this need</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as well...but then at the same time I’m hoping</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>that I do eventually get to have some social time</td>
<td>Lura, as ‘I’, is recipient of ‘social time’ in this clause but is not responsible for making it happen</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This perceived lack of power combines with an early sneaking suspicion, never outright declared, that she has been disadvantaged by the university in terms of information about her subjects, as the following analysis of meaning units (following Gee (1986)) demonstrates:

Lura, week 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Commentary</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>because they were saying that, cause I’ve never, I don’t have a job</td>
<td>Lura, as ‘I’, in this clause is recipient, and therefore not responsible for making something happen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and they were saying that you should hold off getting a job until you kind of get into the swing of things with uni</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All these meaning units are spoken with similar final downward inflection and similar length pauses between each unit, making sure I am aware of the equal meaning value of each unit, including the ‘actually’ which is an indication of Lura’s positioning of this as potentially new information for me.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript (each line of the transcript represents a meaning unit, analysed following Gee (1986))</th>
<th>Commentary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>which they said was fine you didn’t have to because basically it’s like teaching you new things anyway that they didn’t teach to the students who’ve had...</td>
<td>Separate meaning unit used to describe the university situation. The previous meaning unit was used to describe the high school situation. This emphasises the differences between the two education systems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>but it still feels a bit hard because</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>like</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for example</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>my sister <strong>did</strong> complete commerce or business at school</td>
<td>Emphasis on ‘did’ to provide contrast with Lura’s own situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>so when they’re talking about stuff she’s like ‘oh yeah I knew that’ like</td>
<td>Contrast between the two sisters’ situation is emphasised through meaning units used separately for each sister’s experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the top three types of business entities is sole trader, partnership and company and I’m just like</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
oh...that's new for me

and she’s like ‘Oh I already knew that’

and I’m like

oh...k

“Oh...k” is spoken in a very hesitant, uncertain tone and a quiet voice, conveying a sense of new information that is difficult to accept.

So I have to learn that

As well

Falling intonation and voice returns to normal intonation and volume to indicate we are now talking in the present and commenting on the previously described situation

Um...

Provides a break between the retelling and the evaluation about to follow

But that’s okay

Like it’s the learning thing

I like learning new things

4.3.3.1 Commentary

It seems the university’s information about its assumed and prerequisite knowledge has been interpreted as disingenuous. Lura is motivated to achieve. For example:

Lura, week 8

But for me, I just was not that happy. As usual, like I said before, I am used to getting 80s plus so to get 67%...like, in year 11 and 12 I never got under 75 so to get, like 67. Anyway I’ve got to just try, I’ve got to just really smash it. It’s weird.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Commentary</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>*I want to get distinctions and everything.</td>
<td>Lura is looking for achievement in this course rather than focusing on knowledge about Business. In fact, Lura actively dislikes the subjects she is studying.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Because with these four subjects, I don’t want to do any of them in future</em></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Lura seems to feel she has been disadvantaged by the institution because she was told she could manage this course without having studied Commerce at high school. It is true that Lura can and is managing her studies successfully. However, Lura’s aim is to gain high marks and having knowledge of these subjects before enrolling in them at university could have been an advantage to Lura achieving her aim. Her aim, to gain high marks, leads her to experience this situation as a disadvantage and this presents a challenge to her earlier assumptions about the helpfulness and supportiveness of the university. This perception of disingenuousness overlays many of her subsequent interpretations of interactions with the institution and is revisited in many of her submissions, in various ways. For example:

Lura, week 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Commentary</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>What’s different, um, so in school when we would do a test, I am talking about accounting right now, for any test at school we all have the same questions. We’d all have to be separated. We all have the same amount of time you know, that’s just how it was. This test, an in-class test here in University of Loftus, probably everywhere else as well, we have the same</em></td>
<td>Lura interprets the use of different exam questions as unfair and a disadvantage to some students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcript</td>
<td>Commentary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>booklet everyone and I thought that was very strange. In school they would mark you on your ability compared to other students on the same questions but with this one it was different questions for different coloured booklets</em></td>
<td>Lura, week 6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Commentary</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>But speaking of failing, everyone in PASS today were okay, maybe not everyone, maybe 3 out of 5 all failed their first year in a subject and that’s why they had to redo it. So that’s always making you feel better about yourself, hoping that I don’t fail now because apparently it’s really easy to</em></td>
<td>Lura interprets the failure rate of a small group of students as indicating the university makes it easy to fail and is uncaring about students.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Commentary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>On a positive note I got my management assignment back, which was the outline, and I got 90%. Who the only, um, the reason why I lost 10% was apparently because my referencing. I used the author’s first initial in the in text referencing which is what I learnt from the Communications Handbook but apparently it’s wrong. So apparently that’s a bit of a new thing now where you don’t do that, but that’s what the handbook said</em></td>
<td>Lura believes she has been unfairly docked marks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Lura, week 9

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Commentary</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Because I’m pretty definite there was a communications handbook that told me that I should and that was the textbook that we had to buy with our management textbook. So I think ‘oops’ then she said ‘oh no we use the Harvard referencing system’. So then why did I have to buy the communications handbook?</em></td>
<td>Lura again believes she has potentially been unfairly docked marks</td>
</tr>
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### Lura, week 10

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Commentary</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>I found out after the essay when we all talk about it, people were like ‘It was so good like the lecture really helped’. I was like ‘The lecture that has new content in that we don’t need for the essay? How would that help?’ and they go ‘Oh no for this lecture for this week’s Econ’. They were like ‘Oh, they didn’t go over content they went over what you’re going to do in the essay’. I was very disheartened by that for the fact that they didn’t e-mail us prior and be like ‘everyone to make sure you watch your lecture’...I felt kind of really disadvantaged</em></td>
<td>Lura feels unfairly disadvantaged in an exam situation</td>
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</table>

### Lura, week 12

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Commentary</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>I don’t think that the final exam should be that heavily weighted that if you fail it, but you got a high distinction average for the other subjects throughout the semester, you have to redo the whole course because that’s just silly, because you have to basically pass</em></td>
<td>Lura feels the pass requirements are unfair</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Lura shifts from feeling warmly welcomed and safely nurtured by the institution to feeling disadvantaged and somewhat deceived within the space of one week. This disadvantaged perspective is the perspective from which future interactions with the university are interpreted. This appears to impact on her relations with other students, in contrast to her early positive outlook. For example:

Lura, initial interview

*I like the fact that the actual tutorials themselves are small so it’s good to know everyone because if you need them for, like, later on and you can do team work together. It’s beneficial if you want to study together, if you need to do a team project it’s like ‘Hey I already know you, you’re from my…’ and you live near each other too because most of the people come from the shire.*

Later, other students become competitors and part of the environment that causes disadvantage. For example:

Lura, week 6

*In Finance PASS today everyone there was mature age students or had been working for a couple of years straight out of school, like, none of them were undergraduate who just came straight from the HSC, like only me and Moshton, which was funny because they were like ‘That’s cute’ and I’m like thinking ‘Well if I do this right I may have a job by the time I’m your age’.*

Lura, week 8

*Because they [mates] said ‘Oh can you guys help us?’ and we said ‘Oh yeah, ok, we’ll help you’ which is good because you learn 90% better if you teach other people*

4.3.4 Resolution

Lura comes to terms with this unfair situation by accepting it as inevitable and as beyond her ability to control, as she says:
Lura, week 2

Transcript

*But that’s okay, like it’s the learning thing, I like learning new things*

Commentary

Lura accepts this situation, despite presenting its unfairness to me.

Lura, week 4

*But anyway I tried my best what else can you really do*

Lura, week 12

*Really scary being 18 years old and already in uni basically setting myself up for what I want to do for the rest of my life. It’s good but that’s life, right?*

She feels she belongs here, almost as if she has an innate right to this course because of the sort of person she is:

Lura, week 11

*In your recent e-mail you asked me to focus on how this transition has been for me as a person and basically, of course, at first I found uni to be very challenging. I still do in some aspects but to me, as a person, I’m a very dedicated and motivated person. I always try my hardest and I always get the work done as soon as possible. I’m not one of those last-minute Louis who waits till forever to do it. So I find in that sense that uni has been better for a person like me because I’m always wanting to get things done, I’m always wanting to get things right, I’m always trying my hardest, and I think that’s really what you have to do, especially when it’s not just about, well,
uni’s now just you, like, it’s all about what you want to do and how you’re going to prove what you know because you have to go and do all the work by yourself. Yeah, so I guess it really depends on the sort of person you are.

Lura is quite explicit in her final interview about her reasons for choosing and then continuing with her subjects and course:

Lura, week 12

I didn’t want to put myself in a box and that’s the reason I’m doing this course, inside scoop, I’m doing business commerce subjects only because I don’t want to put myself in box and I want to widen the spread of jobs available to me when I finish, because being a person looking for employment in this area basically you have to have a degree to get a suitable job to earn money to live

4.3.4.1 Commentary

Lura accepts this environment, one in which she feels disadvantaged and which she perceives as unfair. In doing this she accedes some level of control to the university, seeing no alternatives. She justifies her own acceptance of this situation in almost moral terms: she is a good and hardworking person, she should have the place she wants both in university and in the world. She feels she needs this qualification to be able to live comfortably for the rest of her life.

4.3.5 Coda

Lura’s search for an employable self is consciously being made at the cost of her own happiness, although she feels she has no choice in this matter, as she herself says:

Lura, week 12

If I had my way and I was rich and I didn’t need money I wouldn’t go to uni…If I was rich and I didn’t need to go to uni I would be working in the RSPCA and saving animals’ lives. That is really what I want to do, but I can’t
4.3.6 Restorying

Lura’s experience of transition is a journey involving limited choices as she accedes authority to the university in relation to experiences she feels unfair; a quest story. She began the semester with a view of the university as an entity with which she could have an almost sensate relationship; as if it could understand and respond personally to her and as if she was personally known and welcomed by the university. This expectation of care and understanding by the university, not based on any real evidence even in the first week, was very quickly dashed and Lura interprets this as disingenuous on the university’s part, again assuming an almost sensate view of the institution but this time a less friendly, less caring sensate being. This experience challenges her sense of a socio-emotional fit with the institution. Lura feels she has been unfairly disadvantaged by the university, yet she does not attempt to challenge or redress this, and so is complicit in reducing her range of choices, her potential agency.

Lura chose to employ the same study strategies she did at school (hard work, getting to know teachers, asking questions but not working collaboratively with peers, not even her sister). This is a restricted form of reflexivity with no exploration of new approaches to study or new forms of agency. Lura interacted with her peers for comparative purposes, as benchmarks, as she had at high school. These benchmarks indicated to Lura whether or not she was working hard enough to achieve her quest for success. Lura decided alone how best to engage with her studies.
4.4 Narrative 3: Moshton – a tale of lucky survival

‘People next to me, they were so confident going in, just like, totally failed’

4.4.1 Moshton at orientation

Moshton is an 18-year-old ‘traditional’ university entrant, sister of participant Lura. They are both coming into their studies directly following their high schooling and on the basis of early entry offers. Moshton did not, initially, directly indicate to me her willingness to participate in this study. Instead, her sister, Lura, responded, and Moshton joined the study following her sister’s decision to participate. Both Moshton and Lura had been offered early entry to two universities and were considering a third. These universities were: Wollongong, Notre Dame and University of Technology, Sydney. Both chose Wollongong, specifically courses offered at the Loftus campus.

Moshton and Lura completed their initial interview and walk around together with me. In this interview they spoke together, overlapping in places and finishing each other’s sentences, suggesting they share similar views. This transcribes, as clearly as possible, as follows:

**Moshton and Lura, initial interview**

*Joanne: When you were thinking about coming to university*

*Moshton: Yep*

*Joanne: And you were choosing this degree and this university you would have had a set of ideas in your head, how has this set up here matched your expectations?*

*Moshton: I love how it’s an intimate university and there’s only two levels. I love how the lectures are at home so I can like fast forward, pause, listen to it again. Um, I also love that the tutorials themselves are small and you get to engage with your tutorial teachers, is that what they’re called?*

*Joanne: Tutor*

*Moshton: Tutor and um, I like how it, yeah, it’s such a, like, it’s so convenient to where I live as well and that’s really great and its very clean*

*Joanne: Did you do much investigating before you chose this uni?*
Moshton: Oh yes, we went to the Wollongong campus like a hundred times and I’m like, I love this campus

Lura: But it’s far away

Moshton: But an hour each morning

Lura: We don’t have our Ps yet

Moshton: So transport would have been terrible. So we’re like ‘Oh I hope there’s a closer one’ and then we found Loftus

Joanne: So did you compare Loftus to any other big universities?

Moshton: Yes, Notre Dame, UTS...

Lura: We had really three, Notre Dame, UTS or Wollongong

Moshton: Yes

Lura: Cause we went there and it kinda felt right, but Wollongong felt the best

Moshton: Wollongong felt really good, Notre Dame not as much and we got accepted into early entry for both so we chose Wollongong, then UTS....

Lura: UTS was kinda...

Joanne: And when you say it felt good, it felt better can you

Lura: Everyone was smiling

Moshton: The atmosphere, everyone I actually know who has come to Wollongong is like ‘It’s the best uni’. You know it’s more, you feel more accepted

Lura: The setting was beautiful

Moshton: The setting was beautiful rather than being stuck in a building of, like, cement

Joanne: How does that (indicating the general eating/social area) match what you were expecting, the tea area and everything that happens there?

Lura: I didn’t realise that there was going to be a little area that we could, like, eat. That we could, like, talk between tutors. It’s clean, like, and it’s actually, like, really nice. Since we’re a small university they offer you a lot
of food and coffee and that sort of stuff, so it’s much nicer than having to bring our lunch and stuff like

Moshton: Well they don’t offer you food but you can make a coffee, like, who thinks about that? It’s so nice that the, um, since it’s such a small university they are able to accommodate the other needs.

4.4.1.1 Commentary

Moshton, like Lura, is describing her selection of Loftus as the site of her enrolment as if it were an answer to her wish: a lucky find that was too good to refuse; and addressing their transport needs (a solution to a potential problem). This positions the university as relating to them personally in ways that meet their individual needs. When Lura points out what she believes to be the university’s response to their individual and personal needs, Moshton agrees and expresses appreciation of this (‘who thinks about that?’). In this way, Moshton in particular appears to be outlining an assumption of mutuality, an implicit contract: you care for me and I choose to respond with appreciation and gratitude, a social reciprocity based on affect.

4.4.2 Contextual Features

Moshton and Lura are providing a jointly constructed rationale for their enrolment at this site to me, as audience, in my dual role as a member of the university and as a researcher from another university (at this stage I was enrolled at Macquarie University and the consent forms bore Macquarie University insignia). I was conducting the interview on a walk-around basis, which gave me the position of authority that came with campus familiarity as well as having conducted extensive orientation seminars attended by Moshton and Lura. Also, as a person much older than Moshton and Lura, I could be viewed by them as having parent-like authority. Moshton continued relating to me on the basis of this difference in authority when addressing me in her video selfies. In all her video selfies, Moshton begins with a salutation and ends with a salutation. She usually wears full make up and on one occasion, when unwell, she apologises for her clothing (week 3) which is less casual than she might normally wear but is at least on a par with my own clothing
choices. She apologises for background noise (week 4), again to me as her audience. She appears to have fixed her copy of my prompts on the side of her computer and moves her glance towards them as she speaks to me, sometimes repeating them to me as an introduction to the next comment in her storytelling.

4.4.2.1 Commentary

Moshton’s salutations and her comments, all addressed to myself, suggest she sees the camera as the embodiment of me and that I have a large influence as audience on the nature of her storytelling. She is telling me her experience of transition as I have framed the nature of transition through my prompts, even as open-ended and vague as I dared to make them. This is evident in ‘ventriloquization’ (Jones et al., 2015, p. 399) as she uses my terminology, for example, ‘the people that have been good in my transition’ (week 4). She is also demonstrating regard for and an understanding of the differences in authority that exist between her role and my own as she apologises for her clothing, apologises for noise and justifies a cinema outing because it was at night and so could not interfere with her studies.

Moshton is at pains to represent herself in these submissions in a particular manner. As Griffin and May (2012) point out, ‘narratives are strategic, functional and purposeful, and narrating is often done in order to achieve certain ends.’ (p. 444). Given Moshton’s justifications of her behaviours on the basis of effective studying and her identification with the institution in the initial interview, it seems that Moshton is keen to represent herself in these video selfies as a ‘good’ student: compliant, competent, hardworking, knowledgeable and cognisant of the importance of her studies.

4.4.3 Complication and Commentaries

Further evidence for Moshton’s self-representation as a ‘good’ student – compliant, honest, capable and hardworking – are scattered throughout her video selfies. For example:
It’s not what I expected, the workload, cause like at school you have 6 subjects and during first semester at uni you have 4. So I thought, like, the work would be like a lot less and I’d be able to actually, like, finish my tutorial homework the day of my tutorial. But no, keep going until Wednesday, Thursday sometimes. Then I have to watch my lectures and do my readings. It’s not what I expected but I’m managing, I’m managing. I’m doing all my homework. Um, yeah, that’s how I’ve been transition so far. I hope next week’s entry’s a lot more optimistic and I get to a set routine.

I’m pretty sure I have an ear infection now, I’m in a lot of pain, my gland is swollen, this ear is really painful, so I’m studying for my management and accounting quiz next week. It’s kinda hard to do cause I have to, like, take a nap like every 20 minutes, which sucks.

Despite her disappointment over the onerous and unexpected workload, she represents herself as managing as having the expectation of doing even better in the future. She finishes this video selfie with a ‘peace out’ gesture (right fist double tapped on left breast followed by a V sign) almost suggestive of a symbol of solidarity or possibly as appeasement for her borderline negative comments about the university. This is the first mention by Moshton of questions and concerns about the university’s intentions, in this instance in relation to the amount of work required of her and the value of this effort.

Moshton’s uncertainty about the university’s reasons for making the demands of her that it does is first mentioned simply as an unanticipated feature of her studies. For example:
Moshton, week 2

*I’ll be starting my 3rd week soon, and, um, yeah, it’s just I didn’t expect it to be so much work. It honestly feels like I’m back in the HSC, writing my syllabus notes and studying every day.*

Mentions of this workload continue over the following weeks:

Moshton, week 3

*I feel like I’m balancing the work but, jeez, like, if I take away one day, I have so much catching up to do so that, like, sucks. But, um, what can you do? Just gotta take it as it comes.*

Moshton, week 4

*My sister and I feel like we’re getting so stressed because we are doing so much work, because we are actually doing all the work. I don’t think half the other students are doing all the work. You didn’t hear it from me. But it’s just insane you know, but I think, I don’t know if this is what they’re doing. I think they’re trying to scare us by giving us a lot of work. What they’re doing is they’re bombarding us with all this work and sort of scared the living daylights out of us so we make sure we hit the deck straight away and make sure that we do our work. Think that’s what you’re doing. I hope that’s what you’re doing.*

Moshton, week 5

*I don’t need to watch this two-hour lecture but I haven’t cheated yet. I haven’t missed one out, so going strong*

Moshton feels required to point out that she is keeping her end of the bargain she made on entry (gratitude and hard work for caring and belonging), hinting at the conflict she is feeling in this situation as she continues to do what is asked of her despite peers not doing this and not suffering any apparent consequences. This suggests a trust by Moshton and now, on reflection, I wonder at the impact of her participation in this study on her ability and willingness to make any adjustments. Possibly her involvement in this study reinforced the role of being a good and compliant student.
This workload issue eventually becomes the focus of a direct criticism by Moshton of the university, moving responsibility from herself to the institution in this area:

**Moshton, week 6**

*Like the two chapters I know really well and the last three have been so confusing and why? I don’t know. I think it’s just the way it’s been sort of like, in class I don’t feel like, not to rat anyone out, but I don’t feel like the strategies used are sort of beneficial. Like generally it’s a lot of icebreakers and then the tutor splits the groups, like splits us all into groups, and gives us one sheet to fill out and demonstrates to the class. But then all we sort of learn is that one sheet, one section of like six, because everyone else is doing their own section, saying it out loud. It sort of doesn’t translate as well as if someone is an expert in it. That’s all I have to say. Moshton out.*

This continues with further criticisms based on the assumed unkind intentions of the university:

**Moshton, week 7**

*Because they had very similar answers next to each other, and then some of the answers were, ‘Do you think it’s ABC or A&D or A & E?’ and you’re like, ‘Whoa, now I’m confused. At first I thought it was C but you know what? It could be A as well’ and it’s so tricky and they do it deliberately to trick you*

Moshton’s comments continue in this vein until week 10, when the situation reaches a climax, as reported by Moshton when she tells of her examination experience:

**Moshton, week 10**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Commentary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I tried my hardest, but according to the Finance exam 33% failed,</td>
<td>Stress on ‘whole’, ‘finance’ and ‘class’ in the last line,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
they failed, 33% of the whole finance class failed

That’s like, I don’t know, 500 students at Wollongong campus as well!

Wow, 33%! They predicted that like, every year, when they do the Finance exam around 40% fail, so I guess it’s better for them now that it’s only 33. But that is heaps! So I was really disappointed with my mark but I’m so glad I passed like, after seeing that result I was like, ‘Okay you know if you passed you are doing good’. I hope it gets easier though. Like that was a pretty terrible exam. Everyone walked out thinking, ‘We failed’.

People around me actually did fail and I was like sshhhit

But, um, what can you do?

We had an economics exam, a mid-term, right? And it was four questions that they gave us. So we studied the four questions and they said ‘We were going to make you do an essay on it but you know what? Scratch that, that it is way too like, high expectations for like 45 minutes’

so that’s sweet, sweet

Moshton has granted agency to the institution by granting the institution a ‘voice’ in her narration. Her repeated use of the term ‘sweet, sweet’ suggests her naive and innocent acceptance of the seemingly caring institutional act, a prelude to the act of betrayal to follow in this story.
Moshton, week 10

Then I find out, you know, I was like, ‘I’m not going to watch the economics lecture because they don’t tell me knowledge that is important for this exam that I’m going to do. I’m just going to focus on the knowledge for this exam’. The lecturer decided that he was going to pretty much tell people what to write.

Moshton feels her hard work and trust have been betrayed by an uncommunicative lecturer and a treacherous act.

Moshton, week 10

So apparently he told everyone like, the answers to the questions. I didn’t even watch the lecture because I was like ‘Nah he’s going to talk about’ I think it was, I don’t even know what it was this new topic. And I’m like ‘No it’s not important for my exam right now. I’m going to focus on that and then catch up’

Moshton positions herself as hard working and doing the ‘right’ thing – as expecting honest dealings but being disappointed.

Moshton, week 10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Commentary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>So people have an advantage because they watched it and he pretty much told them what to do. So they probably got full marks and here I am, just going along with whatever I thought was correct</td>
<td>Head on hand, shakes head, moves hand aside in gesture of surprised disagreement with this outcome</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.4.4 Resolution

This perceived act of betrayal leads to a sarcastic referral to her lack of choice and control in this situation:
Moshton, week 10

You think he could have maybe sent us an e-mail saying ‘You know what? I’m going to dedicate this lecture to helping you with your exam’. Frustrated is an understatement, but that’s okay, you move on, whatever.

4.4.5 Coda

The perceived unfairness of the situation, an assessment mark influenced by chance rather than her ability, confirms Moshton’s sense of powerlessness and her distrust of the institution:

Moshton, week 10

You know, really put as much effort into my question and use my time and put all the effort that I can into an assignment. I go really well. Not exams where it’s a memory game. Like, I try my hardest and then they give you questions that tweak it and they confuse you. Like it’s a memory game.

4.4.6 Restorying

Moshton’s experience of transition appears to be strongly influenced by her perception of a lack of control within study situations and her perception that the university acts with increasing unkindness towards her; a poor socio-emotional ‘fit’. Moshton begins her studies with the expectation of a benevolent and caring university – a relationship akin to a parent-child relationship. She attempts to maintain her trust in this relationship despite growing evidence that the institution is not responding, from her perspective, in-kind. In Moshton’s opinion, the institution does not reward her particular efforts nor does it ensure a level playing field by penalising those students who do not work as hard as she does. This perception reaches a head in the examination situation. Moshton’s judgement of the situation as unfair leads to a withdrawal of her trust in the institution: an alienation, as evident in her distrust of her final grades, her dissatisfaction with results which are above average, and her attitude that it does not really matter anyway:
Moshton, final interview

Moshton: I got a distinction in management but I really thought I’d get a high distinction. I got one mark off a distinction in accounting so I got a credit. I was so frustrated.

Joanne: In [ACCY111]?

Moshton: Yeah.

Joanne: Compared to the general results, that’s very good.

Moshton: Really? Okay. Oh I was just like, oh because I was just so frustrated, but anyway. And then I got a pass so I got 61 in Finance, which I was expecting. I just did not enjoy Finance at all so I’m glad – since most of the year failed I was glad that I actually passed.

Then Econ - I wasn’t the biggest fan of Econ. I got a credit. I think I got 71 or something so I was close to a high credit. I got high credits and stuff but, yeah, I thought I would get higher than that because I tried to calculate what I got previously across the board and stuff.

Obviously, you don’t know your exam result but, yeah, it’s alright. It’s good; P’s\(^7\) equal degrees.

Moshton, like Lura, interacts with her peers for comparative purposes, to determine the benchmarks she needs to reach. She does not seek alternative or new ways of acting or perceiving her situation. Instead Moshton, like Lura, repeats her previous approaches to study. This is evidence of a restricted reflexivity, albeit reflexivity with a successful outcome in terms of her grades.

\(^7\) P’s refers to a Pass grade
4.5 Narrative 4: Wonder Woman – reflexivity without action

‘I do things way too late…maybe I could do a better job if I did it earlier but who knows because I never do that, so silly. It’s just a continuing cycle of doing everything late and putting more stress on myself.’

Wonder Woman at orientation

Wonder Woman is an 18-year-old ‘traditional’ university entrant. She completed her HSC the year before her university enrolment and she was offered and accepted ‘early entry’ (see week 4 entry below). She chose nursing because of her familiarity with the medical system and her sense of personal satisfaction when helping others, suggesting she is predisposed to find meaning in affect economies:

Wonder Woman, initial interview

Well, my family’s always been in and out of hospital so, like, I like caring and I’m always my dad’s little nurse at home when he hurts himself cause he’s a carpenter, and I like, I recently got back from Cambodia from being in the orphanages there, and just seeing like, their little faces when you help them, and just how appreciative they are, and just I like seeing how people are after you help them, if that makes sense

Wonder Woman completed her walk around interview with me in week 1 of session, and already there were indications of a predisposition to look at the world around her for potentially threatening situations. She said that she chose UOW Southern Sydney because she felt safe and comfortable with its physical size:

Wonder Woman: I like how it’s small here but, it’s so much better than the Wollongong campus in my opinion cause it’s just so big there and I’d get lost and like, I don’t know, I like the small comfort

Joanne: Is it the physical size or the people numbers?

Wonder Woman: Yeah physical size.

