Chapter 7
Forming and Transforming Identity

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> *I do probably have a different perspective on uni life I suppose, and what it's like to be a uni student … I'm proud to be able to say 'I'm 44 years old and I'm a uni student'.* (Kerry)
> *I would say I'm a dedicated student in so far as that I don't just want to get a degree, I want to be able develop skills along the way … I want to develop as a person, I want to read more, and educate myself.* (Brian)

7.1 Introduction

FiF students are diverse not only in terms of age and previous life experiences but also in terms of how these factors shape their personal expectations and belief in their ability to achieve at university. This chapter explores the ways in which FiF students' self-image or identity is transformed as a result of their attendance at university and how the multidimensional and interconnected nature of such an experience shapes the students' self-perceptions and their day-to-day lives as well as their relationships with significant others.

For the FiF students in this study, the notion of 'becoming a student' was a profound change from their traditional family experience. By starting university, they were not only heralding a new pathway in their familial culture, pioneering new opportunities and future professional prospects but also challenging previous expectations and ways of being. Ways knowing shape student interactions and experience, and where higher education has not been a part of a student's habitus, they may feel unable to fit in at university (Jehangir 2010; Thomas 2002). Most of the FiF students in this study felt that university was not a place where they would readily belong.

This sense of 'not belonging' was expressed in different ways. Echoing the findings of recent research on the influence of class on the FiF student experience

(Hinz et al. 2016; Rice et al. 2017; Southgate et al. 2017), Marg felt university was 'not a place for blue collar families':

> Growing up I didn't even really know what university was, and then when I wanted to go, my mum was saying 'You should really go and get a job and start earning and buy a house …' Our family saw university as being for rich people, not for us. We were not in that kind of class.

For others, their sense of 'not belonging' was not explicitly linked to class and manifested as self-doubt:

> I didn't ever necessarily think I would ever go to uni. I really didn't think I was honestly capable of doing that. (Kerry)

> I've always wondered, like I never really applied myself at school and there was always that notion of 'what if I did actually try, like am I really smart? Am I smart enough to go to university?' Not achieving a great deal in Year 12 didn't make me feel very smart for a lot of years, so it's kind of like a 'redemption' for me. (Denise)

7.2 The Influence of Others

Students also recounted interactions with 'significant others', such as family members, close friends, employers or colleagues, who challenged their entitlement to belong at university. In some cases, this was through the explicit questioning of either their ability or the actual worth of attending university. Sometimes, the challenge was implicit in the relationship between parties. For instance, Roxie's manager jibed, 'You'll never get in' implying that there was no chance that Roxie would be accepted into university, and Marg's mother asked, 'What's the point? … Is this going to give you more money?'

Pitman (2013, p. 36) observes that an autobiographical research methodology provides participants with an opportunity to 'foreground their own agency' in the changes that occur in their lives. In this study, the FiF students' accounts implicitly highlighted their agency in terms of their control or their choices. In response to her boss's remarks, Roxie describes how she changed her university application preferences to increase her chances of acceptance while both Marg and Denise articulated their decisions in terms of stepping outside of their 'mould' and proving their intellectual capability to their families as well as to themselves.

Most of the FiF students, however, were influenced by a significant other in their life who believed in their ability to succeed at university. Frequently, these 'others' were people who had previous tertiary experience and therefore had the appropriate 'kudos' in the student's eyes to make a credible judgment as to their chance of success. For Jen, her readiness to consider university was due to a culmination of factors at the time, including the encouragement of her boss, believing in herself and having performed well under particular stresses in her job. Jen expressed great respect for her boss, who had worked at a high level in government before becoming

a consultant, adding 'I think at the time my feeling was, if someone like her thought I could do well, then maybe it was worth doing it.'

Likewise, Rowan, who was strongly encouraged to enrol at university by his aunt, explained his receptiveness to her in terms of her educational attainment: '(She's) done a psychology degree at ANU [Australian National University], and she did her MBA … she's always encouraged me to just keep working at it.'