Early in the semester, Wonder Woman speaks of her positive connectedness with other students:
Wonder Woman, week 3

The class is really good because everyone gives their opinion and it's like everyone's there together, so you can see how like, other people are struggling with, so you don't really feel alone. So everyone always just constantly putting in their input so, like, you can even get help from fellow students which is different to high school, especially the HSC, where it was kinda like up to a point you were, um, competing against each other to try and get the best mark, whereas here in uni, you're all helping each other to get passed because you all want to see, everyone wants to see each other succeed, so which is good. And it's different to school because normally no one would help each other that much because everyone wanted the better score. It was like a competition. It was like a race. You just wanted, you wanted to be the person in front. You didn't want someone else to beat you.

4.5.1.1 Commentary

Wonder Woman has already found personal satisfaction and a sense of value and meaning when she feels appreciated and has made a positive difference to other people’s lives. Nursing is a profession that can provide multiple opportunities for this sort of helping and the affects it involves. This course of study seems to provide a pathway to a future that suits Wonder Woman. It is also a profession that is associated with hospitals and these are environments with which Wonder Woman feels familiar. Wonder Woman’s interactions with other students seem ambivalent. When speaking of her high school experience, Wonder Woman expresses a sense of isolation based on competition. In contrast, in week three of her university enrolment she speaks of her tutorial group as mutually supportive and as sharing her sense of struggling, thus providing companionship. However, this view of peers and relationships changes later in the semester.

4.5.2 Contextual features

Wonder Woman submits ten video selfies, one of which (week 13) could not be used, as the audio did not record. She attended three interviews. All her submissions begin similarly with only minor variations – ‘So this is the video selfie for week 2’ – and her endings do not include salutations but usually refer to the following week and are inclusive of me, for example, ‘We’ll see what week four has to bring’, ‘Let’s just hope week five is better’, ‘Let’s hope I get up to date in the holidays’. The shots are always
head or head and upper torso, sometimes with one or both knees bent up and her arms wrapped around them, as if hugging them. Her eyes flick around the room but return regularly to the camera, her facial expression often suggests irritation and her movements are small but frequent, giving the impression of fidgeting; for example, scratching her arm, scratching her head, crossing her legs, crossing and uncrossing her arms, adjusting clothing, minor shakes of the head. Her intonation (represented by the sloping lines in the transcripts below) is repeated across phrases and drawn out at times, to emphasise the meaning of her words. For example:

Wonder Woman, week 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Commentary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>it’s just very similar how</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>like there’s always something to do\</td>
<td>Emphasis on ‘always’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>like you never can really sit down\</td>
<td>Emphasis on ‘never’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>like there’s always something new that has to be done\</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>like it doesn’t really stop</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All the preceding meaning units are spoken to the same beat and intonation pattern, emphasising the repetitive nature of the actions being described, the downward inflection at the end of each meaning unit suggests demoralisation and inevitability.
As with the previous stanza of meaning units, all the immediately preceding meaning units are spoken to the same beat and intonation pattern, again emphasising the repetitive nature of the actions being described. The upward inflection at the end of each meaning unit serves to contrast this description of the present (university studies) to the previous description of the past (high school studies).
4.5.2.1 Commentary

Wonder Woman appears to always be conscious of me as her audience, yet comfortable enough not to feel she needs to introduce herself to me each video selfie and familiar enough to include me in her musings at the end of each video selfie, as if we are sharing this journey together. Her mannerisms give me the impression of jitteriness and a lack of relaxation, which is consistent with the way she speaks of her studies in her video selfies. Her intonation expresses better than her words the sense of entrapped repetition she conveys in relation to her studies.

4.5.3 Complication

With this sense of entrapped repetition comes many unpleasant feelings for Wonder Woman, which are in part conveyed by her jitteriness and irritation. Earlier in the semester, she was reflective about her studies and mentioned tentative responses that she could take to redress difficult situations. However, from week 2, she would repeat the situation again and again in the video selfies but without any definite plans for action resulting from this.

Wonder Woman, week 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Commentary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I think I may be socialising a bit too much</td>
<td>Problem identified as excess socialising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>because around going to uni and then working and then needing to watch my lectures and studying I haven’t found much time for that</td>
<td>Problem expanded – not enough time spent on studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>because I’ve socialised too much</td>
<td>Problem restated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>which is not too good</td>
<td>Negative judgement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This reflection quickly gave way to repeated self-recrimination:

**Wonder Woman, week 3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Commentary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>which I need to find times to allocate. I should maybe write out a timetable, I don’t know,</td>
<td>Possible solution - needs to find time for study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>but yeah like, with my weekends, I guess I should, you know, use that time to catch up on everything I need for my tutorials and labs</td>
<td>Possible solution - needs to use time on studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>but instead I used it to socialise which is a bit of a silly idea</td>
<td>Problem restated – used time to socialise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>but maybe this weekend I will study and get my head around everything</td>
<td>Solution might occur this weekend</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This reflection quickly gave way to repeated self-recrimination:

I just feel like it’s, um, it’s like you have so much freedom on what to say but at the same time you don’t so finding that kind of hard and I’ve probably left it a bit late which is a habit I’ve learnt from school which isn’t good. | Situation outlined | Personal reaction stated | Implied negative self-judgement | Explicit negative judgement |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Commentary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Um yeah, doing my assignment at the last minute, it probably isn’t even half done yet</em></td>
<td>Situation described in negative terms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>which isn’t good.</em></td>
<td>Explicit negative judgement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>I should probably start doing that</em></td>
<td>Actions indicated as a tentative possibility</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The study situations are described in ways that emphasise Wonder Woman’s sense of accumulating difficulties:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Commentary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The referencing, that looks really difficult, seeing as how many marks it is in the assignment, which is crazy.</td>
<td>Situation declared to be ‘crazy’, that is, beyond rational thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Um never really had to do that at school. It was more just like a bibliography, which is quite different.</td>
<td>Situation explained as novel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Um, so I have to teach myself how to do that</td>
<td>A sense of obligation to fix this herself is expressed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I probably won’t do so well in the first one but I guess all I can do is try to see where I’m at.</td>
<td>Negative outcomes anticipated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That’s hard, going from doing no referencing at school to coming to uni. It’s like, then</td>
<td>The difficulty due to the novelty of the situation is repeated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you have to reference everything</td>
<td>First obligatory task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and make sure it’s correct</td>
<td>Second task identified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All the full stops</td>
<td>Third task identified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in all the places</td>
<td>Fourth task identified</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It’s crazy how much time you have to spend on it. The difficulty and the ‘craziness’ of the demands are emphasised

Then having the right text books Fifth task identified

It’s a bit confusing Difficulty emphasised

I haven’t even got all my text books yet because I’ve got to try to find them Next problem to be overcome is described

and they’re so expensive First difficulty identified

And like, can you use old ones? Like some of my family friends have given me some but they’re all sort of like old generation, Second difficulty identified

so it’s like, can I use them? Second difficulty restated

or can I reference them still? Because they’re even though they’re old. Not knowing something is posed as a third problem

I guess I’ll have to ask that question A possible solution is described in obligatory terms.

By mid-semester, Wonder Woman is struggling emotionally:

Wonder Woman, week 6

After the mid-semester break, just so good coming back, feeling, I felt Wonder Woman acknowledges her feelings of stress which she attributes to
refreshed this week just because before the mid-semester break I was feeling a bit stressed and overwhelmed with it all. But the break I guess gave me a chance to catch up as much as I can. So I’m feeling better now, a bit more up-to-date and understanding how everything works. So that was very needed.

But then coming back, it’s like then the realisation that we have one week, then finish an assignment which is due week…and it’s a pretty big one, 2000 word one for 103 which I was finding very difficult and like, hard to understand.

And stupid me didn’t start it in the holiday. God knows why I didn’t. I looked at it but I didn’t start it. The need to find the motivation to start things earlier would definitely help. So realising that that is due very soon and now made the start of the week very stressful.

She speaks of rising anxiety with the approach of the next assignment

Wonder Woman, week 10

Now I just feel like, after being so slack with not watching the lectures and stuff, I just feel like it’s a routine now and I don’t do it at all. Like I, it’s basically a routine and I don’t do it at all. I go to uni, come home, don’t watch lectures because I can’t be bothered attitude, which isn’t good, so I
feel like, the stress of assignments and all that is what made me come to this. Like not wanting to watch the lectures, not wanting to be more like, I didn’t have time, because I was stressing enough as it is. So now it is just an automatic routine to not do it, and not do the study notes, and everything like that.

4.6.3.1 Commentary

While Wonder Woman refers to her feelings as stress and believes this stress is emanating from the assignments, it could perhaps be better understood as anxiety, or a response on her part. The semester break was a rejuvenating time when Wonder Woman was working on catching up with lectures and class notes, but on her return and the realisation of the approaching assignment, her anxiety surges. This anxiety increases at the approach of the object towards which it is directed (Ahmed, 2004c). Wonder Woman still attaches this anxiety, which she calls stress, to her own avoidance of the assignment, as if, could she start earlier, she could avoid it. She has internalised this anxiety and views it as a negative feature of herself.

Throughout this time Wonder Woman has mentioned her peers very rarely. Apart from the positive mentions in week 3 (outlined above), she mentions peers negatively in relation to group work or does not mention them at all. She seems to be alone on this journey, and socialises with friends outside of university. She mentions having ‘fun’ with them, suggesting she sees the sharing of enjoyable activities as the key to her connections. She sees herself as stressed and therefore not fun to be with:

Wonder Woman, week 5

I hate stressing, it’s, who wants to be around someone who’s stressed all the time? It’s no fun

Wonder Woman appears to be experiencing shame as the consequence of her anxiety in relation to her studies. Shame requires a witness, someone either
imaginary or real whose opinion matters and before whom an individual feels they have shown themselves to be something they believe the witness would not value (Ahmed, 2004c). The exposure of the self as ‘less-than’ before this person leads to self-recrimination and harsh self-judgement. Initially Wonder Woman expressed positive views of her peers, but this shifted to negative views or no mention of them and a turning away from them. Shame motivates an individual to hide, to avoid or turn away from the witnesser of the shame (Ahmed 2004c). In this case, Wonder Woman has turned away from her peers. Her negative judgements of her peers appear in relation to a group work assignment, and Wonder Woman has trouble expressing her feelings about the situation and its meaning for her:

**Wonder Woman, week 7**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Commentary</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transcript</strong></td>
<td><strong>Commentary</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Just do them by myself. I know nursing is a team effort and that’s why we are the main aspects of group assignments, that I don’t like them, just so much stressful because some people don’t want to do anything and then there is still the whole ‘too cool for school’ attitude going on. It’s hard. I don’t really like it all that much. It just makes you feel awkward to actually try.</em></td>
<td>Wonder Woman’s anxiety is related to what she thinks her peers may be thinking about her and how her reactions and her actions may impact on her ability to fit in.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I mean they probably are thinking in their heads like ‘Whoa I wish I’d done it’ but you just feel awkward to say ‘Yes, I have done the assignment, I’ve nearly finished’ and they are like ‘No, I haven’t done anything’. It just makes you feel…It’s hard to explain, it’s like, you’re not cool if you do work, if you’re smart you’re not cool, but then you’re at uni</strong></td>
<td>Wonder Woman finds it difficult to accept in her peers the very thing she criticises herself for – avoidance and delay.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
But they say they want to be there, so they do try, they just do everything last minute. I don’t know it doesn’t make sense to me. It just puts you in an awkward situation really. Like what do you say back? Do I agree that I haven’t done anything or do I tell them straight up? It’s a weird situation. I don’t really know what to do.

Wonder Woman seems to manage this situation by distancing herself from her peers.

4.5.4 Resolution

Wonder Woman achieves a timely reprieve from her study situation and from her anxiety and self-recriminations during her clinical placement. This involved three of the most stressful events I could imagine: holding a dying man; being wrongfully accused of unprofessional conduct and being asked to leave the hospital; and a life-threatening car accident. Wonder Woman did not react with self-recrimination or anxiety in any of these situations, but instead followed her feelings to achieve outcomes that accommodated her needs.

Wonder Woman, final interview

Wonder Woman: Then my second week, one day in particular was very hard. In the morning I nearly got failed placement and I had to leave the hospital nearly because this man who liked power, and he made a complaint about me that was completely false.

Because what happened was, we were in the drug room and a patient wanted her medication and I can’t give it, so I went and found my RN who I was paired up with who was in the drug room with this head nurse. A person had just gone in before me and then so I just quickly popped my head in. I was
like ‘Oh excuse me, I’m just letting you know this person wants their medication when you’re ready. Can you please give it to her?’ Then this other man went off at me. He’s like ‘How dare you come in here while we’re doing SA drugs. You’re not allowed in here and blah, blah, blah. Like you should go out and learn how to’ – like all this yelling at me and I was like ‘Oh okay, sorry’.

I walked away and then went and sat in the nurse’s room and read patient notes. He then went off and made a complaint about me. My facilitator came up and he’s like ‘[Wonder Woman] I’m going to have to ask you to leave the hospital because your behaviour today is very unexpected. You’re not allowed to act like that.’ I was like ‘What are you talking about?’ The complaint was that I barged in, I interrupted him, I over talked him, I swore at him, I slammed the door and all day I read a magazine. That’s what he made up.

Joanne: Oh no.

Wonder Woman: So then I was angry and like annoyed. I was like, ‘How can someone do that?’ Like that’s not what happened. Then I tried to tell my facilitator ‘This is what happened, I didn’t do that’. He’s like ‘Oh, okay, well he’s the head person, why would he do something like that?’ Anyway so then my facilitator went and talked to the two other nurses who were in there at the time and they told him what actually happened. So everything was fine and the guy who made the complaint never apologised to me but the hospital did on his behalf. So that was in the morning.

Then just before my shift was finishing I was with a patient who throughout the week they were having episodes and they couldn’t breathe and having anxiety attacks. I kept telling the nurses there’s something wrong, like he’s not acting normal to me. They’re like ‘Oh he does that all the time, it’s just for attention’. Anyway I went in there and he’s like ‘Oh I need to go to the toilet’ and I took him to the toilet. When an old person goes to the toilet and they do a massive number two it means they’re going to pass away.

So he did that, he was fine, I took him back to his chair. I walk out of the room, he presses the buzzer, I walk back in and he’s like ‘I can’t breathe, I can’t breathe’, having an anxiety attack and he’s seven foot tall. He was massive. He stood up to try and get on the bed and I’m like ‘Oh’ - and you’re meant to let these people fall because you can’t hurt yourself by catching them. Anyway so my natural instinct was to catch him because he fell on the bed and this half of him was dangling off the side. I grabbed him by the
forearms and he was shaking and he - because he was not for resus and I knew that so I had to let him pass away in my arms.

**Joanne:** Oh.

**Wonder Woman:** Yeah, it was so sad. I pressed the emergency button and like everyone came running and like he was gripping onto my arms while he was on the bed. It was crazy. Yeah, so that was that day and then I was driving home and then my friend was in front of me so to make sure I got home okay because I drove by myself. Then at the lights I over anticipated how fast she was going and ran up the bum of her. Then that Friday of the week I was coming home from prac I had a car crash and flipped my car three times and then was rushed to emergency. They said I was going to be a quadriplegic because they found I had a fracture in my back. Then I had a perforated bowel but then I didn’t and then I had a shattered pelvis and then I didn’t. So it was very highs and lows that week.

**Joanne:** So how has all of that made you feel about continuing your studies as a nurse?

**Wonder Woman:** It made me want to do it even more. Because just seeing like the emergency paramedics, it makes me want to really be a paramedic now or an emergency nurse. Yeah, because being in that environment - like even mum said to me ‘Are you sure this is still a profession you want to do?’ I was like ‘Yeah, this had made me want to do it even more’. To help people like what I went through. But yeah.

4.5.4.1 Commentary

Wonder Woman reacts with appropriate affect such as anger and uses this to guide her actions, in particular to challenge the unjust accusations made against her. This is in contrast to her reactions to her studies which involve frequent self-blame and recrimination, but no actions.

4.5.5 Restorying

Wonder Woman begins her course already seeking involvement in an affect economy, but she fails to find a sense of achievement and enjoyment in her studies. Her reflections are inwardly focused, she disengages from her studies and her peers and so does not manage to identify, prioritise and act on her concerns. Instead she
ruminates on the similarities between her past study approaches and her present study approaches.

Wonder Woman appears to have reflective capacity but it is combined with self-blame when her reflections are directed towards her studies. This combination of introspection and self-blame appears to result in an affect of shame and consequently Wonder Woman avoids her student peers. This sense of shame precludes any collaborative reflexivity. She does not pursue restricted reflexivity possibly because her previous study-self is the source of her shame and anxiety. She becomes increasingly distressed and employs a fractured type of reflexivity in relation to her engagement with her studies. She refuses student-peer relationships and instead chooses relationships with peers outside of the university.

However, during her clinical placement Wonder Woman acted with decisiveness and confidence, even in difficult situations. This points to the potential for the development of different types of reflexivity and agency by the same individual. Despite her fractured reflexivity in relation to her academic studies, Wonder Woman achieved three distinctions and one credit result for the semester.

4.6 Conclusion

The narratives in this chapter have demonstrated how the transition process for the four participants was an embodied, holistic and situated experience that involved the participants in making decisions and taking action in the pursuit of their goals for their future-imagined selves. These four participants used affect to create and sustain peer relationships that supported the type of reflexivity they used to exercise their agency: comparative reflexivity or fractured reflexivity. Wonder Woman chose to avoid peer relationships as she struggled to use reflexivity to exercise agency. Moshton, Lura and James all used affect to create and sustain peer relationships that supported their reflexivity. They did not go on to use a pooled form of agency, instead using peers as benchmarks and for comparative purposes.
The following chapter presents the narratives of the six remaining participants. These six participants also created and sustained peer relationships to support their reflexivity, but collaboratively, not comparatively. However, unlike the participants in this chapter, the six participants in the following chapter go on to develop a distributed reflexivity and a pooled agency.
Chapter 5: Findings: Narratives showing collaborative interactions with peers

5.1 Introduction
In this chapter the narratives of participants Sara, Scarlett, Olive, Orange, Pink and Superwoman are presented. While narratives provide a detailed and singular view of people’s lives they sometimes share commonalities, especially when the participants share common situations. These five narratives have been presented together because, despite their differences, they share a common thread –the influence of shared and collaborative interactions with peers, usually involving an affect economy, on the participants’ transition experiences and decision making.

The first of the narratives presented in this chapter is Sara’s. Sara is a first-in-family, mature-aged student and single mother of two. During her transition she worked hard to understand what to do, where to locate information and how to present assignments. She participated in all three interviews and provided regular video selfies throughout the semester. The second narrative is Scarlett’s. Scarlett provided lengthy, detailed and highly reflective video selfies and participated in three interviews. Scarlett had completed a single year of a degree in veterinary science before deciding to enrol in her current nursing degree. Olive, whose narrative is next presented, is a mature-aged student and a single mother of a toddler. She succeeds well academically but describes herself as only ‘just’ getting through emotionally. The fourth narrative is Orange’s narrative. Orange is a mature-aged student who speaks English as a second language. Her involvement in an affect economy also involves a view of morality that did not appear in any other narrative. Pink, a mature-aged student with a partner and two children, has returned to study having last participated in formal education 24 years previously when she completed year ten at high school. Superwoman, also a mature aged woman, entered university on the basis of a university-conducted preparatory program. For all these six participants, collaborative relationships with peers were central to their transition experiences and their persistence.
5.2 Narrative 5: Sara – a project of the self

‘I feel like it means to just grow all learn about yourself like I mean I come here to actually specialise and to get a career and everything but I think just in itself you learn so much about yourself’

5.2.1 Sara at orientation

Sara is a 29-year-old single parent of two school-aged children who enrolled in an undergraduate degree in nursing on the basis of a TAFE Diploma which she completed five years prior. Sara finished high school after completing year ten at the age of 15, nearly 15 years before her enrolment in her current course of study. For Sara, studying at university is strongly associated with changes in her social status:

Sara, initial interview

*In my head I thought there was a stigma around being a university student and there was expectations. I felt like there was a lot of pressure and you had to be a certain class or some sort of experience or education to actually get into uni, and for those who completed it, like, there must be some, like, science or something... ‘Oh I’m a uni student’. I thought I’d just climbed the ladder. And I was thinking ‘Yeah’ and my sister’s ringing me going ‘You ok uni student?’, I’m like ‘Hey’ and I was thinking ‘Wow’. It’s just like, yeah, it’s like, inside it’s not nothing, It’s like just how I felt, I felt like I’d sort of gone up higher, so I was happy about that*

On the basis of seeing others in similar situations; that is, mature aged parents, enrolling and studying, Sara felt able to undertake university studies:
Sara, initial interview

Cause I think, like, I didn’t finish school and I finished in year 10, so, and being a mature aged student, I didn’t feel like I had the skills or the ability to do that and juggle home life until I came here, and I met so many mature aged students, I’m thinking ‘I can so do this’.

Sara wants to meet this challenge and to achieve:

Sara, initial interview

Oh you know, you do say it, you’re like ‘This is blah blah blah’, like what that means. I’m like ‘Oh ok’, so I quickly write what that means. So you do cover that but I was like ‘Um did I miss something? What are we up to now?’ like, but I think yep, it’s a learning curve for me, but I like it, it lifts my bar high

5.2.1.1 Commentary

Sara makes no mention of the profession of nursing in her initial interview and nursing was not related to her TAFE studies. A career in nursing seems almost an irrelevance to her reasons for studying, which are focused on self-improvement and social status. Sara does not want this course of study to be made easier for her in any way, she wants to succeed and know she has achieved this success herself. This objective seems related to her sense of her own worth and to study as a transformative experience (Mezirow, 1991, 1997; Daloz, 1986; Kegan, 2000; Dirkx, 1998).

5.2.2 Contextual features

Sara started all her video selfies in the same way ‘Hi, this is Sara…’ and went on to tell me the week in which she was making the submission. Never once did she show her face on screen. She always filmed fabric that appeared to be from her surroundings, such as the jeans she was wearing or the lounge on which she was sitting. Her involvement in the research was a strategic move on her part to make sure she had me as a support person, as she says:
Sara, final interview

Joanne: Can I ask why you choose to participate in this study?

Sara: Um firstly I thought I was going to need your help. I was thinking I was going to need your help and I was thinking the other students have said how much you’ve helped them

Despite this view of me as a source of help, Sara really found her own help through her study participation:

Joanne: And how has your involvement in this project influenced your becoming a student?

Sara: Um I loved it because I thought it reflected, and even when I done it I would watch my own videos and I would think ‘You’re a wreck’. Or sometimes I’m like ‘Good on you girlfriend’ but I just thought ‘No this is good for me’. Like I’ve watched a lot of biographies where they talk, you know, people, where they tape themselves and reflect and I thought ‘You should do this’, and I always thought I should do that because I would learn a lot about myself. And I thought ‘No it’s good. She can sort of reflect on me, tell me how I’ve done or things that she can see’ and I can sort of get better for the next semester. I thought it was going to help me, so regardless of what comes out of it, so I’m here, just do it.

Sara’s submissions are full of evidence of reflection and of reflexivity, focusing on how she feels and the process of making decisions about what to do.

5.2.2.1 Commentary

Sara makes a considered choice to be involved in this research as she feels it will benefit her. Despite wanting to be involved in this project in order to ensure access to my ‘help’, Sara actually uses the video selfies as a structured form of self – reflection leading to reflexivity. She makes judgements about her own progress and what she needs to do to achieve her goals. She is determined to persist despite doubts and difficulties:
Sara, final interview

*Sara:* Yes, that’s me. I’m like, got-to-get-an-action person, gotta get it done. I have to see a result. I had to move, otherwise it just doesn’t feel like, you know, if I’m not getting something out of it I feel like I’m wasting my time.

Sara focuses on management of her own emotions and explains them to me, her audience. She does not seem to be strongly involved in an affect economy, never referring to others in a way that suggests she related to others on the basis of affect:

*I know I’m an emotional person but I know it’s always my reaction. If I can manage that to whatever’s been given to me, that’s what’s going to make it easier. So I always think about that, even when I get a workload, a heavy workload or something I don’t understand, and I think ‘It’s just that you don’t understand it. That’s what freaks me out straight away and I’m like ‘You just need to break it down to little steps’ and then all of a sudden I’ll ‘That’s not so hard’.*

5.2.3 Complication

Sara struggled with the work itself, the amount of work she had to manage and the technology she needed to use. This was especially the case in the first four weeks of the course:

*Sara, initial interview

Yeah, um, it’s a bit overwhelming actually with the Moodles and everything being on line. I’m still coming to terms with accessing that information, where it is.*

This led to feelings of extreme distress:

*Sara, week 2

Just finding it hard to just absorb all the information...I’m finding it hard coming home and blocking that time to study*

---

8 Moodle is the elearning platform used at the University of Wollongong
I was pretty much an overwhelming wreck. I actually thought I was going to have a break down. Um, just overwhelmed…um, I was still overwhelmed.

Sara, week 3

I don’t know how to do it, the structure. Um, I don’t even know where to start…I’ve got to do my research, I don’t know how to reference…I’ve never referenced in my life. I mean, I have done a bibliography, but yep, structuring…I just don’t know where to start. I tried drafting. Um, if I have to think about myself before uni, I haven’t done an essay since 15 years ago.

[Sara’s voice is shaky and wobbly, exuding distress] I am so nervous, I am so nervous. We had an essay and an in-class quiz next week. I haven’t started my essay, I don’t even know where to start, I’m so stressed out…I’m just a wreck, actually I’m just a wreck…I am just so worried that I’m going to fail, I’m going to fail, it’s not going to be good enough…the stress of this is so high…essay writing, it’s like a big fear…I’m worried about the information, I feel like this all these pressures on me…that is really very challenging and stressful…it’s really really stressful

Sara, week 4

I didn’t know if I was capable of doing it. I had no idea what I was in for, but I knew I was in over my head. This week, this past week, has just shown me that just so much information, so much new information, I had to incorporate in such a short amount of time.

When I did have a final essay and I submitted it, the sense of relief! I couldn’t believe that I’d done it! So I am excited. I tried my best to see what mark I got, to see where I stand and where I can improve and if my best is enough.

5.2.3.1 Commentary

Sara’s extreme distress is difficult to listen to. She speaks as if this is an entirely individualised experience (see the use of ‘I’ in the excerpt below) with no mention of sharing this emotional experience with others. This seems to be largely a journey of personal self-improvement:

Sara, week 3

I am so nervous, I am so nervous. We had an essay and an in-class quiz next week. I haven’t started my essay, I don’t even know where to start, I’m so
stressed out...I’m just a wreck, actually I’m just a wreck...I am just so worried that I’m going to fail, I’m going to fail, it’s not going to be good enough...the stress of this is so high...essay writing, it’s like a big fear...I’m worried about the information, I feel like this all these pressures on me...that is really very challenging and stressful...it’s really really stressful

5.2.4 Resolution

Sara takes steps to manage the situations she finds so distressing, through self-talk and actions to locate and implement the strategies she needs to redress the situations. For example:

Sara, week 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Commentary</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>I just want to focus on one thing get it out of the way</em></td>
<td>Sara as ‘I’, owns these actions and the feelings underpinning these actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>I’ve attended the workshop this week to try and help me</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>I am going to send my kids away to my parents for the weekend so I can block out that time to study</em></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>so <em>I am trying to take that on board and just focus on answering the question</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>I am grateful that I’ve got family that are helping me and supporting me</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>I’m not going to do anything this weekend so I feel like I have no life at the moment University is consuming me...</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>I’m going to just try my best and hopefully that is good enough when I get my results</em></td>
<td></td>
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</table>

In her mid-semester interview, Sara summarises the process of transition as a one of constant personal growth and development involving the management of fear and uncertainty. Cognitive and epistemological outcomes and the development of
practical skills are noticeably absent from her description, despite these being the focus of her study activities:

Sara, mid-semester interview

Joanne: So when you think back over the last five weeks, how would you describe the process of getting from there to here?

Sara: I think there’s a lot of fear of change and the unknown from the beginning because there was just so much to take on and so little time to learn everything. So it was very overwhelming. But as it’s going into it I’m starting to get comfortable and starting to get used to it. So I’ll never get used to it but I’m starting to find myself, everything getting familiar and I’m starting to figure my way around. That would probably be it in a nutshell. It doesn’t seem to get easier but it’s constantly challenging. That’s about it really. You think you get past one thing and then you just get challenged again; it’s just constantly growing and moving and you’re never really sitting in the one spot.

Sara also indicates that she uses her peers as sources of assistance and information, to assist her to identify concerns and issues and to find strategies with which to respond to these concerns. This contrasts with the peer interactions that James, Lura and Moshton were involved in. For these three participants, involvement with peers was for comparative purposes. Sara’s interactions with peers involved seeking useful strategies and ideas to adopt in her own studies.

Sara, mid-semester interview

I’m still trying to learn actually. I’m still trying to find someone that’s got that down pat so I can copy them. That’s my usual tactic. If I need something I pretty much look for someone that has it and then I copy them. I just ask them, ‘Look, how do you do that? You do that so good.’ Anyone that’s excelling in the area that I like I will just go and pick their brain ‘cause I just think they’ve got it already and saved me all the hard work. I’m trying to find someone. AAAA and them are pretty good because I just find, okay, find someone who, maybe they don’t have the same lifestyle, but they’ve already got a foundation and I can just work around that. That’s pretty good. I think working with the other students, that’s helped me. Instead of maybe studying by myself at home killing hours I will just come to a study group with them and it just sinks in better. It’s quicker. I can ask questions.
Sara is proud of her achievements and mentions this even before receiving any marks. The timing of this comment suggests her personal, internal motivation is driving her persistence:

Sara, week 4

*I feel like Superwoman actually. I feel like Superwoman. It’s very hard being a single mature age student, being out of school for over 15 years. I left school in year 10. I didn’t even remember how to write an essay.*

5.2.4.1 Commentary

Sara seems to function as an individual within her cohort. She represents her experiences as internal to herself, her goals are personal and her relationships with others are driven by these goals. She mentions group study in the same manner as she mentions individual students, as sources of assistance in her determining what she needs to do to achieve her goals, but not as important in sharing her emotional experiences.

5.2.5 Restorying

Sara’s initial expectations of the university were vague but she expresses a sense of feeling comfortable and content, suggesting a positive socio-emotional ‘fit’ very early in her enrolment. Sara’s future-imagined self is somewhat vague but appears to be based on a process of self-improvement. Sara retains her view of learning as personally transformative throughout the semester, as she explains at the end of the semester in her final interview:

Sara, final interview

*I feel like it means to just grow, all, learn about yourself. Like, I mean, I come here to actually specialise and to get a career and everything but I think, just in itself, you learn so much about yourself. It’s not really a stereotypical, you know, you’re a student, you’re a thing. It’s just a learning*
process I think. You know I found I do learn more about myself studying. Like I just feel like I’m finding out all these things about myself.

For Sara, her future-imagined self is not related solely to nursing but to the changes in herself that she makes in pursuit of studying for a nursing career. Sara interacts with her peers to help her identify issues that she needs to address and helpful approaches she can use in her studies. She is willing to try anything she identifies that might be helpful – an extended form of reflexivity that involves peers in her reflexivity process to identify concerns and prioritise these concerns. She does not, though, include her peers in her final decisions and actions about her study approaches. While she is more collaborative than Lura, Moshton, James and Wonder Woman, her collaboration with her peers is limited compared to the participants described in the following five narratives.

5.3 Narrative 6: Scarlett – study and a socio-emotionally, well-suited environment

‘I just feel like I can be myself more and it’s just nicer’

5.3.1 Scarlett at orientation

Scarlett is a 19-year-old woman who has enrolled in the Bachelor of Nursing after spending the previous year studying a veterinary science degree at a different university and not enjoying the experience. She was offered three positions in nursing degrees at three university sites; one at her previous university, one at Wollongong on the main campus and one at the site of this research, Loftus. Her reason for choosing Loftus was because it contrasted with the aspects of her previous study experience that she found distressing, as she explained in her initial interview:

<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Such a different atmosphere to here</strong></td>
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</table>
[speaking of her previous enrolment at a different university], such a big campus and so you didn’t get to know anybody. I found the students even were really standoffish, whereas here like, they’re all so friendly and, yeah, so it’s nice...This is better to be honest cause I...there’s a girl who’s just finished third year nursing here and she told me about it and she’s the one who got me onto it

and stuff, and so I got accepted into [previous institution] Nursing. Wollongong campus and this one and I just thought I didn’t want to do another large campus where everyone’s so distant. Like I had no friends in first year vet, I was by myself, I was miserable, I hated it, I wouldn’t turn up, I, nup, I just didn’t like it.

At her initial interview, Scarlett reiterated her satisfaction with Loftus based on the contrast it presents to her previous institution:

**Scarlett:** ...It’s second day and I already love it so much compared to [previous institution] so

**Joanne:** Oh great, well come on down then [walking down the stairs]

**Scarlett:** I just think cause it’s a smaller campus you get more of the high school kind of feel, like. Cause I had really good relationships with my teachers in high school, so, whereas at [previous institution] they don’t even know who you are.

**Joanne:** Hhhmmm

**Scarlett:** And this is much closer to home

**Joanne:** No dead time travelling
Scarlett: Yep

Joanne: So with the smallness, it’s the being, you just said it’s the being known?

Scarlett: Yeah

Joanne: And knowing other people

Scarlett: Yeah

Scarlett: It’s so much nicer. It’s more comforting. You don’t feel as pressured. I just feel like I can be myself more and it’s just nicer.

Scarlett does not indicate what the cause of this pressure might be although she speaks of it in contrast to ‘comfort’, ‘nicer’ and ‘being herself’, suggesting the pressure has more to do with how she feels about her study site than it does with her workload. The importance of feeling she is known, socially-connected and belongs is evident in other parts of this interview:

Joanne: Our kitchen area. How did this match what you were expecting?

Scarlett: This is a lot nicer. Like at [previous institution] you had a lunch hall but it was just a massive lunch hall with just tables and then like, 4 microwaves, and you’d have 50 people lined up behind them. So I like this. It feels more homey, more comfortable.

Joanne: So how’s the admin been, did that match what you expected?

Scarlett: They’ve been friendlier, like a lot friendlier than I expected. So they just seem like they know cause it is such a small campus. They just seem like they kinda know what they’re doing more and you know? Yeah, it’s nice.

Joanne: Okay, great. So overall it hasn’t met your expectations but your happier, it’s exceeded them?

Scarlett: It’s exceeded them for sure.

Joanne: So that makes you feel?

Scarlett: It makes me feel comfortable and like, it actually makes me want to come and learn. Like I’m not dreading, like, ‘Oh I’ve got uni tomorrow’. So yeah.
5.3.1.1 Commentary

Scarlett’s responded to the situation she found herself in at her previous institution by refusing to participate in her studies. In her mid-semester interview she said she would not attend classes there and ‘because I hated it so much, I just put my study to the side. I didn’t want to look at it.’ At this previous institution, Scarlett acted on the basis of feelings of exclusion, describing it almost as a hostile and rejecting environment. She felt excluded by people who did not seem to care about her or to know her. Her affective response was unhappiness. This caused her to look for an alternative course of study, one she chose as a deliberate contrast to her previous study environment. She makes clear that, for her, the differences between the two courses of study are her social connections and a sense of belonging. Scarlett makes clear it is not difficulty with the study demands that caused her to feel unhappy:

Scarlett, week 2

<table>
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<tr>
<td><em>Before I came to uni I was at [previous institution] and I had a course which was just as much content, just as much pressure</em></td>
<td>It is difficult to evaluate the content and pressure of a course of study in week 2. This evaluation may reflect a careful examination of the subject outlines, but more probably reflects Scarlett’s strong sense of difference between her socio-emotional ‘fit’ at each institution.</td>
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</table>
But I didn’t enjoy it. So I found myself avoiding work, putting it off to the last minute, never doing anything. Whereas this course, I found myself coming home every day and doing work and rather than sitting there going ‘Oh my god, it’s already been an hour, how much more do I have to do?’ I’ve been like ‘Ok, that one’s done. Whoa, I’ve been sitting here for 3 hours, felt like nothing’. So my attitudes have definitely changed and I think it’s the fact that it’s such a close-knit university.

Scarlett appears to be driven by her feelings. Her choice of her current course of study at Loftus is based on a deliberate search for a social and personal experience that contrasts with her previous university experience. Contact with Loftus was initiated through a personal connection, so that even before beginning her studies, Scarlett’s positive expectations were based on a sense of being welcomed and of fitting in because she was attending at a location that someone she knew and whose opinion she trusted recommended. Scarlett’s stark and distinct contrasting of the two universities suggests a strong need to avoid the previous experience. Consequently, Loftus is only described in positive terms, in contrast to the previous university, which is only described in negative terms. This polarised view of the two universities becomes more balanced, more realistic, as the semester progresses.

Scarlett, final interview

Joanne: Why did you choose to participate in this research project?

Scarlett: One, mum.

Joanne: I remember.
**Scarlett:** Yeah. But then I just thought why not? Because when mum was like ‘Do it, do it’ then I was nervous and I didn’t want to do it. But then I thought about it and I’m like ‘Why not? I might as well just give my experience and my opinion. It doesn’t hurt. If anything, it’s just another experience and something else to go through, so why not? Yeah.

Scarlett participated in this study for the full semester, submitting ten video selfies, one each in weeks 2 to 7 and in weeks 10 to 13. In weeks 8 and 9, Scarlett had an unexpected hospitalisation that prevented her from submitting video selfies. Her video selfies varied in length from 61 seconds to six minutes 14 seconds, with the length generally increasing as the semester progressed. She also attended for an initial interview, a mid-semester interview and a final interview. In all her video selfies Scarlett spoke to the camera and the shots were initially of her head and shoulders. As the semester progressed this began to include legs and arms and habits, such as moving her hands through her hair, were recorded. All video selfies commenced with a title-like statement indicating the week of the submission and no farewell salutations were recorded. In her first submission following her hospital admission, week 10, she apologised at the beginning of her video selfie for her ‘late submissions’ and proceeded to ‘recap’ the missing weeks. This submission ended with a repeated apology. There was no evidence of her referring to any prompts although her reference to ‘changes’ is a reference to the way I had spoken of ‘transition’ at the beginning of the study.

5.3.2 Contextual features

Scarlett had missed Orientation but heard of this research while on campus with her mother for enrolment. I observed her mother strongly encouraging Scarlett to be involved, so much so that I confirmed with Scarlett at the initial interview that her involvement was voluntary. She revisited this decision in her final interview, indicating the role her mother had played in her participation:

**Scarlett, final interview**

**Joanne:** Why did you choose to participate in this research project?

**Scarlett:** One, mum.
Joanne: I remember.

Scarlett: Yeah. But then I just thought, “Why not?” Because when mum was like “Do it, do it” then I was nervous and I didn’t want to do it. But then I thought about it and I’m like “Why not? I might as well just give my experience and my opinion. It doesn’t hurt. If anything, it’s just another experience and something else to go through, so why not?” Yeah.

5.2.2.1 Commentary

Scarlett appears to become increasingly comfortable with her participation in this project throughout the duration of this study and maintains myself as audience in her mind. The increasing length of her submissions and the appearance of casual, habitual actions later in the semester suggest a reduced level of self-monitoring and an increased level of comfort. Scarlett appears to be confident in our relationship, as suggested by the absence of a salutation at the beginning of each video selfie. Scarlett assumes I remember her and that we have a relationship that does not need constant formal introductions. She does not, however, forget my presence as audience nor the purpose of this study, as her apologies in week 10 indicate. This may also reflect an increasing level of comfort with her role as a student of nursing. I wonder if Scarlett’s mother knew this sort of a project might suit her daughter, and whether Scarlett’s previous experience had shaken her confidence and prevented her taking an initiative, such as participating in this study, without encouragement and support. As such, encouraging her daughter’s participation may have been a way of supporting her. I was initially concerned that Scarlett’s involvement was truly voluntary. However, the voluntary nature of her involvement is evident in her appreciation of her mother’s encouragement (see above), in the comfort she expresses with this reflective process and how she felt she benefited from the study:

Scarlett, final interview

Scarlett: I have a diary at home and I tend to write in that a lot. So this, to me, was just a video diary, but just about uni. I could push a lot of stuff out of the way and focus on uni and just reflect on it really well. I think that helped a lot.
**Joanne**: How did that reflection help?

**Scarlett**: It just made things clearer and I’d say something and then it be like ‘Oh yeah, oh I’ve got to do this’. I just said it to the thing, but I hadn’t thought about it until I would actually say it out loud. Sometimes you say you’ve got to do this and you’ve got to do that. But until you actually put it in words and say it to somebody, you don’t do anything about it. I think that helped me a lot.

Although I remained the audience for Scarlett’s video selfies throughout this study, the reflections appear to have been largely made for her own benefit.

### 5.3.3 Episodes

Scarlett’s submissions are made as diary-style entries, here termed episodes. Just as their length increases throughout the semester, so does her focus on her current situation. Initially, the submissions are heavily skewed towards the positive attributes of Loftus but only in contrast to her previous university experience. However, by week five, Scarlett moves away from identifying her feelings as a response to her previous study situation and identifies her feelings as part of this cohort’s response to the current study situation. These positive comments refer to the social situation at Loftus and are focused on the specific present situation, as shown below (the commentary is based on an analysis of deixis, verb tense and relationships between clauses):

**Scarlett, week 5**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>So the tutors I find</td>
<td>Current evaluation of the tutors is indicated through the use of the present tense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>have become</td>
<td>Duration of time, from past until now, shows this is an ongoing evaluation of the tutors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>extremely helpful especially</td>
<td>Specific activity is mentioned as an</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with the online tutorial.</td>
<td>example of the tutors’ helpfulness</td>
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<td>-----------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Like they talked <strong>us</strong> through</td>
<td>‘helpful’ is here specified as talking and the evaluation of the tutors is shared as indicated by ‘us’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and they helped <strong>us</strong></td>
<td>‘helpful’ is a shared evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>because <strong>we</strong> were all really worried about that.</td>
<td>The reason for the help is given not as the demands of the task but because of the concern the students felt, a shared socio-emotional need addressed by the tutors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>We</strong> were going to have this online tutorial</td>
<td>A shared experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and we had no idea what <strong>we</strong> were doing</td>
<td>Cause for worry is specified as a lack of knowledge which is a shared situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>but they told us</strong></td>
<td>Shared experience of receiving the help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>exactly what to do step-by-step helped <strong>us</strong> out</td>
<td>Specifically Scarlett was pleased by the tutors assistance in response to the students’ shared concerns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and same with the students, like the fact that <strong>you</strong></td>
<td>Generic ‘you’ indicates everyone had to do this, a demand shared by all students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>had to post your</strong> answers on the online forum that <strong>anyone</strong> could see was kind of daunting.</td>
<td>Generic ‘your’ applies to all students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **So I know a couple of us were a** | Even the particular features of the experiences are shared with Scarlett by at

---

148
bit worried that we were going to be judged or whatever but nobody was like that, least some students.

**Everyone** was really helpful

This is a positive response to Scarlett’s feelings of concern by her student-peers.

*and we’ve all been relying on the students*

Here the worried group of students are described as being able to rely on student-peers for assistance.

*to kind of like if we weren’t sure how to access something for online tutorial or whatever the students*

Here the worried group of students are described as being able to rely on student-peers for specific assistance.

*would just post because we’ve*

Activity shared with peers.

*created a Facebook page where we*

Activity shared with peers.

*can talk to each other as well as obviously when we*

Activity shared with peers.

*see each other so we all post on that and it’s kind of what’s getting me through at the moment*

Activity shared with peers.

Scarlett’s peers provide a safe and accepting social environment and assist her in practical ways with her studies; an extended, collaborative type of reflexivity. This is similar to the way in which her mother assists her and this similarity is evident in Scarlett’s mid-semester interview:
Scarlett, mid-semester interview

**Joanne:** But the things that have actually helped you make those changes... can you finish that sentence for me? The things that have actually helped you make that change are...?

**Scarlett:** Mainly the students I’d say, because they act like friends and motivators and support and information. They’ve been everything literally. And my mum as well!

**Joanne:** In what way has mum helped? I can imagine.

**Scarlett:** She’s just so supportive and pushy as well. So if I don’t want to do something she just kind of makes me do it or makes me feel better about it, or she can tell when I’m overworking myself and I’ll be like, ‘No, I’ve got to get this finished,’ and she’s like, ‘No, come on, we’re going to the shops,’ or, ‘We’re going to get lunch,’ and she makes me have a break. At the time I’m like, ‘No, I don’t have time,’ but afterwards you do feel better and you can get more done. So yeah, she’s kind of snapped me out of it when I’m too in the zone.

5.2.3.1 Commentary

Throughout the semester, Scarlett is becoming increasingly able to shift her focus from her previous university experience to focus on her experience at Loftus instead. This is evident in the week five submission, mentioned above, in which she clearly represents her experiences at Loftus as shared with student-peers and outlines the positive benefits she receives from these peers. This focus on the present situation continues throughout the semester.

By Scarlett’s own admission (see transcript from Scarlett’s final interview above) she is well-practiced and comfortable with reflection and sees its value, perhaps more than many. It does not seem to be the case that Scarlett cannot reflexively manage her own situation; she is adept at identifying how she feels and is clearly prepared to take steps on the basis of these, having left a high-prestige degree and a sandstone university because of her feelings. Instead, I wonder about the impact of felt exclusion for a year on her confidence and self-esteem. Possibly, Scarlett’s mother is taking on some of this monitoring for Scarlett as she recovers herself.
Scarlett reacts with acceptance, not seeing her mother’s actions as an intrusion but instead as providing her with necessary assistance she does not always recognise she needs at the time.

In week 6, Scarlett raises a strong negative feeling about her studies at Loftus, the first she has mentioned, although she immediately expresses reassurance to herself and to me:

Scarlett, week 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Commentary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>*I know a lot of people have already started and I’m like, freaking out,</td>
<td>Scarlett looks to herself for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>because I haven’t started to get there. I’ll be fine, I’m sure.*</td>
<td>reassurance. This is the first time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>this self-sufficiency has appeared in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>her story</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Week 7 is Scarlett’s first mention of anticipating any difficulties.

Scarlett, week 7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Commentary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>*Going on prac, which is a bit scary. I don’t feel like I’m ready to</td>
<td>This is Scarlett’s first anticipation of a potential difficulty with this</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>go on prac and actually work with people but I also think: prac’s the</td>
<td>course and once again, Scarlett appears to be re-assuring herself, and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>best way to learn. So I’m excited and scared. So week seven’s been</td>
<td>perhaps me too, that she is happy here. She makes a point of indicating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the most full-on week, I would say, out of all them. But I still love it.</td>
<td>the reason for this experience is for her benefit. This reasoning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>differentiates this negative experience from her negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>experiences at her previous university</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Self-reassurance appears again in week 10.

**Scarlett, week 10**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Commentary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>It was really full on but I found as long as I stayed committed, just got them done and asked for help when I needed it. Like you get through and it wasn’t so bad. Like I don’t see it as a negative experience, I just saw it as a bit more of a struggle</em></td>
<td>Scarlett reframes her experience as positive despite it involving negative feelings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In week 13, the final week of semester, Scarlett expresses, truly and unreservedly, a negative view of her experience of study at Loftus and does not mitigate her view in any way. This is the only instance of this in any of her video-selfie submissions and interviews:

**Scarlett, week 13**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Commentary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>I think if I had known that the stuff that we were going to be doing in class was like this, and if I remembered which days I did and didn’t have the academic considerations for when I was in hospital, I probably wouldn’t have gone. I found like, I expected to come and the teachers to have revision, be quizzing us, and they did do revision but it just seemed really childish. Our revision just seemed, it didn’t help me. I found like, I didn’t learn anything from it. Maybe I did but I don’t realised that I have. I don’t know. I just feel like if we had just gone and had a class study session it would have, you know, and we could</em></td>
<td>Confident enough to criticise the university</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
have asked questions we’re unsure about, gone over the topics a little bit. It would have just been a lot more helpful and a lot more purposeful. And I understand that at uni they don’t spoon feed you and they can’t give you answers and all that sort of stuff, that’s fine, but we were doing like, just going round the room. And like, I remember this from this class and it wasn’t helpful and I just felt our time could have been used a lot better.

It seems that throughout the progress of the semester, Scarlett has moved from needing to find study at Loftus very positive to a more balanced and realistic view of Loftus. It appeared to be necessary for her to find reassurance about her inclusion in the group, her social engagement and socio-emotional ‘fit’, before she could move on to look at her current experience for what it really was. It is only by the end of the semester that Scarlett feels comfortable enough to risk criticising Loftus. In her mid-semester interview, Scarlett acknowledges that her previous university experience influenced her views of Loftus:

Scarlett, mid-semester interview

**Joanne**: …Do you think, just out of interest, if you’d come here first, would it have been as positive?

**Scarlett**: I think it still would have been positive but it would have been harder. I think because I went to [previous institution], I had everything thrown at me, and because that was such a bad experience for me, anything better than that was a good thing. So, to me, it probably is a lot more positive than other people because they’re not used to the work and…

**Joanne**: And they don’t know what it can be like.

**Scarlett**: Yeah. Whereas I’m just so grateful that this has been so much better.

5.3.4 Coda

By the end of this semester, Scarlett is finally able to acknowledge that some of the difficulties she encountered with her previous institution were related to her own fit
there, rather than to the institution itself. She mentions, for the first time, her shyness:

**Scarlett, final interview**

*I don’t – I found it hard at [institution] because I don’t make friends quite easily, because I can be quite shy.*

She also mentions for the first time that she had gone there with her best friend and the strain it put on their friendship.

**Scarlett, final interview**

*Because I did – last year when I was doing vet, I was doing it with my best friend and it actually drove us apart a fair bit, because she’s extremely competitive and makes everything a competition. Even who walks in the door first is a competition. The fact that I’m not competing with her about our careers and our marks anymore, we’ve actually gotten a lot closer and gotten back to being best friends.*

*Whereas when I was at uni last year I was starting to pull away from her and try and make new friends. Whereas now that I don’t have that competition constantly, I can be friends with her properly again.*

**5.3.4.1 Commentary**

This was Scarlett’s first mention of her shyness and the difficulties she felt it caused her. In previous interviews she had focused on her previous institution as the source of her problems and consistently contrasted the Loftus site very favourably with this institution. It is also the first time she has mentioned her best friend, and so the isolation she felt was possibly partly due to the disruption of this important friendship.

**5.3.5 Restorying**

Scarlett chose to enrol in this degree at Loftus because she anticipated a friendly and welcoming campus, a socio-emotional ‘fit’, and was searching for this in contrast to her previous university experience. This transfer between courses and universities appears to have been a difficult and risky venture and it has possibly
required support networks outside of the university to make this adjustment, particularly the support of her mother.

Scarlett seemed to need to be certain of her own happiness and a sense of social inclusion before venturing an honest opinion of Loftus and her studies. This took almost a full semester. Scarlett’s focus on the socio-emotional perhaps underpins her very collaborative and shared approach to her studies. She shared her views, ideas, strategies and approaches, making decisions about studies on the basis of shared discussions – an extended form of co-reflexivity. Scarlett passed the semester with one High Distinction, two Distinctions and a Credit, but more importantly, from her point of view she was happy.

5.4 Narrative 7: Olive – the strain of transition

‘I emotionally just got through’

5.4.1 Olive at orientation

Olive is a 27-year-old ‘non-traditional’ university entrant, a single mother with a young child about 18 months old. Olive is living with both her parents, her siblings and her child. She is enrolled in the Bachelor of Nursing on a full-time basis, which is the only enrolment option available at Loftus. About five years previously she had enrolled in this university on the main campus in a science-based degree but withdrew during her first year and went on to paid employment. She spoke little about either of these experiences (previous study and paid employment), but she drew on her work experiences in making her choice to study at Loftus. Olive elected to participate in this study at the conclusion of my full-day preparatory ‘Returning to Study’ workshop.

Olive, initial interview

Joanne: What else, what else matches your expectations that you had in your mind while you were thinking about coming here, choosing...
Olive: This was excellent. I really like the fact that it was very up close and personal and there was so much help available to us already. I like the small campus and getting to know everyone even though I haven’t officially started.

Joanne: Uh hum.

Olive: So that’s great.

Joanne: So did you expect any of that at the time you were choosing a university and thinking about study?

Olive: Um. I was hoping it was going to be like that. I chose Loftus because one: because it’s closer and two: because it seemed like it was going to be smaller and more personal which I thought would help a lot because so far I have found through working that smaller businesses and being closer to people works a lot better than being lost in a big crowd.

Joanne: …So when you were choosing your degree and you were thinking about nursing, how has all of this (indicating the nursing simulation lab) matched up to your expectations?

Olive: Um well through orientations, well open days, at universities, when I was looking around where to go, I saw a lot of the simulation rooms so I kinda expected it to be here, but, I’m very impressed. It looks very close knit (slight laugh).

Joanne: So it’s been a positive experience so far from what you’ve said?

Olive: Yes (definite tone)

Joanne: Okay, been in any of these other rooms? Anything else here that’s been matching or mismatching your expectations?

Olive: Um I haven’t been up here before except that one room so I don’t really know. Um I guess I haven’t really formed that many opinions yet in regards to the teaching and everything else. I’m still waiting to go into a class, but the atmosphere is fantastic and that’s always good for study.

Joanne: How is it good?

Olive: Oh it’s just, it’s really positive and everyone’s very friendly with each other. It doesn’t feel like we’re kinda all being split into groups. Everyone’s forming one big group which is really nice and it should help out with trying to help each other out.
5.4.1.1 Commentary

Olive’s initial interview took place immediately following the ‘Returning to Study’ workshop in which she participated. In this interview I asked about her expectations of the university and her experiences so far, drawing her attention to the facilities as examples of possible expectations. However, Olive’s expectations and her focus were firmly situated in the social and the affective realms. Olive responded to my prompt by focusing on the ‘atmosphere’, the ‘up close and personal’ feeling, and even described an empty nursing simulation laboratory as ‘close knit’. This suggests a projection of anticipated social inclusion and positive connectedness – an experience and an anticipated experience that is primarily socio-emotional. Olive’s replies include a number of references to her present feelings: ‘I like…’; her emotional reactions: ‘I’m impressed’; and her feelings of anticipation: ‘I was hoping.’ These inclusions point to Olive’s focus on her feelings as the guide for her behaviours.