The absence of an 'educational memory' within immediate family, however, should not necessarily be understood as signifying that the desire to participate in education is extraneous to an individual's self-conception or representation. O'Shea (2016, p. 71) argues that FiF students (and their families) have 'aspirational capital' that 'provides the basis for a culture of possibility'. That is, dreams of possibilities may materialise as encouragement and support, from family members, to seriously consider attending university. This was true for Gail, whose parents advocated the importance of a university education, and also for Carl, a rural student who relocated to attend university. Carl's ambition to start university was fostered by his mother who always believed that he and his brothers could do well: 'My mum is always going on about how smart us boys are'. And although Kerry carried great self-doubt about her ability to succeed at university, the value her mother placed on education encouraged her:

> My mum was absolutely rapt when I got into uni. I didn't realise at the time. She was a very intelligent woman—she was actually dux of her form during her schooling in Victoria. She wanted to go to university and her family didn't want her to go. She didn't tell me this until I pretty much started at university. She basically, as we were growing up, said that she had left school and she just went and got a job. But her dream had always been to go to university, so when I told her that I was enrolled and been accepted, she was just over the moon because it's what she had always wanted to do.

As discussed in the introduction to this book, FiF students have been referred to as 'higher education pioneers' (Greenwald 2012; McInnis et al. 1995), often demonstrating a stronger sense of purpose and greater academic application than their intergenerational peers who have had the benefits of their parents' insight and experience of tertiary education systems. The FiF students in this study unconsciously aligned themselves with this pioneering spirit. They recognised that academic success could not be taken for granted, describing themselves as 'self-disciplined' and 'hard workers'.

> I'm a hard worker definitely, much more than like—I don't like to say it, but there are a lot of people who just kind of fly through and don't do much, and if I'm there, I might as well be doing my job properly. And when I know I've got stuff to be done, I will sit down and knuckle down and get it done. (Carl)

> My biggest strength is self-discipline. If I've got a job to do, I know what I've got to do, and I don't need to be told what to do. I guess it's just been in my nature, it's always been like that. And I've got a good work ethic, I like to work hard because I only feel satisfied when I know that I've had to work for something, because that's where I draw my pleasure from essentially, my satisfaction. (Todd)

'Doing my job properly' was important to many of the students like Carl and Todd, for whom applying their work ethic to their studies was satisfying, a reflection of

their personal standards or experiences that preceded their university experience. By drawing on this familial and experiential capital, the agency of these FiF students was realised in their emerging student-learner identities in terms of fulfilling long-held personal aspirations, of being inspired by significant others, or of active or passive resistance to views held by significant others.

7.3   Multiple Identities/Multifaceted Lives

Many of the FiF students identified as having dual or multiple identities. They did not feel that being a student was a singular role—rather it was another part of their life and, sometimes, secondary to their other identity, such as being a parent, a worker or a rural person. The individual's perception of what it meant to be a student influenced the extent that they privileged or prioritised their student identity compared to the others. Some were proud of their student identity and used it to add value to their conception of self. Alison and Travis, younger school leaver FiF students, readily used this descriptor:

> When they ask me what I do, I tell them 'I'm a student', just because I don't really have a great job, I guess. I'm proud of the fact that I'm a student. I think a lot of people don't take the opportunity, and I'm glad I did. (Alison)

> If I'm talking to someone professionally, yes. If I'm meeting someone for the first time … eventually the topic would come out, 'Oh, what do you do in your spare time?' and I'll say, 'Oh, I go to uni' kind of thing. I see it as a very important part of my life. If it's someone I get to know, they should be aware that I go to uni. (Travis)

Some perceived that identifying as a student may occasion negative social consequences, and a number of the students in this study preferred not to use the term 'student' as their primary identifier. For example, Todd, who initially did not feel a sense of belonging at university, gave no priority to his student identity over other identities such as volunteer, family member, sales assistant and marathon runner:

> I just find saying 'I'm a student' gives these impressions of just this 'la-di-da life' and it's all very easy, and that kind of stuff, and I don't like having that perception because I think it takes away from the effort you do put into things. (Todd)

For Jen, who frequently 'forgot to mention' the fact that she was studying when out on social occasions, it was about not wanting to be equated with younger, less experienced students:

> I think of university students as 18 to 23 year-olds. I'm not 18 to 23 years old … I'm a mature age student, so there's a separate classification, so I just tend to more think about work, my role, when I'm speaking to people. (Jen)

The multiple contexts in which individuals must engage, means identity is situated and individuals consider themselves as having many different selves (Scanlon et al. 2007). Some, like Denise and Jen described themselves as having 'multiple

personalities', explaining how they could 'switch off and switch on' between them. Jen described having four 'sides' to her identity that she dissociates from each other:

> When I'm at work I'm in that space of, I'm very lucky, it's very good work … but for those eight hours I am doing what needs to be done, I'm not thinking about that other side. When I'm at uni, it's uni stuff. So there's probably about four sides, uni, work, friends and family in one group, and then my partner gets just a blend of the other lot.