5.4.2 Contextual features

Olive provided seven video selfie submissions. Four involved her speaking to the camera. Three focused on her surroundings – in one case her legs stretched out on the bed while her small son made a walk-through cameo appearance amongst the papers and texts she was working with, his cot in the background while the others showed books and papers spread out while Olive narrated. In the four submissions in which Olive spoke to camera, she did not appear to be using my prompts in any way. My prompts were not mentioned and they were not visible, nor did she turn her head as if to view them. Olive introduced each entry with a title such as ‘This is week five’, but often finished with a salutation, suggesting she was cognisant of myself as audience even though she was not necessarily addressing her submissions to me explicitly. When on screen, Olive appeared casual, once with her hair slightly dishevelled, as if not prepared for a public appearance (the term ‘bed head’ came to my mind). She frequently looked upwards and to the side, the sort of head movement that accompanies thinking and reflecting. In the final interview with Olive I asked her why she chose to be involved in this project and whether it had
influenced her ‘transition’. Her response was focused on the socio-emotional reasons for participation and on reflexivity as an outcome of her participation:

**Olive, final interview**

**Joanne**: Can I ask, why did you choose to participate in this study?

**Olive**: Because I’m a really nice person [laughs]. You know, what it actually is, I’m doing another study, so now I’m on a mission to try and be a part of as many people’s PhDs as possible

**Joanne**: Oh really.

**Olive**: I don’t know. I think research is interesting, and plus you were begging for it, and there was the added benefit of you said you would help us

**Joanne**: Yes, I would be around and that would give you access to me

**Olive**: Exactly

**Joanne**: Has it influenced your transition in any way, your involvement?

**Olive**: Making me actively reflect on it has made me think about things. I always try and sit back and reflect and see how I should do things for next week or whatever, but this week I had to actually sit down and think about it and try and get my thoughts out. So you had to actually sit there and analyse instead of kind of like, just glancing over it. So I guess I thought about it a bit more.

**Joanne**: And is that helpful or unhelpful?

**Olive**: It’s probably helpful. Yes, it’s probably very helpful.

**Joanne**: In what way

**Olive**: Now I know I need to stop being such a slack bottom next semester

5.4.2.1 Commentary

Olive may have participated in this project thinking that contact with me might help her, or it could have been another opportunity to make social connections since her early seeking of social connections seems to suggest a predisposition to seek these out. I have no records of seeing Olive for anything throughout the semester other than in relation to her study participation and she made no mention of any
contribution I had made to her in the form of skills or knowledge. However, it seems that, for Olive, I was an audience that required her to explicate her ‘thoughts’ as a prelude to taking action. Olive reported she had better understood herself and this benefitted her planning. My prompts did not seem to be directing her focus in great detail and her demeanour suggests an internal and reflective focus, thinking out loud for herself as much as for me. When asked in the final interview about the differences between the reflection involved in this project and the many reflective assignments she had completed, Olive’s response indicated that it was the investment of herself that made the difference; Olive needed reality to feel she benefitted from this reflective process. As Clegg (2004) has argued, there are problems with the use of reviews and reflections as assignments that can lead to a ‘…formulaic simulacra of reflection…’ (p. 294) such as Olive appears to have undertaken for her assignments, as described below. For Olive, study seems to be about her being and her actions, her reflexivity, and participation in this study seems to have enabled Olive’s reflection to become reflexivity involving action:

Olive, final interview

Joanne: Nursing gives you endless assignments on reflection, as you know, so what’s the difference between this project and those assignments?

Olive: Because they’re in class and I only half arse them. I don’t know. Because this is completely different. That’s more focusing on not so much like our study and workload. It’s just focusing on how we would reflect on hypothetical situations, which is just our emotions to conflict and things like that, whereas this is talking about how we’re actually approaching uni which is completely different to being in a workforce. So it is making me think about how I’m studying and how I’m going to reflect and how I’m going to do it next time in the way of like assignments, and just doing, you know, preparing for the next day and things like that.

5.4.3 Episodes

Throughout her video selfie submissions, constituted by discrete diary-style entries here termed episodes, Olive represents her agency and her reflexivity. Much of her narration involves her focusing on her interiority as she manages her feelings and plans actions based on them. Below are two sections of Olive’s video selfie
submissions, with comments based on transitivity (Halliday, 1985). In this instance, the type of process or action and the agent responsible for that action and also on deixis (Halliday, 1985) –self-referencing – in order to demonstrate Olive’s agency and self-representation. The following is spoken in a flat tone, as if Olive is tired and in both submissions the camera focuses on books and other study paraphernalia, not on Olive:

Olive, week 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Commentary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>It is week three I’m starting to panic</em></td>
<td>Olive as ‘I’, owns this emotion as actor in this clause and the present in present tense emphasises the immediacy of this experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>I got my first two assignments coming up which is very nerve racking</em></td>
<td>Emotion is attached to the assignment through the use of a dependent relative clause. Olive’s ownership of ‘nerve wracking’ is not quite so personal nor immediate, a distancing from her previous phrase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>It’s good</em></td>
<td>‘it’, presumably referring to her situation, is given the attribute of ‘good’ in this relational clause. Again, Olive’s ownership and so her agency is displaced in this grammar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>like there’s a lot of support</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>I’m just having a lot of trouble writing my first essay</em></td>
<td>Olive as ‘I’ owns this trouble and the immediacy of it is expressed through the present in present tense, although she mitigates this with ‘just’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>because I don’t remember how to write an essay it’s been five years so it’s a big change</em></td>
<td>Olive as ‘I’ owns this cognitive deficit</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Olive hesitates before speaking the next section, then emphasises the first two words through rising pitch and elongation of ‘guess’, as if she has only just thought about this.

Olive, week 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Commentary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>trying to get back into that</td>
<td>Olive is the subject of the elided clause. This construction removes her own particular experience and suggests it is an experience shared with peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and trying to get into the</td>
<td>Olive is the subject of the elided clause. This construction removes her own particular experience and suggests it is an experience shared with peers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Commentary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I guess the train of thought</td>
<td>Olive as ‘I’ owns this cognitive process of uncertainty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to try and get it done, I’m struggling a lot with that</td>
<td>Olive as ‘I’ owns this struggle and its immediacy as the result of the previously outlined situation, including the generic experiences. Olive has re-personalised this</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>apart from that</td>
<td>Olive excludes herself from this clause and so excludes her own reactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the rest of it’s all right</td>
<td>The situation is given a positive evaluation, meaning the problem lies with Olive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…. no big change for this week and as well as that there is also a multiple choice test which I am a little nervous</td>
<td>Olive as ‘I’ owns this nervous reaction, although the dependent relative clause suggests it is a function of the situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcript</td>
<td>Commentary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>about</em></td>
<td>rather than of herself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>I’m feeling a bit more confident because it’s more sciencey stuff</em></td>
<td>Olive as ‘I’ owns this confidence, but puts it down to an external cause</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>but I still don’t know how I’m going to go with that I am not sure</em></td>
<td>Olive as ‘I’ owns this cognitive deficit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>how to study either so that’s going to be a big adjustment there’s a lot of people that seem way more confident with it than I do</em></td>
<td>Olive as ‘I’ owns this uncertainty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>.... which is a bit hard. They seem very assured maybe it’s because they’re straight out of school or recently out of school</em></td>
<td>Olive separates herself from the more competent school leavers, the ‘others’, who have no deficit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>I don’t know</em></td>
<td>Olive as ‘I’ owns this uncertainty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>so okay I think that’s all I can, bye</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 5.4.3.1 Commentary

Olive appears to be exploring her feelings, the point of connection between herself and the world, using me as audience. She sometimes represents her agency directly to me (for example, as actor, “I”, responsible for actions) and sometimes displaces her agency by representing herself in a dependent clause, related to an event that is given greater focus in her sentence. Olive seems to have settled on a view of herself as in deficit in the study context at the end of this excerpt. However, as Cromby (2011) points out ‘Feelings and affects are purposive, dynamic, moving and, in Deleuzian terms, constitutive of becoming and change’ (p. 87). Olive’s self-representation changes as she progresses through the semester:
So it’s the end of week five this week. We have one last assignment and then we’ve got a study break. I’m feeling a bit better. I’m feeling confident. well not confident in my ability. I guess I’m not going to know how good I am until I get the results back from my first assignment. but I am feeling a bit more confident in my study in general I’m feeling like I’m going to be a bit more on top of it.

Olive appears to be identifying more with her peers than previously and is expressing a more positive feeling towards her studies. She anticipates continued positive feelings in relation to her studies. This contrasts with her earlier views. She explicitly comments on this change, as follows.
Olive, week 5

**Transcript**

*adjusting to this uni thing I thought I would be on top of it by now but I’m not*

*but it’s still all right, I’m feeling good*

*I need to get it done and I want to get it done I’m very passionate about this so I am learning so it is I’m still very keen on doing it which is good*

---

**Commentary**

Olive as ‘I’ revises her previous expectations through thinking; that is, she deals with this cognitively

Olive as ‘I’ owns this positive feeling

Olive speaks all of this in a rush as she moves to identify her motivations as feeling-based and evaluates them as ‘good’

---

Olive is again examining her own interiority and connecting her interior and exterior worlds in the process. This involves an evaluation by her of the worth of her own desires. Following this, Olive begins to speak in an upbeat, bright tone, as if introducing a contrasting element to her narration. In it, her focus is on the connections she is making (see bolding) and her positive evaluation of these (see underlining) and she contrasts this with the opposite, less desirable situation, as follows:

**Olive, week 5**

*Oh and it’s really really good our class well our tutorial group in particular is becoming like a real little community and everyone is really good at everyone sticks up for each other and looks out for each other and we’ve got our own little page on social media so we are all on there so it’s good I think the fact that it’s becoming a bit more of a community makes it a bit better than just a class and helps me wanting to go there and knowing people whereas if I didn’t know anyone or I wasn’t really fitting in anything I wouldn’t be wanting to go as much*

Feelings are about connectedness, about how we act on the world and how we are acted upon, as Carnera (2012) writes ‘Affects [sic] is what activates us, what connects us with others…’ (pp. 80-81). Olive purposefully pursued these connections.
5.4.4 Coda

Having borne witness to the emotional nature of Olive’s transition, I asked her in the final interview whether she had ever considered withdrawing and if so, why she had continued with her studies. I also asked her about her motivation to study. My questions and her responses were as follows:

Olive, final interview

**Joanne:** motivation to study, now that I should have mentioned that came up pretty much in the initial interview people were saying why they were coming here so I don’t mean motivation as in what I do to make myself study I don’t give myself a reward for studying I mean why your reasons for coming...

**Olive:** I don’t think it’s going to be sitting there plastered on your wall but it’s always in the back of your mind I know it was for me every time it got really hard and I was like I don’t want to do this I feel like I’m drowning why am I doing this to myself it is painful you sit there and in the back of your mind it’s like no I’m doing this because I have this one shot to get it I need to do it now I have to get through this I can’t screw it up because I’ve got a kid I want to give him a good life so that’s always in the back of your mind it’s not you know yay I’m such a good mother look at me I am at saint it’s like no I’ve just got to buckle down and do this

5.4.4.1 Commentary

Olive’s rationale for her study is the meaning she derives from feeling she will be able to provide a good future for her son. This is consistent with the gendered role of mothering in western neo-liberal societies (Hey & Leathwood, 2009), involving self-sacrifice, but her conflation of this with her studies and her future occupational role suggests a tension between her gendered role of mother and a felt imperative to be a ‘self actualizing economic agent’ (Hey & Leathwood, 2009, p. 107):

Olive, final interview

**Joanne:**…Did you at any point consider leaving?
Olive: It was in the back of my mind but then the back of my mind stomped on that thought pretty quickly, saying ‘No, that’s not going to work, you need to do this’.

Joanne: Why, what made you consider leaving?

Olive: It was really hard. It’s a lot of really hard work, which is a shock to the system, especially because I’ve been out of it for five years now. So there was a lot of like, ‘Why am I doing this? This is painful, you’re hurting yourself. You’re tired, you’re exhausted, you’re running yourself flat’. But then the back of my mind was like, ‘Well no, you’ve got to do this. You’ve got the one shot. You can do it. It’s only three years. Suck it up Princess’.

Joanne: So you look at the positives in the future to get yourself past the negatives in the present?

Olive: Yes. I think that’s a big change for me as well. You know, when you’re a teenager and you think about how hard it is now, it sucks now, you’re not going ‘Oh well it will be great in five years’ time’. I don’t care about five years’ time, I care about now, it sucks now. Whereas now, being more of an adult, I’m like, ‘No, it will get better, you just got to do it’.

Joanne: Survive it.

Olive: Yes.

Olive also sees her willingness to sacrifice her present for her future as a sign of participating more fully in society, as if this is a rite of passage for her in achieving an adult role and consequent agency in society. This involves self-management and self-monitoring by Olive of her feelings, a reflexive process. Her use of ‘you know’ suggest she expects me to share this understanding and experience, a sign of anticipated cultural agreement about the difference between teenager and adult societal roles, and possibly an imagined identification with me whom she knows is also a working and studying mother. She is making a claim for solidarity, a bid for acknowledgement of a shared understanding and a connection.

For Olive, this is a personal journey of becoming, as she acknowledged in her final interview as follows. The first section of this final interview is taken from the very beginning of the interview and the second section is taken from the final section of the interview:
Olive, final interview

Joanne: Thank you for coming, congratulations, I’m assuming you made it through the semester?

Olive: Yes.

Joanne: Well done.

Olive: Scraped through.

Joanne: Fantastic! That’s all you need, you just need to keep on going, keep on going. And you’ve got a lot to balance really.

…

Joanne: Okay, now you certainly don’t have to say yes to this at all, but I was wondering if I could refer to your first semester results in this study? Is that all right with you?

Olive: Uh huh.

Joanne: Ok?

Olive: Uh huhuh

Joanne: So what were they?

Olive: I got 3 D’s and a C

Joanne: You told me you just got through!

Olive: I emotionally just got through.

Joanne: Did you emotionally just get through?

Olive: Yes.

For Olive study is an ontological experience, not just an epistemological endeavour.

5.4.5 Restorying

Olive arrived at the university hoping to find a positive connection with the university, a socio-emotional ‘fit’. The importance of positive peer relationships to Olive is evident throughout her narrative. She describes and evaluates her
transition experiences in terms involving affect and she also describes the role of a nurse in terms involving affect when she recounts the death of a patient while on clinical placement.

Olive, final interview

No, they looked really peaceful which was good because I saw them beforehand and the first person I saw, I saw him on the Friday and he passed away on Sunday night or something. So he was still there the Monday morning when I went in. Like the room was all done, but no one had gone in to see him I think, which is kind of sad, but I saw him on the Friday and he was just, he couldn’t speak, he didn’t know what was going on he was trying to write notes to try and communicate what he wanted but it was like a scribble, like he was writing on top of it. There were no letters there. It was a mess, he was a mess and so seeing him on Monday he looked like, peaceful and relaxed and not agitated and everything. So it was just like, ’All right, so you’re finally comfortable and at rest and you looked like you were in pain before, so now it’s good’. It was actually completely different than I expected.

Olive’s initial video selfie submissions showed evidence of her involvement of peers in her reflexivity in a comparative manner, contributing to a restricted reflexivity. About halfway through the semester this appears to change and Olive seeks meaning and support through collaborations with her peers. She begins to collaboratively involve her peers in her reflexivity: sharing ideas about study and studying together. Olive relied on shared affect as the social ‘glue’ to enable these collaborations. This shift in the involvement of her peers lead to a shift from her initial restricted reflexivity to an extended form of co-reflexivity.

5.5 Narrative 8: Orange –morality and affect

‘it changed me it’s not just passing a course…it’s to become conscious and love what you’re doing and give love give care’
Orange is a 34-year-old woman who has enrolled in the first year of the undergraduate nursing degree following the completion of a TAFE Certificate Level Four in the field of nursing the year prior to her enrolment. Orange is partnered but with no dependants, something she describes as ‘lucky’ given the study workload she has undertaken. Orange is originally from Peru and English is her second language. She sometimes struggles with expression and understanding in English, causing her some concern. For example:

Orange, week 2

*Because I have to learn a little bit more English, how to express myself better, things like that*

Orange, week 3

*I realised there are many term, a lot of terminology that I am not familiar with. It’s overwhelming and I feel frustrated because I cannot pronounce them properly sometimes. And the worse things is I cannot write it down.*

Orange is very explicit about her reasons for studying nursing:

Orange, initial interview

*I feel a lot of pressure on myself that I have to do well because I am a mature aged student and I think ‘Ok, I’m going to try. It’s my life. It’s my future. This is it. If I don’t take this opportunity, what am I going to end up?’ I have to do it.*

Orange, week 1

*I feel very happy to be a uni student now because it’s an opportunity for me to grow as a person and become a professional also*

5.5.1.1 Commentary

Orange seems to seek two benefits from her role as a student of nursing. She seems to seek some sort of personal fulfilment – “It’s my life, it’s my future” – and a functional outcome – “What am I going to end up?”. These two objectives seem to motivate Orange to spend time and effort on her studies:
**Orange, week 3**

*So I have to practice a little bit more and I’ll be all right, practice, practice, practice I think.*

However, in her final submission following her clinical placement, this resolves for Orange and she clearly prioritises the personal fulfilment she expects to find in her role as a nurse as her reason for studying nursing:

**Orange, week 12**

*It’s not just passing the course, it changed me. It’s not just passing a course, you have a degree. It’s to become conscious, and love what you’re doing, and give love, give care, and be compassionate about other people as well, and help them, help them as much as you can.*

Orange is conscious of the use of her own feelings to help others and finds fulfilment in this. Orange discusses affect explicitly and in personal terms only late in the semester. This is perhaps partly due to her increasing reflexivity, something she considers consequential to her involvement in this study.

5.5.2 Contextual features

Orange makes eight video selfie submissions and attends for three interviews. All her eight video selfie submissions are posed the same way, her face fills the screen and she speaks directly to the camera, with minimal head movement. Her facial expressions are either neutral or a happy smile, irrespective of the information being conveyed. She begins each submission similarly, indicating the week of the video selfie submission, and frequently tells me what she will be talking about. For example: ‘Okay, I’m going to talk about my first week in the university’, ‘Hi this is xxxx, I’m going to tell you a little bit about my second week’, ‘Okay, this is week 3’, ‘Hi this is week number five’ ‘Okay, this is about week number six’. Her final words in each submission vary, but are usually directed to me. For example: ‘Thank you’, ‘Okay, that’s all’, ‘Okay that’s my third week’, ‘Okay see you’, ‘That’s all’. In week one, she appeared quite nervous, swallowing a couple of times throughout her submission as if she had a dry mouth. She mentions in her mid-semester interview how difficult the video selfie submissions were for her initially:
Orange, mid-semester interview

I was very nervous with it. I did one first and I delete it because every time I tried to start one, I stopped and thought ‘What else am I going to say?’ It happened twice.

However, Orange found this process helpful as a way to improve her own reflexivity:

Orange, final interview

Joanne: Has your involvement in this study influenced your transition here in any way?

Orange: Yes, a lot, because if I was not in this study, in this research, I would just go and struggle myself but I would not see myself in the computer. I cannot reflect, listen what I’m saying, then just to see me again in the video, ‘Oh, this is what I feel. This is what happened’. Give me the opportunity to learn through me as well through this research. ‘What are my weakness? What am I expecting? What do I have to work more on?’ Things like that. And gives me inspiration because this week is what I did, next week has to be different, has to be better.

At her final interview Olive asked to be included in any future research projects I planned on conducting: ‘If you’re doing another research just include me please.’

This request suggests Orange feels sufficient benefit from her participation in this study to seek involvement in future studies.

5.5.2.1 Commentary

Orange addresses her video selfie submissions to me as her audience. It was when she viewed them herself that she was able to identify her feelings in relation to events and happenings in order to plan her actions. Her reflexivity was developed through viewing her own video selfies. Her constant neutral or smiling face, even when briefly mentioning unpleasant interactions at her workplace, felt somewhat inauthentic to me, as did her very positive attitude to all aspects of her transition. The incompleteness of the perspectives Orange provided in her video selfie submissions was confirmed for me in the final interview, when Orange said:
Orange, final interview

Ah, first semester. I am very happy with my results. I thought I was just going to get a pass, that was my goal, a pass, because everything was overwhelming for me. It’s not just the language that was the barrier for me, it was many things that I never learn and I never heard about it. And it was too much. I thought I couldn’t cope, I cannot do this.

Sometimes I felt, I feel, horrible. I said to my husband ‘I want to cry’ but I can’t. I listen to my husband. He just hugged me. I thought ‘This is too much. Maybe I’m not going to go through this’ but I want to be, really want to be a good nurse.

At no time in her video selfie submissions did Orange give an indication of this difficult and distressed response to her studies. Her submissions, instead, expressed gratitude (directed towards other) and happiness (expressed in relation to the actions of other). This is a response devised for public viewing and one with moral overtones. One that may be constructed for me, as institutional employee with authority on the basis of knowledge and as the person to whom Orange comes for assistance with her English language and studies. In her final interview, Orange refers to me as an ‘angel’, suggesting a moral evaluation of me and a view of me as holding a position of authority. My own reaction to this is discomfort and a sense of being kept at a social distance.

5.5.3 Complication

Orange speaks of all her experiences in consistently positive terms. Negative comment is rare and mild. For example, in week one Orange speaks of a work situation I would call tormenting or bordering on bullying, yet she describes her response simply as ‘uncomfortable’:

Orange, week 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Commentary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I feel a lot of pressure because when I was at work some people know that I’m a uni student and they assume that because I am a uni student I have to know everything and that’s not true</td>
<td>This is a rational response to the tormenting rather than an emotional response. This rational response potentially downplays the impact of this tormenting on her personally</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
nobody knows everything

but they expect more from me and if there is something that I miss or I don’t know they say “oh but you’re a uni student now” so that’s it like um I feel very uncomfortable with that

I think many people would find such bullying distressing, rather than simply uncomfortable. Again, this seems to be a downplaying of the impact of this.

anyway I’m learning and that’s the main thing

This is a positive feature of the week, echoing gratitude expressed elsewhere in this narrative

and there’s a lot of students in my group that help me as well this week

This is a second positive feature of the week, again hinting at gratitude

Orange also frequently describes herself as ‘lucky’ and evaluates situations in moral terms such as ‘good’. This evaluation focuses on the innate value of the situation and sometimes of the people rather than any impact of the situation on herself:

Orange, week 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Commentary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>what happened was something very beautiful very nice and interesting. We are start doing our own group study</td>
<td>This is an aesthetic or perhaps moral evaluation conveyed through ‘beautiful’, and ‘nice’. A more personally responsive evaluation could be expressed in terms such as ‘helpful’ or ‘useful’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’ve been very lucky</td>
<td>This expresses gratitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and many of the other students they help me so I think that’s a good thing because with uni students we help each other and some things that we don’t</td>
<td>This is moral reasoning expressed through ‘good’.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Orange’s week 4 entry, in particular, demonstrates her conflation of the social, the moral and authority. The units of meaning (following Gee) demonstrate how Orange conveys her views:

**Orange, Week 4**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript (presented as meaning units following Gee (1986))</th>
<th>Commentary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>I am very happy is that,</em> as a group,</td>
<td>‘happy’ is attached to shared group participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>I am very lucky to be in this group.</em></td>
<td>Here the previous two meaning units are summarised. This repetition emphasises these meanings; happiness attached to shared group participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>We</em></td>
<td>A group focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>ask each other</em></td>
<td>A focus on group interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘<em>what do you need?</em>’</td>
<td>Agency is given to the group through the speech act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>because that happened to me</em></td>
<td>Orange is lacking agency here, she was the recipient of this action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>someone asked me ‘what you need? how can I help you?’</em></td>
<td>Again Orange is recipient of this rather than actor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>So I did the same with another person if</em></td>
<td>‘so’ indicates causality; Orange is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcript (presented as meaning units following Gee (1986))</td>
<td>Commentary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>I</em></td>
<td>mimicking the actions of the group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>see that person is not good I say</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘do you want any help? do you need my notes?’</td>
<td>Orange achieves agency here as the speaker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Things like that</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>So I am very happy, I feel like</em></td>
<td>‘so’ indicates a cause and effect relationship between these experiences and her feelings of being happy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Oh wow this is a nice group’</td>
<td>Happiness is still a feature of group participation and suggest gratitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Anything we don’t understand,</em></td>
<td>A sudden shift in topic, perhaps to reassure me of the group’s recognition of and respect for the authority of the teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>we ask to the teacher</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>straight away</em></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Orange feels happy and lucky to be in this group. She reciprocates the behaviours directed towards herself, but her reactions and responses are based around her perceptions of the ‘good’ and the ‘nice’. The use of ‘good’ and ‘wonderful’ suggest moral overtones and evaluations:
Orange, week 5

*But now, with this experience, I learn that I can learn from just online which is good, it’s wonderful.*

Orange, week 7

*I did all the subjects online. That tutorial was good and was working. It was wonderful. Anyway I’m happy with it.*

Orange, final interview

*I really appreciate it. You are like an angel.*

Orange is referring to me, using religious terms to describe not just my perceived assistance but the moral and authority positioning she attributes to me.

5.5.3.1 Commentary

Orange is constantly evaluating her situation, pointing out the positive features of her situation to me. These positive features are evaluated as if they are good or moral in some way. This reinforces the sense of gratitude Orange mentions. She is keen to become a nurse, and the process involved is described as a morally ‘good’ one. This moral position may provide a sustaining meaning for Orange, who is looking for some sort of personal fulfilment as well as a professional position in society. She uses moral evaluations to express her connectedness to this group and I wonder at the cross-cultural values at work here.

Orange, Week 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>I feel a lot of pressure because when I was at work some people know that I’m a uni student and they assume that because I am a uni student I have to know everything. And that’s not true.</em></td>
<td>A rational response to the tormenting, a potential distancing by Orange of the impact of this on her personally</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Nobody knows everything.

But they expect more from me and if there is something that I miss or I don’t know they say ‘Oh but you’re a uni student now’. So that’s it. Like, um, I feel very uncomfortable with that.

This seems to be an understatement. I think many people would find such bullying distressing, rather than simply uncomfortable.

Anyway, I’m learning and that’s the main thing

A positive feature of the week, echoing gratitude expressed elsewhere

and there’s a lot of students in my group that help me as well this week

A second positive aspect to the week, again hinting at gratitude

5.5.4 Resolution

Orange’s moral evaluations focusing on group or social situations continue until Orange returns from her clinical placement experience. It is while on placement that Orange has an experience that allows her to relate more personally and individually to her studies, to gain meaning through a sense of personal development and transformation:

Orange, week 12

As a student you go to the lab and you practice in the lab with the teacher and your classmate. But then you come to the real ward. You go and see people suffering. People in pain. And sometimes you see this person pass away. That happens to me. So I saw someone who pass away, that was the second week. Anyway, so this encourage me, this placement encouraged me as a student to do the best that I can. It’s not just as a student go to the lessons and learn, do whatever you have to do just to pass, it’s not just that, because we are going to be with real people, people who suffer, people who need nurses, who need us, really need us for everything, just to have a sip of water or to walk to the bathroom or just to be a little bit more comfortable in the chair. It’s very confronting to see the reality in the hospital, how dependent a person can be. Anyway it’s very touching. Sometimes I try not to be too emotional because I have to focus as well on what am I doing. But now I am a student of nursing I am really studying and doing all the things
that I can to pass the course, but now I realise it’s not just passing the course. It changed me. It’s not just passing a course, you have a degree. It’s to become conscious and love what you’re doing and give love, give care, and be compassionate about other people as well, and help them, help them as much as you can following the protocols and procedures, and everything would be all right. That’s all.

5.5.3.1 Commentary

Orange appears to have undergone a transformation: ‘it changed me’. No longer does the attainment of the professional role of nurse motivate her. She has discovered that she finds true personal meaning in giving to others, giving ‘love’, ‘care’ and ‘compassion’. This refers to her practical role; she still has to manage the next five semesters of study.

To date, Orange seems to have used moral evaluations to find a sense of connectedness and meaning in her study environment. This morality appears to have been conflated with authority and a focus on groups. This focus on authority and a group could have been preventing Orange from finding the ‘personal’ meaning she was looking for by directing her attention towards a perceived moral authority, possibly involving religion. Consequently, this was insufficient to fulfil Orange’s search for more personal development, but perhaps enough to sustain her during this search.

5.5.5 Restorying

Orange developed her reflexive capacity as a result of her participation in this study. Her video selfie submissions led her to recognise her own feelings and then, using peers for emotional support, as sources of ideas and to assist in her decision-making, she decided on actions. This is evidence of an extended form of co-reflexivity.

Oranges’ experience of transition demonstrates a shift in the constructs and beliefs by which she lives her life. Orange is enrolled in studies, in part, as a conscious search for personal meaning and fulfilment which is not present in her current occupation. Initially Orange appeared to look outside of herself to some moral authority to guide her connections with others and for meaning and fulfilment. The
meaning Oranges seeks from her moral beliefs seems attached to authority. This search for meaning through association with an authority changes as a result of her clinical placement experience. During her clinical placement, Orange comes to believe that personal fulfilment can be achieved through her role as a nurse. In this role, she has the opportunity to create positive experiences for patients and this gives her a sense of personal fulfilment. Engagement in an affect economy in a capitalist society can provide an increased sense of meaningfulness (Ducey, 2007) and for Orange this appears to be the case in relation to her future role as a nurse. Orange’s moral belief did not provide this sense of meaning, although it is possible that in a differently structured society this could have been possible. It would be interesting to know if Orange’s sense of agency increased as a result of her ‘epiphany’. Such a shift in agency could take a long time to come to fruition if it does involve an acculturative process of change from 34 years of functioning in one particular way (involving particular moral perspectives and views of authority) to a more individualistic view of herself and the search for satisfaction though affective exchanges with others.

Orange described her earliest transition experiences in very positive terms. She expresses gratitude for the opportunity Loftus has given her to redirect her future. Her future-imagined self is always her goal but this future-imagined self is only vaguely discussed until after her clinical placement. Following her placement, her future-imagined self is much more clearly articulated in terms of the meaning and values she attaches to the role of a nurse.

5.6 Narrative 9: Pink – disappointed expectations and alienation

‘The communication has been very minimal. There’s not a lot telling us what’s going to happen or what we should expect or when we should expect that, so that creates confusion and frustration.’

5.6.1 Orientation

Pink is a 40-year-old mother of two, who lives with her partner and children and is currently enrolled in the first year of her undergraduate degree in the Bachelor of
Nursing. She entered university on the basis of her Special Tertiary Admissions Test (STAT) results. Her previous formal education was the completion of year 10 of high school, 24 years previously. Pink came to study nursing because ‘I want to be able to help people’ (mid-semester interview) making her well-suited to a profession characterised by long hours, difficult, physically-demanding and low prestige work because she expects to feel rewarded in other, affective, ways (Hardt, 2007; Ducey, 2007). She chose to study at Loftus without realising what a satellite site was ‘I didn’t know that this was a satellite rather than a big uni. It’s obvious that it’s not as big as what Wollongong Uni is but until you actually become part of it you don’t realise what the differences are’ (mid-semester interview). However, she feels this choice has been beneficial because of the ‘camaraderie’ she experiences here, ‘I think the camaraderie that we’ve got as a class and as a group has kept a lot of us down the right path and functioning…But I know that it’s probably been the best decision for me to come to a small…To me it’s a lot more friendly and easy-going’ (mid-semester interview). Again, Pink looks to the affective as meaningful. It took Pink a long time to decide that this course was what she wanted to do and it has involved sacrifices by her entire family as well as herself, making her enrolment a high stakes move for all the family:

Pink, mid-semester interview

Financially we’re making a lot of sacrifices because I’ve left a full time job to work part time and it’s not working as well as I’d like so I’m about to leave that too probably go and do some AIN work. So, once again, that sacrifice financially is going to make a big difference, and not just to me, to the whole family – my kids and my partner will go without things because of my choice to come back to uni. It’s probably family life that’s the most affected because I am either locked away or at work, so there’s not as much of me available to everybody at the moment…And the kids to a certain extent too; they’ve had to realise that I’m at uni, that’s how it is. There’s some things that I can’t do

9 The term ‘AIN’ refers to the role of Assistant in Nursing
any more that I used to do and there’s going to be higher expectations on them than what there was previously. It’s definitely been a learning curve.

In her initial interview Pink expresses some uncertainty over her expectations and explicitly indicates her dislike of uncertainty:

Pink, initial interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Commentary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Joanne:</strong> What experiences have met your expectations and what has not been what you expected?</td>
<td>Here uncertainty is expressed as ambivalence – it both is and is not what she expected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pink:</strong> Um I didn’t have a whole lot of expectations, it’s quite similar to what I thought might be so, you know, classroom experience, a new facility, lots of different parts to the facility, so it’s quite similar to what I expected. The biggest, probably, thing that wasn’t what I expected is the size. It’s a lot smaller than what I thought it was.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Joanne:</strong> This is the simulation lab. I think you had your uniform fitting in here. Did you expect anything like this?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pink:</strong> No.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Joanne:</strong> What do you think of it?</td>
<td>Here uncertainty is expressed through rising intonation on the initial ‘um’ and the repeated ‘um’. The self-deprecati ng ‘I must admit’ also indicates uncertainty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pink:</strong> Um yeah it’s really good. I didn’t, I didn’t actually expect it to be a lab as such. I didn’t expect to have people laying on beds, so when we were in there it was like ‘Oh my god, there’s somebody on the bed’. But, um, yeah, I didn’t expect to have all the equipment and stuff here, I must admit. I thought it would be a little bit more, um, like</td>
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</table>
**Transcript**

Joanne: So how has that been then, that this is a more real-life situation than you were expecting?

Pink: Yeah, it’s really good. I think it’s great because it will actually make us more prepared for what we’re going into. You won’t be walking in blindly, you’ll have an idea exactly of what’s about to happen. So I think it’ll make us a little bit more confident of what we can do.

Joanne: And how does that make you feel about you then?

Pink: Good. I like to have the confidence. I don’t like walking in blindly.

**Commentary**

Pink’s responses to my questions are clear, direct and immediate. Pink likes things to be clear. She feels confident in known environments and situations and Pink likes to feel confident. As her experiences of the semester continued, she realised what she did not know but felt that it was unknowable before experiencing it:

Pink, final interview

You can’t tell someone what this is going to be like... It doesn’t matter what anybody says to you, it’s not going to matter until you actually do it and that’s just like having a baby.

This preference for clarity and certainty influences Pink’s expectations of relationships. This is reflected in her relationship with me as she participates in this research project:
Pink, mid-semester interview

**Pink:** *If you’ve got something specific that you need me to answer or if I haven’t given an answer, just email me. I’d much rather be guided than just be aimlessly wandering.*

**Joanne:** All right. Okay.

**Pink:** *If you’re not getting what you need, just guide me.*

5.6.2 Contextual features

Pink finds the uncertainty in this loosely structured research situation uncomfortable, as she repeats in her mid-semester interview:

Pink, mid-semester interview

**Pink:** *I suppose I don’t really know if what I’m doing’s what you need?*

**Joanne:** That’s awesome. Thank you very much. That’s great.

**Pink:** *That’s probably the main thing because I just give a general overview of how the week has been and who I’ve encountered during that week.*

In all of Pink’s submissions the camera was focused on her feet. In none of them did she show her face to the camera, and I wonder if this might have been because I focused the camera on our feet during the initial interview. Pink seeks certainty, so following my approach would have been a comfortable option. Although I explicitly stated that if she were unable to submit a video selfie at any time there would be no need for concern, on two separate occasions Pink made multiple submissions in one week to ‘make up’ for missed weeks, and she refers to these video selfie catch-ups in obligatory terms (see italics):

Pink, week 7

*Good morning. It’s week seven. I’ve actually missed a week so I promise to do two this week. It’s Pink.*
Pink Week 12

Hi. So it’s Pink. I have got to make up for three videos so I’m going to do three videos and I’m going to do them in the order and send them on to Dropbox for you

5.6.2.1 Commentary

Pink’s desire for certainty appears to influence her expectations of relationships, especially in relation to the reciprocation in relationships. She feels an obligation to meet my expectations regardless of my reassurances that the provision of video selfie submissions is not to be onerous. She is keen to know whether or not she has met my expectations. Pink uses the time at the end of an interview session with me to ask about an assignment, highlighting the reciprocal nature of her expectations and her reliance on clear demarcations of these expectations (I had indicated that I would be open to such requests if timing made it possible and/or necessary). She also views her role as an AIN in this manner, as a reciprocal relationship involving affect:

Pink, final interview

Pink: Yeah, I am I loving it and I never expected to love working in aged care. I just – I never had an affinity for old people, but I’ve discovered that they’re like kids. They’re very dependent and I like that they’re dependent on me. I like being able to help them. I get a lot of satisfaction from that. So I feel like I’m doing something worthwhile, so yeah, I love it.

Joanne: Making a difference to people’s lives.

Pink: I love it, and even just, you’ll shower a couple of the residents and they’ll give you a kiss and a hug. They’re so grateful for any little thing that you do for them and that to me is important. I’m a making a difference in the world. So yeah, there’s a lot of nurses that aren’t like that.

Joanne: It’s the culture, it’s an interesting culture.

Pink’s relationships with her peers are also highly reciprocal:

Pink, week 4

I found that girls in my class were just amazing. We all bounced off each other a lot. We did a couple of study sessions, which was really cool. We started to work more as a team rather than just as a group of people, all going to Uni together.
Pink, final interview

It was a nice group and I think everybody got a lot from each other...we gave each other a lot of support and we had a lot go on between our group of friends in that first semester and we were very supportive of each other and we made sure that if somebody was having a bad week, you got them through that week.

For Pink, it seems to be very much the reciprocity of the relationships that matters and this involves a sharing of positive affect.

5.6.3 Complication

Pink’s expectation of reciprocity in relationships was disappointed in her dealings with the university about her verification. Verification involves confirmation of the student’s ability to meet the legal and health requirements for participation in their clinical placements. Pink’s experiences of verification were particularly stressful for her because she assumed that the institution was interested in maintaining and improving its relationship with its students. She thought that if she took responsibility for her part of the process in verification, the institution would take responsibility for performing its part. However, this did not happen as Pink expected:

Pink, week 7

I’m still not verified which caused me a lot of grief. Yesterday I spoke to several people in verification at Wollongong who were not very helpful at all and I probably lost my cool, which wasn’t ideal, but documentation has gone missing and I wasn’t made aware. So for four weeks I’ve been waiting for verification that was not going to happen. I don’t find the staff down there helpful. I have now spoken to 2 of the head lecturers and one of 30 people in charge of verification and hopefully sorted a few things out and apologised for my outburst. But I must say, I would never recommend the people I spoke to to do anything to help you because they were horrendous. Hopefully now that is all fixed and I will now get my verification up and running in the next week. Documents have been faxed down, so I’ve got to say, I was pretty
disappointed with the way that I was treated and the lack of communication, which I have spoken to management about I don’t feel that as a first-year student we should be left in the dark for as long as we were. I don’t feel that there should be no communication. I’d made several points of call to find out if they had all my documentation or if something I was doing was holding up verification and was fobbed off and ignored which I don’t think it ideal. So hopefully even though I didn’t handle myself very well and lost my cool, after apologising and getting a bit more information to management, things might change and make it easier for a few more of the students during what is a really stressful situation for verification.

5.6.3.1 Commentary

Pink points out that she has met her obligation and even followed up on this, making sure her documents had arrived. She expresses disappointment, indicating her expectations were not met. This mismatch between Pink’s expectations and her experiences leads her to distrust the institution’s intentions towards her, a poor socio-emotional ‘fit’. She revisits this situation in her final interview when she articulates her assumption of an intention by the institution in the interaction – to apply unnecessary pressure – and suggests alternatives to avoid this. It is with an ironical laugh that Pink suggests that she no longer considers the institution interested in her opinions.

Pink, final interview

Yep, my girlfriend runs one [verification process] every month and I think St George [Hospital] does one, Sutherland [Hospital] does one. I don’t think Kareena [Private Hospital] does, but every month they do a verification, yep, so it doesn’t have to be as hard as what the uni makes it. I don’t know why they make it so difficult. They make it this horrendous situation that puts so much pressure on us when we’re already under enough pressure as it is. It could have been so much easier. I suggested that they start the process from the minute that we actually apply to come to uni and if you don’t get in, you’ve lost nothing. So we’ll see if they listen to any of that [laughs]. It would definitely ease the burden on the student. If I knew when I applied last August that I’d need all my vaccinations, I would have gone and done it then.
This breaking of her trust in the institution’s intentions towards her leads to a
cynicism and wariness over other interactions with the institution. For example:

**Pink, final interview**

**Pink**: Yeah, because we had a conversation and I think it was xxxx that explained it to us that, she said that, it is nearly impossible to get high distinctions in essays because if you get a high distinction it has to be sent them to the subject coordinator and then they will have to remark it. And she said you’ll usually come out with a worse mark. So she said you’ll always get, rather than an 85 you might get an 82. So you’ll get a distinction but not a high distinction because she said it’s just too much to have it remarked. You’ll lose marks and that’s not fair. Which I don’t see as fair, but…

**Joanne**: I didn’t know they did that process, that seems…

**Pink**: Yeah, so apparently if you’re [inaudible] going to give a high distinction it has to be sent through to the subject coordinator to be remarked. So there was quite a few people in the class that weren’t very happy with that.

**Pink, week 9**

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<td>I’m still a bit concerned regarding lecturers getting back to us with answers and stuff. That’s quite frustrating. I’d like to think that given the fact that we are adult learners and we are left to our own devices a lot of the time, when we have a question and we go to lecture, it would be nice to think they would get back to us</td>
<td>Her experiences are being generalised to all lecturers Pink has immediately assumed ill-intention, a replication of her perceptions of the problems with verification, rather than considering other possible explanations</td>
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Despite these alienating interactions, Pink feels other areas of the institution to be more responsive, interested and caring; a better socio-emotional ‘fit’. She was invited to attend a panel discussion that formed part of a university review process as
a student representative. This resurrected her belief in the institution as a caring partner in relationship with her:

**Pink, week 12**

*I also attended a meeting that was held by Wollongong Uni that was in regards to, you know, how things were going at the regional campus and I found that really good. It was nice to have people listen to our voices. There were only a few of us there but it was nice to have people listen and hopefully they’ll take on-board a few of the suggestions that we had.*

Pink experienced alienation and felt unfairly ignored by the institution in her attempts to both meet her end of the bargain in the relationship involving verification and to explain, redress and improve her failing relationship with the main campus by improving communication. As Ballantyne (2012) found, many first year students see their studies as a relationship with the institution in which both they and the institution have roles and responsibilities to fulfil. Despite her disappointment, Pink drew on her other relationships (relationships with Loftus staff and student-peers) for connection and support.

**5.6.4 Resolution**

Despite the disappointment in the university that Pink has experienced and despite some difficult life events, she never once considered leaving, but instead focused on what she needed to do to manage her situation:

**Pink, final interview**

**Joanne:** Did you at any time consider leaving?

**Pink:** Never.

**Joanne:** Never?

**Pink:** No. It wasn’t ever – no. There was one particular day where we’d found out my mum was sick, we found out [unclear] brother was sick and it was like, ‘Oh my god. How am I going to do this?’ But it wasn’t a thought of ‘I can’t do it’. It was, ‘How can I do it? I need to make it work, how’s that going to happen?’ So, no, not for a second. It was too big of a leap of faith
for me. I have to make it work. So I just need to find out what’s going to make it work.

For Pink, a part of managing her studies involved seeking out the positive reciprocal relationships she valued and thrived in and compartmentalising the negative and less supportive relationships. Pink related very positively to Loftus and made a very clear distinction between Loftus and the main campus (that was responsible for verification):

**Joanne:** It looks like you were fairly supported. You learnt from your experiences, you had family support, you found the institution mostly supportive and peer relations.

**Pink:** See to me, institutional support was more this institution [Loftus] than Wollongong.

**Joanne:** Sure, yeah, yeah.

**Pink:** Yep. So I didn’t find Wollongong particularly helpful.

[Laughter]

**Joanne:** No.

**Pink:** I don’t know that many people did.

In week 3 and week 7 she mentions three different tutors by name and speaks highly of the support she felt she received:

**Pink, week 3**

One of the tutors VVVVV was really good. She was actually very, um, she’s very calm. I find her really easy to listen to

**Pink, week 7**

Also the tutors, and tutors have been really good. Both SSSSS and CCCCC, SSSSS especially has been exceptionally helpful and understanding. So it’s really nice to have their support

In the initial interview and again in weeks 2 and 3, she mentions the administrative staff as particularly supportive:
Pink, initial interview

*I’ve had a bit of contact with the admin staff and they’ve all been really helpful and really friendly. Got back to me with answers when I’ve needed them*

Pink, week 2

*The ladies in admin have been fine again. They’ve always been really helpful. The tutors and the, um, all of the teaching staff have been amazing. They’re more than happy to answer any questions*

Pink, week 3

*I’m thinking that I’m going to need to lean on the office staff a bit this week to get some of that sorted out*

5.6.4.1 Commentary

Despite the difficulties Pink encountered, she summarised her experiences in positive terms and felt better prepared for her next semester:

Pink, final interview

*Pink*: So, but overall I still see it as a completely positive experience. I don’t – I certainly don’t regret doing it and having now started working in the industry, I know that I’ve made the right decision. So I’m not regretting any of what I’ve done. I just know that there’s things that I need to do different. Not necessarily better, just differently.

It seems that Pink has managed her relationships sufficiently to feel she belongs and she knows with whom she can positively relate and whom she wishes to avoid. She has limited the alienation she felt as a result of treatment by the university to that section of the university she believes responsible for the poor treatment, which is the main campus. She can avoid dealing with the main campus because of her enrolment at Loftus.

5.6.5 Restorying

Pink’s narrative involves self-determination and persistence in finding and maintaining collaborative connections with and within the university despite
potentially alienating experiences. She commenced her enrolment at Loftus with a definite self-declared preference for comfort through certainty and a strong preference for positive, clear, reciprocal relationships. Both of these preferences were severely challenged by the university through its management of missing documents during her verification procedure. Once Pink’s trust in the university’s intentions was challenged, her socio-emotional ‘fit’ was challenged. Other instances of poor and uncaring treatment by the university then appear in Pink’s video selfie submissions, even when these treatments did not impact her directly. This suggests that the overall nature of the socio-emotional sense of ‘fit’ is influenced across events. Pink managed her situation by clearly delineating responsibility for the uncaring relationship to one section of the university, the main campus. She restricted her focus to the immediate (positive) environment at Loftus. Pink’s response to the university’s treatment of her during her verification is reminiscent of Mann’s (2001) alienation for self-preservation. Pink’s response demonstrates that, in this instance, the alienation occurs in response to a disappointed expectation that involved the university’s intentions, as if the university had a subjective reality.

Pink’s reaction to her verification may have contributed to the highly collaborative relationships she developed with her student-peers at Loftus. These relationships appeared to be based on shared objectives and were sustained through positive, shared affect. These relationships were important to Pink’s decision-making in relation to her studies. They provided the context for a shared reflexivity and a pooled decision-making about engagement with studies; an extended form of co-reflexivity.

5.7 Narrative 10: Superwoman – the role of affect in community and belonging

‘Those things make me feel more at home in a place that isn’t’

5.7.1 Superwoman at orientation

Superwoman is a young woman aged between 20 and 25 years who entered her current nursing undergraduate degree on the basis of an enabling course completed the previous year. The enabling course was conducted at Loftus, the same campus
she now attends for her nursing studies. She lives at home with her parents and works part time in the nursing industry as well as undertaking coordination and management of a local girl guides groups a number of evenings each week. I had met Superwoman as part of a class group for about ten minutes during her enabling course, but I did not know her before her enrolment in her nursing course and her participation in this study. In her initial interview, Superwoman’s first comment to me was that she liked a tutor we had walked past:

Superwoman, initial interview

Joanne: This is a second or third year nursing tute run by SSSS. She’s in charge of NMIH XXXX

Superwoman: She’s nice. I like SSSS

And later in the same interview Superwoman clearly expresses her experience of ‘belonging’ based on feeling accepted because of the ‘friendliness’ of the campus:

Superwoman: I had the expectation that the campus would be friendlier and more inviting because of how small it was, and that’s...my expectation’s been met on that one. Yes, um.

Joanne: So has that been good?

Superwoman: Yes.

Joanne: So why is ‘friendly’ good?

Superwoman: (intonation suggests the answer should be obvious to me) Because you’re new, because you’re learning. Friendly is good because then you feel more accepted. Um, what other expectations did I have? I had the expectation that my educational needs would be met and so far I think they’re going to. I can’t tell because it’s only my first week, um.

Joanne: What do you mean your ‘educational needs’?

Superwoman: That I would learn the content that I needed and have the practical skills to do it and, um, there would be support if I needed it.
5.7.1.1 Commentary

Superwoman seems pleased with her choice of studying nursing at Loftus and with the staff she has met. It is likely that Superwoman has only met the tutor she says she likes the once, as this is her first week of studies. Yet she has already formed a strongly positive opinion of her. Similarly, Superwoman considers herself to be ‘new’ and is looking for connections, even though at least one other enabling course participant would have been enrolled in the nursing degree and she is familiar with the administrative staff and the physicality of the campus. This suggests that Superwoman is looking for membership of an imagined community, or a sense of belonging and acceptance, and that she is already working towards this by quickly finding the staff pleasant and by expecting that her personal educational needs will be addressed. She is anticipating the acceptance and belonging she desires, a socio-emotional ‘fit’, and she looks for this to be provided by the institution in an individual, personalised manner, tailored to her particular needs.

5.7.2 Contextual Features

Superwoman participates in all three interviews and provides nine other video selfies ranging in length from less than a minute to more than five minutes. In each, Superwoman begins by saying hello or by providing an introduction to the timing of the video such as ‘Okay so it’s week…’. She speaks directly to the camera in about half the submissions, with her head or head and shoulders in view. Other times she appears to have fixed the phone she is using to the visor of her car and she speaks to me as she is driving, with half her body in the screen. On one occasion the video is of the traffic she is negotiating. Superwoman takes me with her in her daily journeys and speaks to me as if I am directly asking her the prompt ‘What has changed?’ She frequently orients her responses to this prompt. For example:

Superwoman, week 2

*Ah, what’s changed this week?*
Superwoman, week 6

What’s changed?

Superwoman, week 7

So what’s changed this week?

Superwoman, week 9

Not much else has been changing

Superwoman, week 10

I don’t think much is changing any more

5.7.2.1 Commentary

I am always the audience for Superwoman, although she speaks of me and my work in the third person, as if perhaps others are listening too. This also serves to maintain a professional rather than personal relationship with me. These boundaries, professional and personal, are ones that Superwoman challenges at times:

Superwoman, mid-semester interview

**Superwoman**: I don’t think so. I know you’re not all about tooting your own horn but I think you miss the fact that you help a lot of people. And you don’t ask questions about yourself. You don’t ask questions about ‘How did I help you?’

**Joanne**: No.

**Superwoman**: No, because that’s not what it’s about.

**Joanne**: But I can’t ask that question and expect people to honestly answer me face-to-face.

**Superwoman**: Yeah, true.

**Joanne**: I do know that question needs to be asked by somebody else really.

I am a part of Superwoman’s new community and she expresses her concern over the extent to which I am affectively satisfied in this community. I respond with a
point of methodology and epistemology, attempting to renegotiate our relationship back onto terms I feel are more appropriate to my role and our relationship. As Irwin (2006) argues, we do ‘structure’ as much as we do ‘ethics’ in our relationships with participants. In this interaction with Superwoman I am refusing the offer of community membership based on affect and I am trying to maintain a distance to preserve the independence between participant and researcher required for ethical conduct of the research. Even now I wonder how this was received: as a refusal by the institution for a connection, as reinforcement of my power and our structurally based differences, or as simply a person-to-person ‘Thanks but no thanks’.

5.7.3 Complication

During the process of enrolment, prior to the commencement of studies, the nursing students were involved in a process of verification that did not go smoothly or well. During the verification process at the beginning of this particular semester two problems occurred. Many students had not brought with them the necessary documentation and the verification process took much longer than the faculty had allowed, causing wait times of around four hours. The campus manager dealt with this by apologising to the students for the delay, explaining that it was out of her control to alter it, providing pizza (as students could not leave the campus during this time and there are no food outlets on the site) and offering to contact parents or others if students could not do so themselves to inform them of the delay. Superwoman spoke of this in her initial interview:

Superwoman, initial interview

**Joanne:** The way that the problems were dealt with, how did that meet your expectations, or not?

**Superwoman:** Um, I think on the day it was, everyone was very apologetic but also a little frustrated that we hadn’t been seen to do the side of our job that we were supposed to. And I just don’t think that with that, many people not knowing what had happened, what was s’posed to happen, that it maybe wasn’t something that we had done personally, rather than something that had been just lost in communication.
Joanne: Uh huh

Superwoman: So there was that side of it. Um, and then there was an email sent to ask us what we thought. But possibly the way it was worded was the reason I didn’t respond to it. So I didn’t provide feedback. But apart from that verification was good once we got to the screen part and they asked us questions. I think, had it been a little smoother it would have been potentially, had the outcome to be quite good.

5.7.3.1 Commentary

Early in the semester, in fact prior to a single class being held, Superwoman felt judged and blamed by the university for the difficulties with verification. This was on the basis of a sense of frustration she perceived by main campus staff on the day of verification and the tone of an email sent to students seeking feedback on the process.

5.7.4 Resolution

At this early stage of the semester, that is, by week 1, Superwoman had made the decision not to respond to the section of the university (the main campus) that she felt had unfairly blamed her for the problems with verification.