Though they described themselves as having dual or multiple identities, the students' accounts suggest some consistent agentic responses across identities, suggesting control and/or choice. For example, Denise observed that while she is 'like the life of the party and the attention seeker' with her group of friends outside of university, she is shy when it comes to group work and establishing friendships at university. That said, she overcame her shyness at university to be able to have rigorous discussions on her subject of interest, psychology, with fellow students. While Jen views the different sides of her life as being discrete roles, she admitted infusing an intellectual curiosity across all:

> But yes, I'm … how to describe it? There's still an aspect of me always asking questions, so whether that's in a tute or at work or with a friend to try and understand more, so there's a running thread.

Being able to define the boundaries between identities is not always straightforward and choice, or control, is sacrificed to some extent in the face of stressful 'contests' between a student's aspirations, values, resources and experiences. For example, Kerry experienced conflict between her different identities as a FiF student, mother and worker. She had found it frustrating to have given up a well-paying job when she had children, and she was relishing the notion that she was developing other skills at university. Study added complexity to her life and, as a consequence, she was very busy but proud to tell people that she was a university student:

> I think, also, at the end of next year when I finish my study, I'm going to miss saying to people 'Oh yeah, and I'm at uni'. I'm actually proud of that. I'm proud to be able to say 'I'm 44 years old and I'm a uni student'. I actually like that; it's nice not to just be known just as—and I know it sounds dreadful because I do love my children terribly—but it's nice to be known as something other than just a mum who works.

Women students in higher education often experience positive and negative impacts of family commitments (Leppel 2002), and this is particularly so for women who are the first member of their family to attend university. Typically, taking time out from the family to study frequently causes anxiety and guilt for mothers, notwithstanding that they often take little or no time for their own leisure (Stone and O'Shea 2012; O'Shea 2015). While Kerry '[loved] being a mum', motherhood was not her whole identity, and the binary of these two significant identities, student and mother, caused conflict for her when she considered the impact on her children.

> I'm thinking, 'Have I actually decided to study right in the best years of their life and maybe given too much of my time to study rather than to them?' And I don't know—I'm still actually grappling with that thought myself … Am I going to look back and go 'Oh, I really should have …'—we didn't have the overseas holidays and things that we were going to do

in the school holidays because I had assignments to do and those sorts of things, but then I look on the other hand that I'm probably instilling them with some really good values. (Kerry)

She went on to explain that in order to spend time with her children she sacrificed other aspects of her life:

It's not like I'm not there—it's not like I'm working two jobs, studying and then I'm out with my friends, and I'm never home with them. I will forego going out with those other people because I want to be home with the kids and things. So we still, as a family, we spend a lot of time together.

With no higher education experiential capital to draw on, these FiF students create space for a student identity alongside their various other identities: parent, friend, colleague or other. By describing their student identity as something additional to their other identity, or identities, the emergent nature of identity is highlighted. Managing and defining boundaries of their multifaceted selves is a dialectic of 'becoming', reflecting individual choice and control to negotiate different contexts. However, this is influenced by what they believe that identity incorporates.

7.4   (Pre-)Conceptions of Student Identity, Experience and Belonging

Prior to participating at university, students form their understandings of university and what it is to be a student based on past experiences, but for FiF students these conceptions are not verified through direct familial experience of university. Their knowledge is 'decontextualised' and 'naïve', making their transition into university problematic (Scanlon et al. 2007). A number of the FiF students spoke of not feeling like a 'real' university student, contrasting their experience to a perceived or imagined reality of what student life is like. Sue, for example, spoke of not being a 'proper university student' as she did not experience living in residence, going to parties or being financially restricted. Similarly, for Kerry the university campus was not how she had imagined it would be, nor was student life as frequently portrayed in the media, with students meeting to socialise on lawns outside old buildings or in a student bar. Even though Todd rejected the 'student' label, this opposition was based on a view very much modelled in media portrayals:

I don't know why that is though, I just feel like when I see someone and their title is 'student', it kind of makes you think of the uni ads where it's all just lying around on the lawns, and then 'Oh, I'll roll over and write my essay now'. (Todd)

Students who were highly invested in other aspects of their formed identities did not consider this unfulfilled idealised or imagined view of what university would be like as a concern for them. Kerry, who had many competing priorities as student, worker and mother, felt that the city-based campus, where people mainly come in for part-time study after work, satisfied her needs, as she 'wanted a uni to just walk

in and walk out of and not have to worry about all the other stuff'. Marg, who had three years of study behind her, said, 'I consider myself as studying … but I don't see myself as a student'. For Marg, university was 'purely business'.