Superwoman, initial interview

Then there was an email sent to ask us what we thought. But possibly the way it was worded was the reason I didn’t respond to it. So I didn’t provide feedback

This refusal to have anything to do with the main campus was despite Superwoman’s initial desire to study there:

Superwoman, week 2

I thought at the start that the uni lifestyle, that I would miss it if I wasn’t at the Wollongong campus, that I would miss the activities, that I would miss the fun
She dealt with the blame she felt by withdrawing from any relationship with the main campus. She restricts her interactions with the university to those staff and students with whom she spends time at Loftus. Her experience of university is now that which occurs at Loftus. She has drawn her own boundaries around her sense of community on the basis of affect. The main campus is not included:

**Superwoman, initial interview**

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<tr>
<td><em>I just don’t think that with that many people</em></td>
<td>Here Superwoman refers to students as generic ‘people’.</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>not knowing what had happened, what was s’posed to happen, that it maybe wasn’t something that we had done personally rather than something that had been just lost in communication. So there was that side of it.</em></td>
<td>Here the generic ‘people’ have quickly become a group with whom Superwoman identifies</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Um, and then there was an email sent to ask us what we thought. But possibly the way it was worded was the reason I didn’t respond to it. So I didn’t provide feedback</em></td>
<td>Identification with this group continues</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Here Superwoman defends the group by refusing to engage with the main campus which has made accusations made against the group</td>
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Superwoman’s community appears to be continually negotiated and performed through shared positive and negative affect. For example, the difficult emotions engender a sharing of experience:
Superwoman, final interview

I’ve noticed that there has definitely been a lot more emotion in our club this week. There has been at least four sets of tears and everybody seems to be feeling very overwhelmed about their first placement. So I think that’s a little bit contagious. When one person starts worrying, I think everybody starts to worry.

Superwoman, week 10

We had made friends by then too though. So you were all sharing your struggle of getting ready for the exam. That was a shared stress. Everybody had that stress. To deal with the stress you said – I think one of us said, we should all study together. That would have formed probably my little group of friends. Then we would have invited everybody. It might have been [Christina] or [Adele] because they were at every study session we went to as well. We would have just invited everybody. But I think that was – my way of coping is to do it in groups because I learn better that way. I think a couple of us felt that way so we got together and studied once or twice before that exam… but we were both stressing at the same level so it was good to share it with somebody that wasn’t like – you’ll be fine – because that drives me nuts. I don’t feel fine so, ‘you’ll be fine’ is not a good response.

Anticipated happiness aligns Superwoman and her peers towards similar objects (food) and activities (study). These objects and activities then represent happiness as a shared, community experience:

Superwoman, week 4

We started having study sessions during the week, which have been really helpful. We’d just organised those within our own class and a couple of the people from the other class came in and joined us as well. They heard us, we just invited the whole tearoom really if they wanted to come up and study. So that was really helpful. We’ve done that twice for this exam so I have a feeling we’re going to do them a lot more. What else has changed? We’ve had pancakes and noodles this week. Just so you know, it’s very exciting when we get to school and its pancake Wednesday or noodle Thursday, always very exciting.

With this sense of community comes a sense of responsibility for those within the community. This sense of responsibility is something Superwoman seems to feel
strongly; for example, she felt ‘guilty’ for not attending PASS, as if she had a responsibility to the leader to attend:

Superwoman, week 6

*I stopped going to PASS because our 102 assignment’s done so we haven’t been going to PASS which everyone tells me is normal, but I feel a little bit guilty. It’s just not a priority at the moment. I’ve been struggling with one of the assignments that we got one of my classes. It’s really vague so that increased the stress level even more because I’m not comfortable with the assignment.*

5.7.4.1 Commentary

Superwoman has resolved the issue of feeling accused by the main campus by making a strong community bond at Loftus. This community defines who is excluded as well as who is included and this community of people is of central importance to Superwoman during transition:

Superwoman, final interview

*I don’t have the dedication either to sit down and self-motivate. People motivate me. So coming here works well because I come for the people as much as I come for the degree, if that makes sense.*

This community motivates Superwoman to study more than the goal of being a nurse motivates her:

*Yeah. It’s still uncertain – I guess I’ll never know whether I’m actually going to enjoy nursing as a whole. So some of me is, ‘Am I actually going to be content doing this job?’ especially because I’m so – not up and down but – restless in every job I’ve ever been in.*

5.7.5 Restorying

Superwoman’s strong peer relationships and strong positive connection to the Loftus campus follow an earlier perceived sense of being unfairly blamed for verification problems by the main campus. In Superwoman’s narrative, this lack of
socio-emotional ‘fit’ with the wider institution consequent upon the issues to do with the verification process has led Superwoman to look for a socio-emotional ‘fit’ at her local Loftus campus. The strong connection to the Loftus campus is often reported in relation to the shared activities provided for students at the Loftus campus (recreational and study activities and interactions) as examples of caring and a positive regard for her by Loftus.

Superwoman’s narrative also provides evidence of an extended form of co-reflexivity. Superwoman describes strong peer bonds involving shared affect, shared study activities and shared goals. Superwoman maintained these bonds and connections by monitoring other people and situations for their affective and emotional features. Superwoman shows evidence of this when she monitors my own emotional reactions and affect in relation to my role on campus. However, Superwoman does not seem to spend much time in a reflective process on her own involvement and satisfaction in these situations. The content of her submissions is all about the ‘doing’ of being a student. For example:

Superwoman, week 5

*It’s been a pretty easy week, learning lots of stuff in labs and things. I’m just really looking forward to the break and being able to catch up on all my assignments and things like that.*

Superwoman’s strong focus on others and the satisfaction it brings her to be involved with peers who share objectives perhaps predispose her to the highly collaborative reflexivity she uses to negotiate her transition. Given her focus on others rather than on her own interiority, this raises the possibility that peer relationships are essential to Superwoman’s ability to continue to manage her studies.
5.8 Conclusion

The six narratives presented in this chapter demonstrate the integral relationship between social engagement and academic engagement. For these six participants, their peer relationships provided them the context within which to consider their options for action in an attempt to succeed in their studies – a type of distributed reflexivity. Their final actions were supported by their peers, leading to a pooled form of agency.

For all ten participants whose narratives are presented in chapters four and five, their transition was a process of making choices about actions in response to their current learning environment based on meanings which derived in part from their past experiences, in pursuit of their future-imagined selves. Affect played a significant role in maintaining the necessary peer relationships for reflexivity, both for collaborative and comparative reflexivity, and the exercise of agency.

Chapter six takes up these narratives and explores them through the lens of student engagement to understand in detail the role of reflexivity and agency in the transition experiences of the ten participants in this study.
Chapter 6: Discussion: An interpretive restorying

6.1 Introduction

The narratives presented in chapters four and five illustrate the range of experiences of transition amongst the ten research participants. In this chapter I focus on the way in which these participants’ reflexive deliberations influenced their agency and their experiences of transition as ‘becoming’. These findings demonstrate the way in which agency is central to transition as ‘becoming’; an iterative and lifelong process of adaptation, and how higher education offers the possibility of developing an individual’s capacity for agency. I use Kahn’s (2014) theorising of student engagement to connect participants’ agency to the process of engagement with studies during transition. My findings indicate that both the academic and social features of transition as ‘becoming’ are inseparable and this concurs with Klemenčič’s (2015) view of the relationship between student agency and student engagement as inherently social.

My findings also outline features of transition into university that were common to the participants in this study. Four key features of the experience of transition are presented here: participants use of reflexivity to mediate their agency; participants’ subjective experiences of time with a focus on the role of the future-imagined self in transition; participants’ peer relationships and the roles of these relationships in the exercise of agency; and participants’ sense of connection with the university. Together, these features speak to a socio-relational context purposefully developed and maintained through affect to enable engagement with studies as the exercise of agency during transition.

For ease of reading the participants are summarised in Table 7 below.
Table 7: Description of the ten participants involved in the narrative inquiries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants' self-chosen Petnames</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Previous formal educational qualification</th>
<th>Years since previous formal educational</th>
<th>Life-stage</th>
<th>Faculty of enrolment</th>
<th>Chapter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Male, partner of Olive</td>
<td>Year 1 of undergraduate degree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Living at home with parents</td>
<td>Faculty of Nursing</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lura</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Female, sister of Moshton</td>
<td>HSC</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Living at home with parents</td>
<td>Faculty of Business</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moshton</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Female, sister of Lura</td>
<td>HSC</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Living at home with parents</td>
<td>Faculty of Business</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sara</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>TAFE Diploma</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Single mother of two school aged children</td>
<td>Faculty of Nursing</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wonder Woman</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>HSC</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Living at home with parents</td>
<td>Faculty of Nursing</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olive</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Female, partner of James</td>
<td>Year 1 of undergraduate degree</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Single, one toddler living with own parents and siblings</td>
<td>Faculty of Nursing</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scarlett</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Year 1 of undergraduate degree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Living at home with parents</td>
<td>Faculty of Nursing</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orange</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>TAFE Cert 4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Partnered with no dependants</td>
<td>Faculty of Nursing</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pink</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Year 10 of high school</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Partnered with dependant school aged children</td>
<td>Faculty of Nursing</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superwoman</td>
<td>20-25</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>UAP</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Living at home with parents</td>
<td>Faculty of Nursing</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6.2 The process of student agency mediated by reflexivity
Reflexivity involves three steps: identifying personal concerns, prioritising these concerns, then deciding a course of action (Kahn et al., 2017) and features of
reflexivity were evident in all ten participants’ narratives. Table 8 below presents examples of each participant’s reflexivity during transition.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>The component of reflexivity demonstrated by the excerpt: identification of concerns; prioritising of concerns; identifying courses of action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It just made things clearer and I’d say something and then it be like ‘Oh yeah, oh I’ve got to do this’. I just said it to the thing, but I hadn’t thought about it until I would actually say it out loud. Sometimes you say you’ve got to do this and you’ve got to do that. But until you actually put it in words and say it to somebody, you don’t do anything about it. I think that helped me a lot. Scarlett, final interview</td>
<td>Summary of the process of identifying and prioritising concerns, then choosing to act</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Joanne:** Nursing gives you endless assignments on reflection, as you know, so what’s the difference between this project and those assignments?

**Olive:** Because they’re in class and I only half arse them. I don’t know. Because this is completely different. That’s more focusing on not so much like our study and workload. It’s just focusing on how we would reflect on hypothetical situations which is just our emotions to conflict and things like that, whereas this is talking about how we’re actually approaching uni which is completely different to being in a workforce. So it is

<p>| | The past, present and future orientations involved in deciding what actions to take on the basis of deliberations |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>The component of reflexivity demonstrated by the excerpt: identification of concerns; prioritising of concerns; identifying courses of action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>making me think about how I’m studying and how I’m going to reflect and how I’m going to do it next time in the way of like assignments, and just doing, you know, preparing for the next day and things like that.</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olive, final interview</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Because if I was not in this study, in this research, I would just go and struggle myself but I would not see myself in the computer. I cannot reflect, listen what I’m saying, then just to see me again in the video, ‘Oh, this is what I feel. This is what happened’. Give me the opportunity to learn through me as well through this research.</em></td>
<td>Identifying concerns and the emotions that triggered reflexivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orange, mid-semester interview</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>I’m needing a lot more time than I thought to complete my studies. I’ve had to cut back on work hours. Um, one thing I’ve noticed is like, a lot of the other students seem to be doing a lot less work. Like I’ve spent four hours on certain readings getting that all summarised and people haven’t even looked at it in class, so I’m going to have to work out how that’s going to affect my progress, if I need to do that or if my time would be better spent on other things.</em></td>
<td>Actions based on the future-imagined self of a successful student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James, week 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>I just want to focus on one thing, get it out of</em></td>
<td>Actions based on the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcript</td>
<td>The component of reflexivity demonstrated by the excerpt: identification of concerns; prioritising of concerns; identifying courses of action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>the way. I’ve attended the workshop this week to try and help me. I am going to send my kids away to my parents for the weekend so I can block out that time to study.</em></td>
<td>future-imagined self of a successful student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sara, week 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>But I think that was, my way of coping is to do it in groups because I learn better that way.</em></td>
<td>Explanation of actions taken on the basis of reflexivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superwoman, final interview</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>There was one particular day where we’d found out my mum was sick, we found out [unclear] brother was sick and it was like, ‘Oh my god. How am I going to do this?’ But it wasn’t a thought of ‘I can’t do it’. It was, ‘How can I do it? I need to make it work, how’s that going to happen?’ So, no, not for a second. It was too big of a leap of faith for me. I have to make it work. So I just need to find out what’s going to make it work.</em></td>
<td>Recounting the reflexive process, triggered by emotions, when identifying possible actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pink, final interview</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>So I thought, like, the work would be like a lot less and I’d be able to actually, like, finish my tutorial homework the day of my tutorial. But no, keep going until Wednesday, Thursday sometimes. Then I have to watch my lectures and do my readings.</em></td>
<td>Identification of possible strategies to achieve future-imagined selves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcript</td>
<td>The component of reflexivity demonstrated by the excerpt: identification of concerns; prioritising of concerns; identifying courses of action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moshton, week 2</td>
<td>I’m just like ‘Oh...that’s new for me’ and she’s like ‘Oh I already knew that’ and I’m like ‘Oh...kay’. So I have to learn that as well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lura, week 2</td>
<td>Identification of concerns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wonder Woman, week 4</td>
<td>Identification of actions, expressing a feeling of lack of control identified by Kahn et al. (2017) as indicative of fractured reflexivity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 6.3 Types of Reflexivity

Kahn’s types of reflexivity and the findings of this study in relation to each type of Kahn’s forms of reflexivity are described in Table 9 below. The participants’ narratives demonstrate that their decisions and actions (that is, their agency) during transition were mediated predominantly by one type of reflexivity at a time.

Kahn (2014) proposes three main types of reflexivity: restricted reflexivity, extended reflexivity, and fractured reflexivity (see Table 9 below) and argues that there are different outcomes for engagement with higher education studies from each of these three main types of reflexivity. He also argues that restricted and extended reflexivity can be conducted by students in concert with others – termed ‘co-reflexivity’ – or alone. Co-reflexivity is a form of distributed reflexivity, ‘a group of individuals who use shared dialogue to articulate their aims and develop
organisation to realise these aims’ (Kahn, 2014 p. 1008). Co-reflexivity includes pooled agency.

Table 9: Findings of this study categorised according to Kahn’s (2041) types of reflexivity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kahn’s Types of Reflexivity</th>
<th>Explanation of Kahn’s Types of Reflexivity</th>
<th>The Findings of this Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>restricted reflexivity and co-reflexivity</td>
<td>Kahn suggests restricted reflexivity could occur when a student prioritises concerns other than the educational tasks, resulting in evasion of learning through, for example, habitual or formulaic responses. Kahn proposes that restricted reflexivity could be characterised by high levels of social involvement but not of academic involvement. Restricted co-reflexivity, for example, could involve high levels of engagement with social groups on campus but low levels of engagement with studies.</td>
<td>Those participants in this study using a restricted reflexivity were applying previous approaches to study without exploring other or additional options. These participants involved their peers in their reflexivity for comparative purposes, in order to evaluate their own performances against their peers’ performances. None employed co-reflexivity. Each made final decisions about their study without the involvement of peers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>extended reflexivity and co-reflexivity:</td>
<td>Kahn argues that extended reflexivity could take the form of deliberating for long periods of time and pursuing an educational goal for its own merits, resulting in taking responsibility and trying different types of reflexivity. This extended reflexivity could include studying individually and participating in group assignments. Extended co-</td>
<td>Those participants in this study using an extended form of reflexivity explored many different approaches to their studies. They all involved peers collaboratively to identify new approaches to study and most of them employed a pooled agency, where their study (choices and actions) decisions were made with</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
reflexivity could involve studying with peers and discussing studies and approaches to study with peers.

Kahn describes fractured reflexivity as alienation: feeling and being disconnected from studies and peers.

The single participant in this study who employed a fractured reflexivity eventually disengaged from her studies. She also avoided student-peer relationships. This fractured reflexivity was exercised in the formal study context. She did not appear to use a fractured reflexivity during her clinical placement.

Although two participants appeared to shift from one dominant type of reflexivity to a different dominant type of reflexivity during the course of this study, each participant relied on one dominant form of reflexivity at a time. Table 10 categorises participants according to the final dominant form of reflexivity they used, as evidenced in the narratives in chapters four and five. The participant’s initial dominant type of reflexivity is also indicated. The most common form of reflexivity employed by these participants was extended co-reflexivity.
Using Kahn’s typology of reflexivity, the following section presents an analysis of the reflexivity that was evident in the participants’ narratives.

6.3.1 Extended co-reflexivity

An analysis of the narratives developed in this study indicates that extended co-reflexivity; that is, extensive and distributed deliberations conducted by participants leading to a pooled agency, was the most common type of reflexivity used. Five participants (Scarlett, Olive, Orange, Superwoman and Pink) deliberated in concert with their peers; they shared approaches, experiences and discussed possible study strategies. They involved their peers in making decisions about their studies. These five participants used reflexivity to extend the scope of their deliberations through their peer relationships. These peer relationships were voluntary, mutually supportive, and characterised by positive affect. For example:

Superwoman, week 10

*So you were all sharing your struggle of getting ready for the exam. That was a shared stress. Everybody had that stress. To deal with the stress you*
said – I think one of us said we should all study together.

Pink, week 4

I found that girls in my class were just amazing. We all bounced off each other a lot. We did a couple of study sessions which was really cool. We started to work more as a team rather than just as a group of people all going to Uni together.

Those participants who employed extended co-reflexivity had usually adopted this form of reflexivity from the beginning of their transition. The exception to this was Olive, who adopted this type of reflexivity by mid-semester.

Olive’s narrative provides evidence of a shift in the type of reflexivity she employed from a predominantly restricted reflexivity to a predominantly extended co-reflexivity. Olive began the semester by comparing herself to her peers, studying alone and drawing on her previous student self.

Olive, week 2

I’m still studying on my bed but I’m trying. Um, I guess a lot of it has to do with the fact that everyone else seems very keen and studious as well in the sense that they’re trying to get all their work done and doing it on time and I don’t want to fall behind.

Olive, week 3

Because I don’t remember how to write an essay. It’s been five years so it’s a big change

Combined, this is evidence of a restricted reflexivity and comparative involvement of her peers. However, this changes quite quickly to an extended type of co-reflexivity, as Olive reported in her mid-semester interview:

Olive, mid-semester interview

You can talk to them [peers] about what is going on and what is happening. Even on our Facebook group we all put videos of things that helped us out. So we share that with everyone else, or notes that we have got. We can just cross check.
6.3.2 Extended reflexivity

One participant, Sara, involved her peers in the identification of study concerns and new ways of approaching her studies, but her submissions do not provide evidence of a pooled agency. Instead she involved her peers collaboratively up to the point at which she decided what to do and at this point she appears to make decisions without their involvement. This is an extended form of reflexivity but one that falls short of the collaborative involvement of peers in a pooled agency.

6.3.3 Restricted reflexivity

James, Lura and Moshton provide evidence of restricted reflexivity – the use of habitual and past strategies to minimise reflexive engagement with studies. These three participants mostly made their decisions about their study alone, without the involvement of peers, except during the initial two steps of reflexivity: the identification and prioritisation of their concerns. They involved their peers for comparative purposes, as benchmarks of their own performances:

James, week 2

*Like a lot of the other students seem to be doing a lot less work. Like I’ve spent four hours on certain readings getting all that summarised and people haven’t even looked at it in class. So I’m going to have to work out how that’s going to affect my progress. If I need to do that or if my time would be better spent on other things.*

Initially, James was keen to do well and was motivated by his future view of himself as a post-graduate student. However, his focus on learning in order to achieve a future-imagined self was influenced by the quantity of coursework he was required to complete. This shifted his attention from his future-imagined self (post-graduate student) and onto his present self (student of nursing); away from learning as a goal in itself and towards a focus on grades:

James, mid-semester interview

*It is almost not really helping you know it more. Often it is just on some*
tangent and you cannot see how it is relating to helping learn the coursework, and then putting that into nursing is like (pause) this assignment is almost taking time away from better things you could be learning. But that is what it is.

Lura and Moshton each provided lengthy submissions and spent many hours at their university studies. However, they relied on ‘effort’ and ‘hard work’ to succeed, as they had in their high school studies. They did not explore other means of succeeding. Their deliberations were independent of others and, like James, they relied on peer relationships for benchmarking of their personal achievements rather than for mutual, collaborative deliberations:

Lura, week 8

Because they [mates] said, ‘Oh can you guys help us?’ and we said ‘Oh yeah, ok, we’ll help you’, which is good because you learn 90% better if you teach other people. So we knew stuff. Like I was feeling not too bad.

Moshton, Final Interview

There’s nothing wrong with connections; they can help you and stuff

Although Lura and Moshton are sisters and living at home together they only started to discuss their studies together towards the end of their first semester. Their preferences were independence of each other, demonstrating reflexivity but not co-reflexivity.

6.3.4 Fractured reflexivity

Wonder Woman was focused on her own interiority. Initially, Wonder Woman provided evidence in her narratives of potential for some form of co-reflexivity, looking to peers to find positive relationships that were supportive of collaboration. For example:
Wonder Woman, week 3

*Everyone always just constantly putting in their input. So like, you can even get help from fellow students which is different to high school...here in uni you’re all helping each other to get passed*

This very quickly changed and by week 4 the video selfies Wonder Woman made during the teaching weeks of semester were focused on her high school studies (that she considered dysfunctional). These approaches were repeated from her past approaches to studies. Wonder Woman brought with her from her previous schooling situation a student identity that felt powerless. This sense of powerlessness is consistent with Kahn and colleagues’ (2017) findings in relation to fractured reflexivity; that is, that it is characterised by a sense of powerlessness. Kahn and colleagues (2017) reported fractured reflexivity as a feature of group work when an individual felt that the group prevented them from exercising individual agency. However, the findings of the study reported here differ from Kahn’s findings in that the situation in which this powerlessness was evident predated the group work situation. She did not look beyond her distressed self to find new approaches to adapt to her new learning environment.

When considering her studies, Wonder Woman is stuck in self-recrimination and distress:

**Wonder Woman, week 3**

*And I’ve probably left it a bit late, which is a habit I’ve learnt from school, which isn’t good. Um, yeah, doing my assignment at the last minute. It probably isn’t even half done yet*

**Wonder Woman, week 6**

*And stupid me didn’t start it in the holiday, god knows why I didn’t. I looked at it but I didn’t start it. The need to find the motivation to start things earlier would definitely help*

This continued with no change throughout her semester until she began to disengage behaviourally with her studies:
Wonder Woman, week 10

Now I just feel like, after being so slack with not watching the lectures and stuff, I just feel like it’s a routine now and I don’t do it at all. Like I, it’s basically a routine and I don’t do it at all.

Kahn (2014) argues ‘The personal distress associated with fractured reflexivity provides one immediate route to student drop out and failure’ (p. 1013) and Wonder Woman’s video selfies indicated distress and eventual behavioural disengagement from her studies. However, despite this evidence of disengagement and distress, Wonder Woman passed all four subjects she was enrolled in and finished the semester with three distinctions and one credit.

There is insufficient information in Wonder Woman’s narratives to be certain of the reasons for her final success. It is possible that despite her eventual disengagement, she had done enough work early in the semester to gain these results. However, a significant event in her enrolment during her first semester was her clinical placement and perhaps this influenced her by clarifying her objective in studying, through a deeper encounter with her future-imagined self. While on clinical placement, Wonder Woman demonstrated her capacity to position herself appropriately in relation to power structures and her own abilities; that is, she exercised agency. Wonder Woman indicated that her end goal, her future-imagined self as a registered nurse, was enough to keep her persisting despite her negative reactions to her own approaches to study:

Wonder Woman, final interview

Deep down I knew this is what I really wanted to do. So even though that motivation, like that idea of this is where I really want to be to like, motivate me to get me through it. Even though that didn’t do that it was the due dates. But deep down it didn’t make me want to leave. Like I didn’t really hate all the learning, I didn’t hate all of that. I wanted to know all of it. I just didn’t want to like...do the pressure, like the assignments. Does that make sense?

In summary, all ten participants employed agency mediated by reflexivity during their transition in order to negotiate their engagement with their studies. Reflexivity was used in different ways by different participants to determine how they wanted to engage with the opportunities and limitations offered by their
courses of study and the study environment. Investigation of reflexivity during transition demonstrates the ways in which individual students respond differently to similar contexts and so offers a way of understanding the highly individualised nature of transition as ‘becoming’; an iterative process of adaptation.

Eight of the participants employed a single type of reflexivity throughout this study and six of these participants used extended co-reflexivity; that is, a collaborative form of reflexivity that involved peer relationships and shared decisions about their engagement with their studies. Two participants (Olive and Wonder Woman) showed evidence of a shift in the type of reflexivity they used, from one form (or the potential for one form) to another form.

6.3.5 The use of agency to negotiate transition

The reflexivity used by the research participants led to agency in the form of decisions and actions taken to organise sustaining socio-relational contexts for studies through preferred types of peer-relationships. This agency was directed by the individual participants’ wish to achieve their future-imagined selves. These participants exercised agency, then, as “a temporally embedded process of social engagement” (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 962) in which present time socio-relational contexts were developed and maintained with a view to achieving future-imagined selves. That is, agency occurred within the flow of subjective time. However, during this transition period, the “projective orientations to future possibilities” (Colley, 2007, p. 431) strongly guided the “practical-evaluative orientations to engagement with the present” (Colley, 2007, p. 431) as participants determined and decided present-time actions during transition.

The socio-relational contexts created by each research participant to support their agency in pursuit of their future-imagined selves reflects Emirbayer and Mische’s (1998, p. 962) view of the “temporally embedded process of social engagement” (p. 962). The development of these contexts also reflects Klemenčič’s (2015) features of student agency. While there is evidence of all six of Klemenčič (2015) features in the findings reported here, of particular note are the third, fifth and sixth features (pp. 16-19):
Student agency is temporally embedded (third feature)

Student agency is inherently relational (fifth feature)

There are different modes of agency: personal, proxy and collective (sixth feature)

During transition into university the participants drew heavily on their future-imagined selves to persist despite the challenge that negotiating a new environment such as university inevitably presents. The socio-relational contexts they established and maintained and, at times, adjusted, seemed to support their search for these future-imagined selves in the present by providing the context they needed within which to reflect upon their current actions and choices. They then made further choices about their actions either collectively (using co-reflexivity) or personally (using reflexivity). The absence of student-peers reduced the opportunity for reflexivity and therefore for agency in the present time.

The study reported here provides empirical evidence of the ways in which these features of student agency relate to each other and also demonstrates the iterative nature of these processes. These acts of agency, then, served to potentially change the participants’ capabilities in the present-time in relation to their studies but also to influence their ability to enact agency through reflexivity, as the adjustments to this process evidenced in the narratives in Chapters 4 and 5 indicate.

**6.4 Morphogenesis of agency: higher education studies and the role of the future-imagined self**

Transition as ‘becoming’ appears to be a time when students determine and practice a dominant type of reflexivity and agency, leading to particular types of social and academic engagement. It also appears to be a time when students can explore and adopt different types of reflexivity. The shifts in reflexivity reported in this study are evidence of two types of morphogenesis of agency: shifts in the type of reflexivity used (such as the shifts evident in Wonder Woman’s and Olive’s narratives, from one dominant type of reflexivity to another type); and potential for shifts in the number of different types of reflexivity used by an individual. This latter type of morphogenesis is specifically argued by Case (2013, 2015b) to be an outcome of higher education.
The findings of this study show that Olive shifted her reflexivity from a restricted form to extended co-reflexivity form. Wonder Woman began her studies looking forward to reflexivity that involved collaborations but shifted to fractured reflexivity. Wonder Woman also exercised a different type of reflexivity again during her clinical placement, although the details provided in her video selfie submission about this time did not illuminate in depth the processes she employed during this time. Nevertheless, the use of different reflexive approaches by single participants is consistent with the view that mode of reflexivity, and therefore agency, is not a fixed attribute or trait (Archer, 2003, 2007). These findings align with Case’s (2013, 2015b) general view that morphogenesis of agency is an outcome of higher education studies.

Case (2013, 2015b) specifically argues that students might be expected to exercise multiple forms of reflexivity and agency as a consequence of completing a course of higher education. This proposition is supported by the findings of Kahn et al. (2017) who demonstrated the exercise of multiple types of agency and reflexivity by postgraduate students on the basis of online postings made in relation to their subjects’ assessment requirements. However, Kahn et al.’s (2017) findings are drawn from study participants who have already completed a course of higher education study or its equivalent (no information is provided on the basis of entry of the study’s participants). Kahn et al.’s (2017) research does not report on the students’ use of reflexivity during the initial stages of higher education studies and so, on its own, is not evidence of the morphogenesis of agency consequent upon higher education studies.

The findings of the study reported in this thesis show that the undergraduate participants began their studies using a single dominant type of reflexivity at a time, but that changes in reflexivity during higher education studies do occur. This study, then, complements Kahn et al.’s findings by suggesting that students do not begin their studies exercising multiple forms of reflexivity; that they do and can
change the types of reflexivity they use; and that the study environment does influence the type of reflexivity students employ. Kahn et al.’s (2017) findings and the findings of the study reported in this thesis indicate that the relationship between higher education and the morphogenesis of agency is deserving of further investigation.

The exercise of agency based on reflexivity led to a variety of choices about study engagement by participants. However, there were patterns of similarity between the participants’ use of reflexivity that led to similar transition experiences for them all.

6.5 Participant comparisons: experiential outcomes of agency mediated by reflexivity during transition

A comparison of the ten participants’ narratives of transition led to the identification of three common transition experiences. These common experiences were:

6.5.1 **Life course perspective:** The participants were making decisions about transition from the perspective of their life course, connecting transition decisions to other changes they were negotiating in their lives and involving their past selves, their present selves and their future-imagined-selves.

6.5.2 **Peer mediated:** The participants all pursued peer relationships, although for different purposes, as the context for their reflexive deliberations. These relationships involved affect.

6.5.3 **Relationship with the university:** The participants arrived at university with a conception of a pre-existing relationship with the university. This relationship involved affect and was conceived by the participants to be reciprocal and was part of a socio-emotional ‘fit’. It was assumed by the participants that the university knew and cared for them as individuals: that the university had a subjective reality and behaved with
intent towards them. The participants’ behaved and reacted on the basis of the extent to which this conception was matched by their experiences.

6.5.1 A life course perspective: time, transition into higher education and a role for affect

The participants’ future-imagined selves were important in directing their reflexive considerations and sustaining their agency during transition as ‘becoming’. This future focus sustained the participants’ sacrifice of comfort and security by their present selves. Wonder Woman, Olive, Orange and Pink, in particular, demonstrated the use of affect to manage their present selves as they endeavoured to achieve their future-imagined selves. For these four participants their future-imagined selves held personal value and meaning as a potential means to contribute to society and this value sustained the sacrifices they were making in the present. Their narratives demonstrate the importance of affect in transition as ‘becoming’ in the ways they speak of ‘love’ ‘care’ and the desire for a ‘good life’. For example:

**Wonder Woman, final interview**

*Because just seeing like the emergency paramedics, it makes me want to really be a paramedic now or an emergency nurse. Yeah, because being in that environment - like even mum said to me ‘Are you sure this is still a profession you want to do?’ I was like ‘Yeah, this had made me want to do it even more’. To help people like what I went through. But yeah.*

**Pink, final interview**

*I love it and even just, you’ll shower a couple of the residents and they’ll give you a kiss and a hug. They’re so grateful for any little thing that you do for them and that to me is important. I’m a making a difference in the world. So yeah, there’s a lot of nurses that aren’t like that.*
Orange, week 12

It’s not just passing a course you have a degree, it’s to become conscious and love what you’re doing and give love, give care and be compassionate about other people as well and help them, help them as much as you can, following the protocols and procedures and everything would be all right. That’s all.

Olive, final interview

Every time it got really hard and I was like ‘I don’t want to do this. I feel like I’m drowning. Why am I doing this to myself? It is painful’. You sit there and in the back of your mind it’s like ‘No, I’m doing this because I have this one shot to get it. I need to do it now. I have to get through this. I can’t screw it up because I’ve got a kid. I want to give him a good life’

Other participants, such as Lura and James, also used their future-imagined selves to sustain their present-self performances but they were more oriented towards a future role in society for personal achievement and gain rather than for meaning and value. For example:

Lura, week 12

I didn’t want to put myself in a box and that’s the reason I’m doing this course. Inside scoop, I’m doing business commerce subjects only because I don’t want to put myself in box and I want to widen the spread of jobs available to me when I finish because being a person looking for employment in this area, basically you have to have a degree to get a suitable job to earn money to live.

James, mid-semester interview

I am not seeing if I like this. I just have to do it. I have to do it well if I want to get into other things I want to get into after. It is not just like P’s get degrees and stuff. I want to be able to do postgraduate. I want to do really well at everything. I am not aiming for P’s.

Both these types of future-imagined selves, one involving meaning and value in the service of others and the other involving more individualistic achievements, serve to integrate participants’ past-selves, present selves and future-imagined selves.
This subjective experience of time contrasts with the linear and unidirectional view of time, which dominates the ‘induction’ and ‘development’ transition support programs (Gale & Parker, 2014a, 2014b). The findings in this study are consistent with Colley’s (2007, 2010) explanation of subjective experiences of time in transitions. Colley (2007) and Biesta and Tedder (2007), describe subjective views of time in transition throughout the life course as:

- Iterational orientations to the past
- Projective orientations to future possibilities
- Practical-evaluative orientations to engagement with the present (p. 431)

The subjective experience of time, described as ‘projective orientations to future possibilities’, is consistent with the findings of Horstmanshof and Zimitat (2007); Simons et al. (2004); and Brown and Jones (2004), who discuss the role of future-orientations in relation to student success and retention. The findings of this study confirm that the future-imagined self is a powerful influence on the ways that the participants negotiated and experienced transition as ‘becoming’.

6.5.2 Peer Mediated: collaborating and comparing throughout transition

Another common feature of the transition experiences resulting from the participants’ various types of reflexivity and exercise of agency was the investment made by the participants in peer relationships. Participant relationships with student-peers, the university, and its staff constituted important socio-emotional contexts for transition. Student-peer relationships were an important part of the exercise of reflexivity and research participants sought out and actively maintained these peer relationships in ways that supported their preferred type of reflexivity. The development and maintenance of these peer relationships in ways that supported the participants’ preferred types of reflexivity relied on affect.
6.5.3 Peer relationships

Peer group relationships frequently served to create the contexts within which students employed reflexivity, either collaboratively, as part of a group, or comparatively (as benchmarks), when the participants pursued their future-imagined-selves. Some participants developed and maintained collaborative relationships where affect was social ‘glue’ and a source of emotional support and validation. This was particularly the case for those employing extended co-reflexivity – Pink, Olive, Orange, Scarlett and Superwoman. For example:

Superwoman, final interview

So you were all sharing your struggle of getting ready for the exam. That was a shared stress. Everybody had that stress. To deal with the stress you said – I think one of us said we should study together

Scarlett, mid-semester interview

Joanne: The things that have actually helped you make that change are…?

Scarlett: Mainly the students I’d say because they act like friends and motivators and support and information

McMillan’s (2016) research into the attachment and quality of student friendships in the South African context found that ‘peer attachment figures were sought out during the stressful period associated with transition’ (p. 116) and the findings reported here are consistent with this. Participants sought out peer relationships very early in their transition and the peer relationships in this study fulfilled a number of the roles identified by McMillan (2016) (see Table 11).

The findings from this study support a reinterpretation of McMillan’s (2016) findings. McMillan’s (2016) findings outline the practical ways in which peer relationships can provide support. The findings of this study suggests an interpretation of these practical outcomes as evidence of reflexivity, as participants identify concerns, prioritise these concerns and make decisions about actions.
Table 11: Comparison of McMillan’s (2016) findings and examples from narrative analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>McMillan’s (2016) role of peer relationships during transition</th>
<th>Examples from current research on the role of peer relationships during transition</th>
<th>Reinterpretation of McMillan’s (2016) findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>modelled study skills</td>
<td>There’s a lot of people that can give so I just think there’s something I can learn from everyone. So it’s good, even watching the mature, the very mature students coming in. Sara, final interview</td>
<td>Extended reflexivity; identify concerns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>provided academic support</td>
<td>We all bounced off each other we did a couple of study sessions which was really cool we started to work more as a team rather than just as a group of people all going to Uni together Pink, week 4</td>
<td>Extended co-reflexivity and pooled agency identify concerns, prioritise concerns and make decisions about actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reinforced academically appropriate values and attitudes</td>
<td>I’m still studying on my bed but I’m trying um I guess a lot of it has to do with the fact that everyone else seems very keen and studious as well in the sense that they’re trying to get all their work done and doing it on time and I don’t want to fall behind Olive, week 2</td>
<td>Restricted reflexivity and comparative involvement of peers identify concerns and prioritise concerns</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Some participants used affect to maintain comparative or benchmarking-style peer relationships rather than collaborative peer relationships. For example, three of the participants (James, Moshton and Lura) felt competitive towards other students and on this basis kept their deliberations to themselves and involved their peers as external benchmarks rather than as collaborators. They differentiated themselves from their peers. For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>McMillan’s (2016) role of peer relationships during transition</th>
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<th>Reinterpretation of McMillan’s (2016) findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>coerced those whose commitment to studying was flagging</td>
<td>if I see that person is not good I say “Do you want any help? Do you need my notes?” Things like that</td>
<td>Extended co-reflexivity learning to pooled agency identify concerns, prioritise concerns and make decisions about actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>helped reduce stress</td>
<td>We had made friends by then too though. So you were all sharing your struggle of getting ready for the exam. That was a shared stress. Everybody had that stress. To deal with the stress you said – I think one of us should said we should all study together</td>
<td>Extended co-reflexivity leading to pooled agency identify concerns, prioritise concerns and make decisions about actions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Superwoman, final interview
Lura, week 8

_They said ‘Oh can you guys help us?’ and we said ‘Oh yeah, ok, we’ll help you’ which is good because you learn 90% better if you teach other people_

James, mid-semester interview

_It perhaps sounds conceited almost but I am going to do well compared to everyone else. I am going to do very well_

Moshton, week 4

_I don’t think half the other students are doing all the work. You didn’t hear that from me_

All participants’ narratives showed evidence of the development and maintenance by participants of peer relationships that supported their preferred type of reflexivity. Those participants who wanted to pursue studies competitively developed and maintained relationships for comparative purposes to support restricted reflexivity. Those participants who wanted to pursue their studies in concert with others exercised co-reflexivity and developed and maintained highly collaborative peer relationships to support this co-reflexivity. Even Wonder Woman, who exercised a fractured reflexivity, developed and maintained peer relationships that supported her choice of engagement. When involved in a group assignment Wonder Woman found it stressful and difficult to work with her peers. A similar outcome of involvement in group work by students using a fractured form of reflexivity was observed by Kahn et al. (2017). Wonder Woman was uncomfortable in the study situation and sought peer relationships outside of the university context, perhaps as a distraction and a form of disengagement from the university.

Existing research into students’ social engagement often emphasises the importance of peer relationships to success in higher education contexts (Kantanis, 2000; McMillan, 2016; Juvonen et al., 2012; Tinto, 1993). Some research has
investigated the relationship between social engagement and academic engagement. Interestingly, Wilson et al. (2015) found social engagement did not align with academic engagement and academic outcomes in their research and Solomon (2007) found it could even be counterproductive. Researchers (Juvonen et al., 2012) in the area of school engagement suggest that the quality of peer friendships is important. Kantanis (2000) and Tinto (1993, 2006) have discussed the relative importance of social and academic engagement. Kantanis (2000) believed that social engagement predated academic engagement. Tinto (1993) argued for the primacy of academic engagement.

The findings from this research indicate that, for the participants in this study, developing peer relationships was a key objective during transition as ‘becoming’ and all participants pursued peer relationships. These findings extend existing research which shows the centrality of peer relationships and the relative importance of social engagement by demonstrating that these participants developed student-peer relationships (collaborative, comparative or disengaged student-peer relationships) in order to provide a context that supported their preferred type of reflexivity and consequently their preferred type of engagement with their studies. That is, social and academic engagement appeared to be inextricably linked in this study and both types of engagement were actively pursued and managed by the participants together.

6.6 Relationship with the University: the institution, transition and a sense of belonging

Another key feature of the transition experiences of the research participants in this study was a relationship with the institution, often referred to in the literature as a sense of belonging. This relationship involved affect, expectations and a sense of ‘fit’.

As well as forming relationships with peers, participants felt they had a relationship
with the university which:

- offered a socio-emotional ‘fit’
- existed before they commenced orientation and classes
- was expected by the participants to be reciprocated by the university

6.6.1 Socio-emotional fit in sense of belonging

The findings of this study point to the importance of a socio-emotional ‘fit’ for the participants’ sense of belonging in transition as ‘becoming’ rather than a cognitive-rational view of ‘fit’. Socio-emotional ‘fit’ refers to an embodied view of ‘fit’ involving positive affect and a sense of emotional safety. Research into students’ expectations of higher education has sometimes focused on ‘fit’ as the alignment of students’ expectations and reality (for example: Devlin & Jade, 2014; O’Shea, 2015; Moles & Wishart, 2016; Johnson, 2016; Crisp et al., 2009; Beaumont et al., 2011). These approaches to ‘fit’ lead to cognitive and rational responses such as aligning the university’s expectations with the students’ expectations by providing information about the university’s expectations.

There is evidence of such a cognitive-rational lack of ‘fit’ in the findings reported here; for example, participants in this study did not expect the amount of work that was required nor the manner of some examinations. However, this did not always seem to cause the participants concern. Some participants did not want this mismatch realigned and some thought it was not possible to pre-emptively align expectations:

Sara, initial interview

*Oh, you know you do say it you’re like ‘this is blah blah blah’ like what that means I’m like ‘oh ok’ so I quickly write what that means so you do cover that but I was like ‘um did I miss something? What are we up to now?’ like but I think yep it’s a learning curve for me but I like it, it lifts my bar high*
Sara saw any such realignment by myself as a potential downgrading of her achievements. Sara wanted to manage the cognitive-rational ‘fit’ for herself:

Pink, final interview

You can’t tell someone what this is going to be like...It doesn’t matter what anybody says to you, it’s not going to matter until you actually do it and that’s just like having a baby

Pink did not think it possible to align the expectation-reality mismatch.

In contrast, mismatches between participants’ socio-emotional expectations of the institution and the participants’ experiences caused distress and impacted on the participants’ willingness to engage with their studies. For example:

Moshton, week 10

You know, really put as much effort into my question and use my time and put all the effort that I can into an assignment. I go really well. Not exams where it’s a memory game. Like, I try my hardest and then they give you questions that tweak it and they confuse you. Like it’s a memory game.

The findings of this study also suggest that the connectedness between the student and the university, at least in the very early (pre-enrolment to the middle of first semester) stages of transition, was conceptualised as a personal relationship the student had with the institution, as if the institution had a subjective reality and acted with intention towards them. This relationship was shaped by the participants’ sense of acceptance and a belief that the university in some way understood them and cared for them. This was true for both mature aged and younger students. For example:

Superwoman, initial interview (Mature-aged)

Friendly is good because then you feel more accepted...I had the expectation that my educational needs would be met and so far I think they’re going to

Moshton, initial interview (ex-HSC students)

The atmosphere, everyone I actually know who has come to Wollongong is like ‘it’s the best uni’ you know it’s more you feel accepted
These findings concur with Araújo et al.’s (2014) findings, that socio-emotional ‘fit’ is important throughout enrolments. These researchers report finding a ‘holistic perception of belonging as a lifecycle issue central to the student experience, and not merely a first week, first semester, or first year problem’ (p. 30), referencing a more embodied and lifelong view of fit that entails more than simply a cognitive-rational alignment of expectations. This socio-emotional ‘fit’ is in evidence in transition as ‘becoming’ explored in this study.

6.6.2 Timing of fit in sense of belonging

The findings in this study also indicate that these participants arrived at the university believing that this socio-emotional relationship already existed, even before they commenced orientation or classes. For example:

Olive, initial interview

**Joanne**: ...So when you were choosing your degree and you were thinking about nursing how has all of this (indicating the nursing simulation lab) matched up to your expectations

**Olive**: Um, well through orientations, well open days at universities, when I was looking around where to go, I saw a lot of the simulation rooms so I kinda expected it to be here, but, I’m very impressed it looks very close knit (slight laugh)

Lura and Moshton, initial interview

**Joanne**: and when you say it felt good, it felt better can you...

**Lura**: everyone was smiling

**Moshton**: the atmosphere, everyone I actually know who has come to Wollongong is like ‘it’s the best uni’ you know it’s more you feel more accepted.

Existing research into students’ connections with the university speak of a ‘sense of belonging’ or ‘connectedness’ as a positive and even necessary feature of higher education studies (Kember et al., 2001; Bryson & Hardy, 2012; Hardy & Bryson, 2016; Vaccaro et al., 2015; McMahon & Portelli, 2004; Tinto, 1993). This is
sometimes thought to be developed over time and in conditions of proximity. For example, Kember et al. (2001) argue, on the basis of their research with part-time students in a Hong Kong University that students best created a sense of belonging with smaller groups and later built up towards a sense of belonging with a department or an institution. In contrast with these findings, but consistent with Thomas’ (2012) findings that connections existed before classes began, in the study reported here, participants arrived at the university with a pre-conceptualised relationship with the institution. The study reported here began data collection, for each participant, in either Orientation week or at the latest, week 1 of first semester. However, it should be noted that the exact timing of data collection is rarely provided in research reporting on students’ development of a sense of belonging. This means that it is possible that the timing of data collection later in a semester could account for the scarcity of findings in other studies on the development of a sense of belonging. Data may have been collected too late in a semester to capture this feature.

6.6.3 Reciprocity in sense of belonging

Finally, the findings of this study suggest the participants expected their relationships with the university to be reciprocal, based on shared values and understandings. When this expectation of reciprocity was breached, the participants felt discomfort and even some level of distress.

Pink, week 7

I’ve been waiting for verification that was not going to happen. I don’t find the staff down there [at the main campus] helpful. I have now spoken to 2 of the head lecturers and one of 30 people in charge of verification and hopefully sorted a few things out and apologised for my outburst, but I must say I would never recommend the people I spoke to to do anything to help you because they were horrendous. Hopefully now that is all fixed and I will now get my verification up and running in the next week, documents have been faxed down so I’ve got to say I was pretty disappointed with the way that I was treated and the lack of communication which I have spoken to management about. I don’t feel that as a first-year student we should be left
Research into first year students’ experiences at a satellite campus of an Australian university (Ballantyne, 2012) reports students wanting a reciprocal relationship with the university. Ballantyne’s (2012) research into the perceptions of 14 first-year mature-aged students looked beyond the phenomenon of a sense of belonging to identify the dynamics of the relationships between the students and the university. She found that ‘the students interviewed are calling for a more meaningful relationship with the university, and specifically one in which they hold significant rights and specific expectations as committed and goal-oriented consumers who are valued by the institution.’ (Ballantyne, 2012, p. 48). While her participants were mature-aged, Ballantyne saw sufficient parallels in experiences between mature-aged and younger students to suppose that it may be the same for younger students. The findings in the research reported here concur with Ballantyne’s view that students look for a relationship with the university that is reciprocal and in which they feel valued. This research adds to Ballantyne’s findings by showing that the participants arrived at university orientation and classes with a belief in the existence of such a relationship.

This assumption of a reciprocated relationship based on shared values and understandings was sometimes challenged by the participants’ perceptions of the university’s intentions and by later events. The ‘fit’ is not something, which, once achieved, remains intact. It is part of an ongoing relationship. When this ‘fit’ was challenged, it featured in the participants’ reflexive deliberations and sometimes led to their disengagement or alienation.

6.6.4 A sense of not belonging: disengagement and alienation, a means to an end

The narrative findings point to frequent experiences of alienation and disconnection
amongst the participants during transition as ‘becoming’. These experiences were of varying intensity and occurred when the socio-emotional ‘fit’ was not in evidence. These experiences fall into some of the categories of alienation described by Mann (2001). At times, alienation maintained the participants’ persistence during their transition and so was useful to the participants.

Of the ten participants in this research, only two (Sara and Scarlett) appeared not to experience some form of disconnect or alienation. For Sara and Scarlett, their studies provided the opportunity to deliberately attempt to change their past selves (in Sara’s case, a socio-economic self and in Scarlett’s, a lonely and disconnected study-self) in the present university situation. Despite significant difficulties both Sara and Scarlett faced in their studies (Sara struggled academically and Scarlett was unexpectedly hospitalised during her first semester) neither perceived any obstacles to their studies as intentional or unfair and consequently, neither appeared to feel any disconnect, alienation or disengagement with their studies.

The remaining eight participants all provided evidence of some form of alienation or disconnection making this a common feature of transition. For example, Wonder Woman, according to her video selfies, stopped working towards academic achievement and had difficulty with peer relations in group work, rarely mentioning any other student-peer relationships. This experience is consistent with the notion of generic pedagogical disengagement underpinned by the view of student engagement as proposed by Kuh (2001). Mann (2001) proposes seven possible perspectives on alienation and Wonder Woman’s video selfies were also evidence of the seventh of these: a deliberate withdrawal of the self for self-protection. Wonder Woman appeared to withdraw to avoid the distress she felt as she attempted to align her previous study self with her present self and her future-imagined self. Superwoman’s refusal to interact with the section of the university that offended her and her continued strengthening of her connection with the satellite campus could also be considered a partial withdrawal of the self for protective reasons. The first of Mann’s perspectives on alienation – the post-
modern condition – might explain Lura’s willingness to put up with unhappiness for the sake of a future self in society. Mann’s second perspective, the primacy of discourse, might describe Pink’s frustrations with the institution as she battles against the positioning she faces in relation to missing documentation. Primacy of discourse also explains James’ refusal to accept my implied deficit positioning during one of our early interactions. Mann’s sixth perspective – discipline into docility – describes Moshton and Lura’s sense of going through the motions to meet assessment requirements without necessarily finding personal meaning or connections they expected through their achievements because they no longer trusted the university.

In brief, the findings reported here support Mann’s contention that there are multiple perspectives on alienation and also demonstrates that in this study at least, alienation was a common, but not fatal, experience. The findings in this study point to the way that some perspectives on alienation might be deliberately used by students to transition as a ‘becoming’, to sustain themselves in their present situations as they work towards their future-imagined selves.

In summary, the findings of this study suggest that the participants arrived at university believing they had a reciprocal, socio-emotionally safe relationship with the university. Yuval-Davis (2006) describes belonging as ‘emotional attachment, about feeling ‘at home’ and, as Michael Ignatieff points out, about feeling ‘safe’ (p. 197). Similarly, Kahu (2014) explains that ‘They [constructions of belonging] reflect emotional investments and desire for attachments’ (p. 202). These student-institutional and student-peer relationships were actively sought and maintained by students in this study. These relationships provide a socio-emotionally safe context from which the participants strove to achieve their future-imagined selves. The participants exercised agency, mediated by reflexivity, to maintain this socio-emotional safety and to pursue their goals. This transition process goes beyond the cognitive-rational and indicates the need to acknowledge the ontological nature of transition as ‘becoming’ in the higher education context.
6.7 Conclusion

The narrative analysis illustrates the participants’ experiences of transition as ‘becoming’ to be an affect-driven, relationship-oriented process of engagement, driven by participant agency, exercised through reflexivity from within the perspective of the participants’ life times. The key findings of this study are the participants’ use of agency during the period of this study in order to:

a. seek out, develop and maintain socio-emotional relationships with peers. The participants actively pursued peer relationships as the context for their reflexive deliberations.

b. use these relationships in support of the further exercise of their agency in relation to their academic studies. These peer relationships were used by the participants to support their preferred form of reflexivity as they made decisions and choices in relation to their studies.

The findings also identified two key features of the experience of transition driven by student agency. These two features are:

c. **The participants were making decisions about transition from the perspective of their life course**, connecting transition decisions to other changes they were negotiating in their lives and involving their past selves and their present selves, strongly guided by their future-imagined-selves.

d. **The participants arrived at university with a conception of a pre-existing relationship with the university**. This relationship was conceived by the participants to be reciprocal and it was assumed by the participants that the university knew and cared for them as individuals: that the university had a subjective reality and behaved with intent towards them. The participants’ behaved and reacted on the basis of the extent to which this expectation was met.
These features further demonstrate that transition as ‘becoming’ is a process driven by student agency in the pursuit of future-imagined selves and suggest that this type of transition forms part of a lifetime of adaptations, involving multiple subjectivities and developing rhizomatically.

The next chapter further discusses the contribution of these finding by connecting them to Gale and Parker’s ‘becoming’ type of transition support programs. It identifies the limitations to this study and presents a discussion of the potential wider implications of the findings for the higher education sector, universities and individuals.
Chapter 7: Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

The study reported in this thesis was guided by the question:

How do first year undergraduate students experience their transition into university studies and how might the stories they tell of this time illuminate their processes of agency?

To investigate this question, the study used an analytical framework based on Kahn’s typology of reflexivity. The focus of the research was on student agency as the driver of engagement with studies during transition. The purpose was to understand transition as ‘becoming’.

This chapter concludes this thesis. It begins with a summary of the findings of this study and the contributions of these findings to theory and practice. It then discusses the implications of the findings for universities and the higher education sector, with particular attention to transition as ‘becoming’ (Gale & Parker, 2014a, 2014b) that might be possible when students’ agency is supported by universities. These implications extend beyond the traditional view of transition as occurring within a defined time period, such as the first year of enrolment. This section is followed by a discussion of the limitations of this study and the research implications that follow on from these limitations. The final section, a coda, revisits my original motivation for undertaking this study and my own reflections for future practice in support of transition as ‘becoming’.

7.2 Summary of the findings

The findings of this study show that transition as ‘becoming’ involved:

- The exercise of agency, mediated by reflexivity. This study showed that all the participants employed reflexivity and that this led to agency (decisions and actions) related to engagement with studies. The comparative and collaborative reflexivity illuminated in this study indicates the nature of
the interconnection between social and academic engagement. This finding confirms the value of Kahn’s (2014) understanding of student engagement through student agency to an understanding of transition as becoming.

- Subjective experiences of time with an emphasis on the role of the future-imagined self, in which future orientations affect the processes of reflexivity and agency that lead to persistence during transition. This finding concurs with Horstmanshof and Zimitat (2007), Simons et al. (2004), and Brown and Jones (2004), who discuss the importance of future-orientations in relation to student success and retention. It also aligns with the view of student agency put forward by Emirbayer and Mische (1998), Colley (2007) and Klemenčič’ (2015), all of whom describe student agency as occurring within the flow of subjective experiences of time.

- The development and maintenance of peer relationships (collaborative, comparative or avoided altogether) that serve to support different types of reflexivity. These findings support and extend Klemenčič’s (2015) description of student agency as inherently relational by providing a description of the manner in which peer relationships were used by the participants to support their agency.