As noted in Chap. 6, some of the FiF students reported that they at first felt unsure in their new environment and spoke about wanting to leave university at various times in their early weeks but the establishment of friendship networks at university helped many stay the course. Raffo and Reeves (2000) observe that when young people establish friendships it gives them a sense of control; they feel less anonymous and other students become sources of information about institutional norms (p. 163).

As noted in many of the survey responses from FiF students, they believed that friends were a critical element of their success as a student:

> I found that if I had friends in the course I was able to work with them and it would motivate me to go to uni more often. (19-year-old female, continuing survey)

> Friends who encourage you to get work done and are committed to doing so as well has been vital in maintaining a great university experience. A close community of friends who are willing to study as well as support and encourage one another to continue doing likewise. (20-year-old male, continuing survey)

> [to be successful] I rely on the motivation of having a close group of friends to help when struggling with work or for support. (18-year-old female, continuing survey)

In contrast some of the older students we interviewed, such as Denise, the mature age student who described herself as socially isolated at university, felt that friends could be a distraction when engaging as a learner in this new learning context:

> It's kind of sad in a way, but I can't break into the clique. But I'm kind of grateful for not having a distraction. Like, I had a lot of friends and distractions at high school and now I'm fully focused, I'm not here for the social aspect I'm just here for the degree basically, I'm here for me. (Denise)

This raises an important element in understanding older students' responses to the university environment, which is that their needs and priorities are likely to be different from those of school leavers. Scanlon et al. (2007) make the point that mature age students do not suffer the same social displacement as younger learners but are more focused on finishing their degree in order to meet their personal or career goals. Their research suggests that mature age students were more experienced in making transitions, and they exhibit 'characteristics of student identity valued by the university, such as seriousness and participation' (p. 236). Though relatively unperturbed by her different social identity at university, Denise spoke with resolve about her academic identity. When speaking of how she negotiated resubmissions of her essays and getting academic assistance, she said:

> Well no one else is going to get this degree other than me, like my mum and dad's not going to get it, my sister's not going to get it, my girlfriends are not going to get it for me, so I'm wholly and solely responsible, financially and academically responsible, for my future; so it's on me.

The mature age FiF students also frequently spoke of a sense of 'social incongruity' (Devlin et al. 2012) when describing their initial experience of attending

university, commenting on age differences between students as an obvious key point of divergence in their student experiences. Roxie related how until she found her own 'type of people', she felt out of place. Pete noted in his interview that he was not just 'mature age' but was, in fact, 'quite old' and he was frequently mistaken for one of the teaching staff by other students. Both he and Kerry found that the school leaver students in their classes expected them to take on a leadership or mentoring role in group activities. As Pete says, 'If you walk into a tutorial for the first time they think you're the tutor immediately.'

The feeling of not belonging is very common among new students of all ages, and the accounts above illustrate the complexity of understanding experience in relation to emerging student identities and perceptions around 'belonging'. The multiplicity of factors mediating students' sense of belonging means there is no 'one size fits all' approach to facilitating positive and productive student identities, but sensitivity by academic staff is a starting point for enhancing it.

> Everyone has a story, and that's evident here when you look around. And sometimes, you know, being the ponderer that I am, you think, 'What happened on your way here today? Like, what happened before you sat down here and spoke to me this morning; or what's your life story?' and that sort of thing. So I think maybe some of the lecturers can be a bit more mindful of that, you know, whether you're first-in-family or whether you have a disability or anything like that. (Denise)

7.5 Transformation: Moving Away from Family Culture

Within the setting of family and friends, the experience of (transformed) identity can be difficult for students to negotiate (O'Shea et al. 2017). Rowan and Travis, for example, sought affirmation from family members but were met with silent resistance or rejection:

> The interesting thing is, because I didn't have a lot of contact with family when that decision [to come to uni] was made, there was probably not much of a reaction from their side. But I told my dad last semester that I got an '80' and he … it was an interesting reaction from him. There was not much comment, and what I suppose I was looking for was 'Well done'. (Rowan)