- The development and maintenance of a socio-emotional relationship with the university. The findings of this study extend Thomas’ (2012) findings that a sense of belonging begins before classes commence, by showing that the sense of belonging brought to the university by newly enrolling students is based on a belief that the relationship is reciprocal and presume the university acts with intent as if it has a subjective reality. This finding concurs with the findings of Araújo et al. (2014) that a socio-emotional fit is more important to students’ sense of belonging than a cognitive-rational view of fit. This finding of the importance of a sense of belonging to transition adds to the extensive research in this area (Thomas, 1021; Countryman & Zinck, 2013; Kember et al., 2001; Lizzio & Wilson, 2013; Edwards et al. 2016; Larkin et al., 2016; Johnson, 2016).

These findings contribute to theoretical understandings of transition, methodology
of transition investigations and higher education practice in supporting ‘becoming’ transitions.

7.3 Contributions of the study
This study contributes to understandings of transitions as ‘becoming’ in higher education. It demonstrates the role of student agency in the interplay between student and university during transition and the outcomes of such interplay and provides initial findings about the manner in which student agency operates during transition. It illuminates transition as ‘becoming’ as part of an iterative, lifelong process of adaptation that potentially involves the morphogenesis of agency through involvement the higher education context.

Methodologically, the approach taken in this study has contributed to the expansion of existing educational research approaches by using methods and interpretive lenses that extend the view of learning beyond the epistemological into the realm of the ontological. The prioritisation of the ontological in this study has enabled findings that contribute to understandings of the conditions that support transition as ‘becoming’: the socio-relational conditions necessary to support the exercise of agency and the role of the future-imagined-selves in this process.

This study also adds to understandings of engagement in the higher education context. The study findings demonstrate the interconnection between social engagement (socio-relational features of transition) and academic engagement. The use of Kahn’s concept of co-reflexivity (a form of distributed reflexivity; that is, reflexivity that is conducted collaboratively or comparatively with peers) as an analytical tool has shown to be of particular relevance to these findings.

Finally, the findings of this study are significant to practice in the higher education sector. The lifelong, person-centred perspective necessary to understand and support transition as ‘becoming’ points to potentially useful changes in the manner by which the sector supports, monitors and researches transition. These are discussed in the following section.
7.4 Implications for transition support, monitoring and research

The research findings reported in this thesis demonstrate that transition relies on student agency. That is outside the control of universities, although not outside their influence. Transition requires collaboration between universities and students in which students are supported by universities to exercise their agency in pursuit of their future-imagined selves, with recognition of the interconnected social and academic features of transition as ‘becoming’ for students. The following are examples of the possible types of planned learning opportunities and administrative implementations of the findings of this study. These suggestions are designed to support transition as ‘becoming’ by enhancing the conditions for the development of student agency as identified in this study. Specifically, these suggestions seek to maximise:

a. students’ socio-emotional ‘fit’ and sense of belonging;

b. opportunities for students to develop peer relationships they themselves find appropriate; and

c. opportunities for students to identify and pursue their future-imagined-selves.

7.4.1 Support for transition as ‘becoming’

Transition as ‘becoming’ involves subjective experiences of time and this indicates that transition support needs to extend beyond an orientation period and even beyond first year (Wilson, Greenacre, Pignata & Winefield, 2016). However, the very early stage of a degree does seem to be particularly important for the development of a socio-emotional sense of ‘fit’ and for feeling emotionally safe (Thomas, 2012; Araújo et al. 2014; Kahu, 2014; Yuval-Davis, 2016). Treating Orientation programs as an opportunity to respond to the positive and caring expectations held by the students on arrival, could support the realisation of student agency and therefore, student academic outcomes. This responsiveness might be
seen in staff behaviours characterised by respectfulness and a personal touch. An institutional response of this type requires adequate and appropriate staffing by academic and professional services staff at each of the potential touch points of early student interaction. The promotion and exercise of attitudes of respect for the student as an individual is more important than scripting specific staff behaviours.

Orientation programs that position students as ‘in deficit’ are inconsistent with the development of student agency. Programs that position students as ‘in deficit’ are those that target and communicate with incoming students on the basis of their demographics and communicate an assumption that particular student groups will have particular deficits in skills and understandings. For some students, this seems to be received as a message about potential difficulties and a lack of faith in their capacity to succeed. This ‘deficit’ approach is particularly relevant in the current widening participation agenda because the discourse surrounding this agenda often speaks of the need to assist low-socioeconomic students to succeed at university in order to avoid ‘setting up students to fail’ (Gale & Parker, 2017). Using statistical data on Australian university students from underrepresented groups, Gale and Parker (2017) show that:

…the retention rates³ of students from low SES backgrounds are largely comparable to those of their peers. For example, in 2012 the retention rate for all domestic undergraduate students was 81.96% while it was only slightly less for low SES, at 80.08%; a comparability also evident in the years prior (p. 87)

This is not to suggest that programs providing skills teaching and other types of information are irrelevant, but the manner of their offering needs to support agency and this involves supporting a sense of belonging and faith in the students’ abilities to complete, rather than communicating foreboding about a lack of ‘fit’. It is possible that communications suggesting a deficit positioning of the student challenges a sense of belonging.

7.4.2 Support for transition as ‘becoming’ across degree programs

The view of student agency used in the study reported here is mediated by
reflexivity, which is triggered by the student’s individual concerns based on their individual life trajectories (past, present and imagined futures). This view of student agency requires a longer-term view of ‘becoming’ than one that is simply about transition in one semester or even one year. Consequently, student agency needs to be supported by universities throughout students’ entire degrees.

A pedagogical strategy used in many courses in different universities that combines both academic engagement and social engagement is group work. This combination of an academic endeavour with a social situation provides an opportunity to support student agency and therefore ‘becoming’. There are a number of types of group work used in universities, for example, team-based learning (see, for example, Sweet & Michaelson, 2012), peer assessment activities (Freeman, 1995), problem-based learning (Pike, Spangler, Williams & Kollar, 2017), Peer Assisted Study Session (PASS) (Dawson, van der Meer, Skalicky & Cowley, 2014) and student rovers (University of Wollongong, 2018). These latter two forms of group work (PASS and student rovers) are discussed below in a section dedicated to peer-led group work outside the context of a scheduled class. Of those types of group work that occur within the context of a scheduled class, most are a part of an assessment process and this can impact negatively on student agency (as discussed in the following paragraph). In contrast, forms of group work that do not involve assessment (both formal gradings and peer-evaluations of contributions by group members), such as classroom activities involving peers, provide a supportive environment for student agency for most students.

The findings of this study show that some students involve their peers collaboratively to exercise a distributed agency, through sharing of strategies and ideas. These students might enjoy all forms of group work as well as benefiting from the process quite directly. However, some students use peers comparatively rather than collaboratively. For these students, working with peers can assist their agency through exposure to the strategies and ideas of others. However, group
work involving shared assessment marks, or even tasks where performance is assessed individually but the ability to perform is influenced by peers, runs counter to these students’ preferred manner of exercising agency as individuals in pursuit of personal academic achievement. Furthermore, student choice of group members would best support student agency in all group work contexts. The choice of peers with whom to share reflexivity, either collaboratively or comparatively, can support both a pooled collaborative agency and an agency based on comparative benchmarking. Policies governing pedagogical practices need to be adjusted to ensure the activities can support student agency. Policy adjustments would require attention to the separation of assessment marks from group activities when the objective of the group work is to promote student agency.

Another pedagogical practice that combines social situations with academic endeavours is the use of students in the support of other students, such as Peer Academic Study Sessions (PASS) (Dawson et al., 2014) and student rovers (University of Wollongong, 2018). These programs are based in understandings of co-operative learning (Furphy, 2017; Gillies, 2003). Given the findings concerning peer relationships reported here, peer support programs seem an obvious area for provision of support for student agency and so their potential value in this area is addressed in this section. The use of peers in formally appointed roles could convey a sense of them as ‘experts’ to the students seeking assistance, with consequent power differences negatively influencing the opportunities for reflexivity in these peer interactions. It is possible that the shared concerns necessary for distributed reflexivity are less available to the participants of peer-supported programs than might seem obvious. Even if the power difference between these two roles (peer-support leader and peer-support participant) does prove to detract from the opportunity to support student agency through distributed reflexivity, these formal appointments continue to provide support to students by providing information related to studying in university and role models of study-related behaviours.
Consistent with providing opportunities for students to exercise their agency in pursuit of their future-imagined-selves, a careers-type information focus early in enrolment could support students’ persistence with their studies (that is, retention) as they refine their views of their future-imagined selves. The work integrated learning initiatives (McIlveen et al., 2011), clinical nursing placements, and teaching practicums are consistent with such an approach. Extension of these to other degrees, where possible, early in courses, could be useful because of the importance of the future-imagined self in ‘becoming’. This future-imagined self plays a role in sustaining and directing students’ persistence in their studies (retention) by providing a direction for the exercise their agency.

Agency, as mediated through reflexivity, can be neither taught nor compelled. However, it can be influenced. Learning portfolios (see for example Bhattacharya & Hartnett, 2007) are one means by which this is currently possible. Non-assessed and self-reflective tasks can be used to provoke students’ reflexivity in the same way involvement in this study provoked the reflexivity of the participants. Non-assessed self-reflective tasks that include prompts targeting students’ future objectives could provoke students’ reflexivity in relation to the suitability of their current practices to the achievement of their future objectives. The opportunity to complete such a task periodically, alone or in concert with self-selected peers, and with an opportunity to discuss the task with university staff if desired, could support student agency in the process of ‘becoming’ throughout their degrees by provoking reflexivity in support of agency.
7.4.3 Higher education sector support for transition as ‘becoming’

A key to progressing understandings of transition as ‘becoming’ based on student agency is the ability to conduct appropriate research and use measures that support the lifelong view of ‘becoming’ used in this study. Research using measures of attrition and retention from within, or aggregated across individual universities, diminishes opportunities to consider transition as ‘becoming’ as a person-centred process because such research focuses on the institutional context instead of the individual students’ movement in, through, around, out and back into the higher education context. If research was undertaken using a unique identifier that remained with the student in all higher education contexts, attrition and retention could be researched from a more person-centred approach. This would begin to shift the emphasis from transition as a university-defined period and towards consideration of transitions as a person-centred process.

7.5 Limitations of this study and future research opportunities

As with all research, the research paradigm used offers guidance to the conduct of the research that can then produce findings or results that have meaning within that research paradigm. However, the possible findings are also limited by that research paradigm. The findings reported here are but one small part in an ongoing mosaic of knowledge about transition that comprises the integration of multiple types of research.

This research has identified localised and small scale understandings of transition, but in doing so has foregone the opportunity to identify nomothetic research outcomes. That is, the findings presented here are not generalisable. Furthermore, the small number of participants (ten), enrolled in only two different degrees on a satellite campus of a regional university in Australia means that care and attention must be taken by the reader when deciding the transferability of these findings. Finally, although these research findings support the view that transition is a lifelong and lifewide process, the research was conducted over a single semester and this points to the need for further investigation of this view of transition and of agency as the driver of transitioning processes.
Despite these limitations to the findings, this research demonstrates the value of investigating reflexivity in order to understand the role of student agency in academic achievements and its inherent connections with the socio-relational contexts of study during transition. The localised, small-scale nature of this research provides an Australian point of reference for further, more extensive research into agency, engagement and transition. However, it has also raised a number of interesting questions deserving of further investigation.

Of particular interest is the possibility of the morphogenesis of agency as an outcome of higher education. This study found that the newly enrolling students used a single dominant type of reflexivity. Kahn et al. (2017) found that postgraduate students’ used multiple types of reflexivity. The findings of these two studies, taken together, support Case’s (2013, 2015) contention that the morphogenesis of agency is an outcomes of higher education studies. However, this is much too little evidence to confirm or deny these contentions and more research is necessary to explore this area of theorising. In this study, two participants (Olive and Wonder Woman) each changed the dominant mode of reflexivity they employed. Understanding the conditions leading to changes in types of reflexivity is of value to the support of transition and ongoing studies. The persistence (retention) and success of the student employing fractured reflexivity (Wonder Woman) is of particular interest, because it raises questions about the relationships between affective alienation, behavioural disengagement with studies and eventual retention and achievements in studies. These issues deserve further investigation within the theoretical context of the morphogenesis of agency.

This study was conducted on the satellite campus of a regional university offering enrolment into three degrees and with an enrolment of around 400 students, many of whom live in proximity to the campus. The small and intimate nature of the campus, as well as the values underpinning the teaching at this site, supports the co-reflexive practices of the participants. Peer connections are explicitly supported
and encouraged and are evident to students in the staff’s collegial relationships. It would be beneficial to broaden understandings of the findings of this study by replicating this research at other larger sites and at those with different values, including studies conducted in an online campus environment.

All research into student agency could be designed to include the perspectives of withdrawing students (those who formally withdraw and those who simply stop attending). The inclusion of withdrawing students in research into student agency and transition as ‘becoming’ could provide information on the ways students use their agency to redirect their attempts at achieving a future-imagined self by other means than through a particular university course. Such findings could have implications for universities in relation to transfers between universities and movement throughout the higher education sector, the tertiary education sector and employment.

7.6 Coda
This research began in response to my personal observations of students enrolling into the first year of their undergraduate degrees. I remember their commencement as an emotional roller coaster, stretching them to the limit. I am a part of their stories as both audience and participant. They are rich, vibrant, holistic stories of lives lived within and beyond the institutional context and in relationship with others who are also within and beyond the institutional context. These stories involve meanings and purposes beyond the scope of the acquisition of knowledge and competencies, a degree, or a job.

The process of undertaking this research has allowed me to reflect on my own understandings and experiences in supporting students to complete their degrees. My observations that transition requires ongoing persistence, often drawing on the support of others, has been explained through this research as the ongoing exercise of agency, mediated by reflexivity within socio-emotional contexts. The interplay
between institutions and students, driven by this exercise of agency, does indeed lead to outcomes that go beyond the cognitive, towards a ‘becoming’, with lifelong benefits. This study indicates to me that how I teach is of as much value to the long-term agency of my students as what I teach.
Reference List


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Newbery, G. (2012). *The psychology of being engaged and its implications for promoting*


Appendices

Appendix A: Ethics Approvals

From Macquarie in 2013:

From:  The Ethics
To: Associate Professor Ian Solomondes
Cc:  Mrs Joanne Dearlove
Subject: Mac Ethics Application - Approved (S2013000731)(Con/Phet)
Date:  Wednesday, 20 November 2013 2:02:30 PM

Dear Associate Professor Solomondes,

Re: "Deeming: An Interplay driven by student agency" (S2013000731)

Thank you for your recent correspondence. Your response has addressed the issues raised by the Faculty of Human Sciences Human Research Ethics Sub-Committee and approval has been granted, effective 20th November 2013. This email constitutes ethical approval only.

This research meets the requirements of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007). The National Statement is available at the following web site:


The following personnel are authorised to conduct this research:

Associate Professor Ian Solomondes
Mrs Joanne Dearlove

Please note the following standard requirements of approval:

1. The approval of this project is conditional upon your continuing compliance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007).

2. Approval will be for a period of five (5) years subject to the provision of annual reports.

Progress Report 1 Due: 20th November 2014
Progress Report 2 Due: 20th November 2015
Progress Report 3 Due: 20th November 2016
Progress Report 4 Due: 20th November 2017
Final Report Due: 30th November 2019

NB: If you complete the work earlier than you had planned you must submit a Final Report as soon as the work is completed. If the project has been discontinued or not commenced for any reason, you are also required to submit a Final Report for the project.

Progress reports and Final Reports are available at the following website:

http://www.research.mq.edu.au/for/researchers/how_to_obtain_ethics_approval/
human_research_ethics/forms

3. If the project has run for more than five (5) years you cannot renew approval for the project. You will need to complete and submit a Final Report and submit a new application for the project. (The five year limit on renewal of approvals allows the Sub-Committee to fully re-review research in an environment where legislation, guidelines and requirements are continually changing, for example, new child protection and privacy laws).

4. All amendments to the project must be reviewed and approved by the Sub-Committee before implementation. Please complete and submit a Request for Amendment Form available at the following website:
http://www.research.mq.edu.au/for/researchers/how_to_obtain_ethics_approval/
human_research_ethics/forms

5. Please notify the Sub-Committee immediately in the event of any adverse
effects on participants or of any unforeseen events that affect the
continued ethical acceptability of the project.

6. At all times you are responsible for the ethical conduct of your
research in accordance with the guidelines established by the University.
This information is available at the following websites:

http://www.mq.edu.au/policy

http://www.research.mq.edu.au/for/researchers/how_to_obtain_ethics_approval/
human_research_ethics/policy

If you will be applying for or have applied for internal or external
funding for the above project it is your responsibility to provide the
Macquarie University’s Research Grants Management Assistant with a copy of
this email as soon as possible. Internal and External funding agencies will
not be informed that you have approval for your project and funds will not
be released until the Research Grants Management Assistant has received a
copy of this email.

If you need to provide a hard copy letter of approval to an external
organisation as evidence that you have approval, please do not hesitate to
contact the Ethics Secretariat at the address below.

Please retain a copy of this email as this is your official notification of
ethics approval.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Peter Roger
Chair
Faculty of Human Sciences Ethics Review Sub-Committee
Human Research Ethics Committee

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Faculty of Human Sciences - Ethics
Research Office
Level 3, Research HUB, Building CSC
Macquarie University
NSW 2109

Ph: +61 2 9850 4197
Fax: +61 2 9850 4465
Email: fhs.ethics@mq.edu.au

http://www.research.mq.edu.au/
From UOW in early 2014:

In reply please quote: NSA14/03

10 February 2014

Ms Joanne Dearlove
Faculty of Human Sciences
Education Department
Macquarie University

Dear Ms Dearlove,

I am pleased to advise that the Social Sciences HREC has noted the application below and the Macquarie University Human Sciences and Humanities HREC approval. The project has been granted ‘non-standard approval’ status, as this project has been approved and will be monitored by the Macquarie University HREC.

Ethics Number: NSA14/03

Title: Becoming: An interplay driven by student agency

Researchers: Ms Joanne Dearlove, A/Professor Ian Solomonides

UOW NSA Approval Date: 18 February 2014

As this project has been approved and will be monitored by the Macquarie University HREC, no additional monitoring of this project will be undertaken by a University of Wollongong HREC.

The University of Wollongong has institutional responsibilities for the research which are separate from the ethical review. The University’s Ethics Unit must be informed of amendments, complaints about the project and provided with reports of serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Kathleen Clapham
Chair, Social Sciences
Human Research Ethics Committee

Ethics Unit, Research Services Office
University of Wollongong NSW 2522 Australia
Telephone (02) 4221 4338 Facsimile (02) 4221 4338
Email ethics@uow.edu.au Web www.uow.edu.au
From UOW on the transfer of candidature in 2016:

APPLICATION TRANSFER APPROVAL
In reply please quote: HE16/073
Further Enquiries Phone: 4221 3386

3 March 2016
Joanne Dearlove
Learning, Teaching, Curriculum

Dear Ms Dearlove
I am pleased to advise that the transfer of the Human Research Ethics application from Macquarie University, referred to below, has been approved.

Ethics Number: HE16/073
Project Title: Becoming: An interplay driven by student agency
Researchers: Ms Joanne Dearlove, Associate Professor Margaret Wallace
Approval Date: 1 March 2016
Expiry Date: 28 February 2017

This certificate relates to the research protocol submitted in your original application. The University of Wollongong/Illawarra and Shoalhaven Local Health Network Social Sciences HREC is constituted and functions in accordance with the NHMRC National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research. The HREC has reviewed the research proposal for compliance with the National Statement and approval of this project is conditional upon your continuing compliance with this document. As evidence of continuing compliance, the Human Research Ethics Committee requires that researchers immediately report:
- proposed changes to the protocol including changes to investigators involved
- serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants
- unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.

You are also required to complete monitoring reports annually and at the end of your project. These reports are sent out approximately 6 weeks prior to the date your ethics approval expires. The reports must be completed, signed by the appropriate Head of School, and returned to the Research Services Office prior to the expiry date.

Yours sincerely,

Associate Professor Melanie Randle
Chair, UOW & ISLHD Social Sciences
Human Research Ethics Committee
C: ian.solomonides@mq.edu.au
Appendix B: Participant Information and Consent Forms for the Video-selfies

Associate Professor Ian Solomonides
Director, Learning and Teaching Centre

Participant Information and Consent Form

Transition into First Year Undergraduate Studies

You are invited to participate in a study of transition into the first year of an undergraduate university degree. The purpose of the study is to compare the ways in which we usually collect information about this experience to other ways of collecting information on this experience to see if we are missing anything important. In particular, this study will be comparing the collection of information through a survey with the collection of information through video clips. Interviews will be a part of both approaches. This is a multi-part study and this information and invitation relates to Part 2 sections C and D of the study, which involves video recordings.

The study is being conducted by Joanne Dearlove to meet the requirements for the award of a PhD under the supervision of Associate Professor Ian Solomonides, Director of the Learning and Teaching Centre, Macquarie University (98509857, ian.solomonides@mq.edu.au).

Section C:

If you decide to participate in this section of the study, you will be asked to spend about 5 minutes each week videoing anything that shows your answer to the question:

How are you experiencing the transition into first year undergraduate studies at UOW Southern Sydney?

Your responses are entirely up to you and are not restricted to university people and places. They can include family and work situations, helpful and unhelpful situations, you can
narrate the video or not, you can be in the video or not. The clips should focus on how you are experiencing the transition, which we anticipate will be highly individualised.

The video recording can be taken on your own digital phone or other personal digital recording equipment or you can use a hand held recorder provided by the researcher. The recordings need to be submitted weekly to the researcher in person or electronically. Initially they will be viewed by the research team and will be stored on a disk in a locked filing cabinet off campus. They will be labelled using a code, such as participant ‘Blue’, so as to not identify you. You will be given the opportunity to view these recordings when participating in the interviews related to this section (see section D below) so that you can review your decision to have the information included in the study. The recordings and images may be included in the dissertation and potentially in journal articles or conference presentations related to this research. In this case, faces will be blurred to avoid identification.

Section D:

If you decide to participate in this section of the study, you will be asked to spend up to one hour completing a 2-stage interview on three separate occasions, once in week 1, once in week 6 and once in week 13. The first stage of the interview in week 1 will take about 20 minutes and you will be asked to group items and give reasons for your groupings. The items will relate to typical relationships in the university context. For example, you might be asked to say which two are more similar and why: your relationship with your tutor, with your ‘ideal’ view of a student and with your current view of yourself as a student. Your responses will be recorded in writing and you will be asked to confirm that they are correctly recorded at the end of this stage. This is the entirety of this section of the research in week 1.

The second stage of the interviews relates to weeks 5, 6 or 7 (depending on your availability) and week 13. It involves responding to questions about your video (Part 1 section A of this study) on the basis of the groupings from the first part of the interview. For example, if you indicated that feelings of competence are important to you in your relationships in stage 1, then you might be asked to indicate which clips best portray this. Your responses to these questions will be audio recorded, but without identifying you in any way. You will be identified only by a code, for example, student ‘Red’. The data recorded
will be analysed for categories and themes and you will be contacted once this analysis has been completed to verify the findings and to ensure you are willing for your data to be included in the study.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. There is an $80 bookshop voucher for those who participate in this section of the study to recompense you for your time. However, your involvement, non-involvement or withdrawal will have no impact at all on your UOW assessments, nor on your access to and use of the campus’ Learning Development services as advertised to all students. There are no direct benefits to the individuals who choose to be involved in this research, although there may be indirect benefits, as involvement in university activities have been found to be associated with increased engagement and therefore greater chance of success at university. The risks to involvement are minimal. However, if, as a result of involvement in this research you should experience any concerns or anxieties, you are welcome to make an appointment with the campus counselor, Dr Jocelyn Harper. She is contactable on jocelyn@uow.edu.au or you can make an appointment through the Student Service Officer, Amy. If, as a result of involvement in this research, you become concerned in any way about your study approaches, you are welcome to contact the researcher directly for support. I am contactable on dearlove@uow.edu.au.

During the conduct of this research and in any report or publication arising from it, confidentiality will be protected by the fact that the data collected will not be collected and stored in any form that would identify any individual. In addition, data will be stored off site in a locked filing cabinet. Any images used in publications from your video recordings will have the faces blurred. You will be contacted after the data has been analysed in order to allow you to check that the findings are a true reflection of your information and to give you the opportunity to reconsider your involvement in the study.

I, (participant’s name) have read and understand the information above and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this research, knowing that I can withdraw from further participation in the research at any time without consequence. I have been given a copy of this form to keep.

Participant’s Phone or Email: __________________________________________________________

Participant’s Name: _
The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the Macquarie University Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about any ethical aspect of your participation in this research, you may contact the Committee through the Director, Research Ethics (telephone (02) 9850 7854; email ethics@mq.edu.au). Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated, and you will be informed of the outcome.

PARTICIPANT’S COPY

Enter Appendix 2
Appendix C: Recruitment notices

Are you new to university? Enrolling in your first year? Happy to use the video function on your phone? Then this is a study that you might be interested in being involved in.

Joanne Dearlove is conducting a study to compare the ways in which we usually collect information about students’ experiences of transition into first year undergraduate studies to other ways of collecting information on this experience to see if we are missing anything important. **In particular, this study will be comparing the collection of information though a survey with the collection of information through video clips.** Interviews will be a part of both approaches.

All newly enrolling first year undergraduate students will be approached at the beginning or conclusion of a class in the week beginning the 31st March and asked to complete a 4-page survey on their transition experiences. An invitation will also be made seeking 10 students to participate in interviews related to their experience of completing the forms.

An invitation will be made seeking 10 students to be involved in submitting 5 minute video clips that show their experiences of transition into university for the first 5 weeks of semester. These 10 participants will also be involved in interviews related to their video recordings and their experiences in weeks 1, 6 or 7 and 13.

Recompense for your time is provided in the form of book vouchers for $30 or $80 for those students involved in the interviews.

Your participation is entirely voluntary and your participation, non-participation or withdrawal will in no way impact on your studies or your use of the services provided to Loftus students.
If you are interested in being a part of this study, or if you have any questions about this study, please contact Joanne Dearlove on dearlove@uow.edu.au

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the Macquarie University Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about any ethical aspect of your participation in this research, you may contact the Committee through the Director, Research Ethics (telephone (02) 9850 7854; email ethics@mq.edu.au). Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated, and you will be informed of the outcome.

This research is being conducted to meet the requirements for the degree of PhD under the supervision of Associate Professor Ian Solomonides, 98509857 ian.solomonides@mq.edu.au of the Learning and Teaching Centre.
Appendix D: Video-selfie Prompts

Initial interviews (Walk around the campus and video along the way while prompting):

Think about when you were thinking of uni and choosing your degree, how do your current university experiences match your expectations?

Week 2 to week 5 prompt:

Think about who you were before you started here and tell me if and/or how you have changed

Which person/location/service is important to your studies now and in what way?

Email sent in May 2014 in relation to the second half of first semester:

Dear Video project participant,

For the remaining few weeks of submissions, can I please ask you to focus on how it has been for you as a person. The information on the differences you have been experiencing has been invaluable, but I would like to add you [sic] views of these and how it has been for you.

Thanks and regards,

Joanne