> My family are very poverty stricken, well not poverty stricken, but close to. And the one person who actually does have money, [my uncle], as far as he's concerned, I'm wasting my time going to uni, because he is a carpenter and he believes tradies are more important than the arts. Because at one point I wanted to be a teacher, and I told him that, and he said 'Well don't be a teacher, you need life experience before you can even begin to teach, it's stupid to go to uni and not live your life beforehand'. And it's just like, well not everyone has the luxury to go out and find a job, and have real-world experience. (Travis)

For some FiF students the very act of enrolling into university challenged their family's cultural norms and they felt the need to justify these choices. Their families often did not place value on their academic success and were challenged by the

changes they saw taking place in their values and beliefs. Others like Denise found that their new academic identity and new ways of thinking meant that they no longer valued the same things as their family and they experienced a marked 'growing away from' their family:

> I'm just spending six hours with my head in the textbook, and I've got to go and talk to family members that I haven't seen for ages … and talk about babies and children and stuff like that. Not conversations I want. I feel like I've moved on so much but they're back here. They're still stuck in their old ways; they're still third, second and third generation Centrelink recipients, and I know that sounds horrible, but it's just, that's the mentality that I don't really have any more; that's the mentality I had in my family.

The difficulty resulting from not wanting or not being able to break easily from their past values and beliefs can leave students trying to bridge two worlds, leaving them with a sense they that they no longer fit in either (London 1992; Thomas 2002; Murray and Kennedy-Lightsey 2013).

7.6   Transformation of Self and Opening Up Horizons

Despite these feelings of disjunction and disruption, for the majority of the FiF students their reflections of the university experience were pervaded with a sense of achievement and resilience. They acknowledged that what they had learned was not limited to gains in academic knowledge and skills but, more significantly, their own personal transformation:

> I think I'm a more disciplined person; I'm a more confident person. I kind of feel smart. I feel like I've, and I've said this before, but it's the high school redemption. I felt dumb at high school, but now I feel like a smart adult. (Denise)

> Studying at university enables me to achieve the graduate qualities that I find interesting and would adapt in the future. I want to gain an education which is useful for my everyday needs and further develop my understanding to achieve my best. (19-year-old male, continuing survey)

There are strong parallels with Stone and O'Shea's study (2012), where the students expressed profound shifts in their confidence and ambitions for life, having new skills and abilities to 'transform their lives more broadly'. Roxie described herself as having been very laid back and confident before going to university but now saw herself as even more confident, with a lot more ambition and 'ready to take on the world.' Rowan saw university as having made him 'a more well-rounded adult', while Todd also saw himself as more assured, feeling capable of thinking and talking at a much deeper level than when he was in high school. Todd also saw his drive to be independent as having developed immensely throughout his time at university, recounting that he was becoming his 'own person' as he neared the end of his honours degree.

Roxie, like many of the other FiF students, became a great believer in the transformative powers of a university education. Previously mistrustful of educational institutions, she probably had the greatest personal transformation of all those interviewed:

> I was a real tearaway, I had serious drug problems when I was a young woman, and I didn't recover from that until I was about 25. So, to go from repeated drug overdoses and nearly dying to finishing university, with a really, really good GPA, [and I have now] finished honours. (Roxie)

Perception of self, however transformed, is an aspect of identity but not the whole story regarding how experience is shaped. Wenger (1998) describes experience as 'identity in practice'; a way of being in the world, where we encounter our effects on the world and develop our relations with others. This proposes a mutually impacting interaction between individual agency and the social environment that reifies identity. Roxie's comment, 'My friends are astonished; they're really proud of me' is suggestive of her experience of the world beginning to shift with the social reification of her emerging identity. Gail recounted that as her marks improved at university, she became increasingly competitive and assertive in her academic application:

> As my marks got better throughout my degree I thought 'yeah, I want to get that dux sort of thing' and I was kind of aggressively trying to get those results, so I'm pretty happy that I got it. (Gail)

This change in personal belief and ambition enabled Gail to achieve a number of scholarships and prizes and after completing her degree she was employed as a research assistant at the university. From there she actively sought and won another challenging research position indicating external recognition of her skills and abilities. Though Gail ascribes getting these employment contracts to 'luck', the reality of her winning these prizes and positions demonstrates a subconscious but active personal and social reification of identity:

> I know that other people in my degree who have really struggled to find work, so I think I'm one of the lucky ones. I just tend to think I'm lucky most of the time. As far as the achievements go as in during my studies that's more reliant on the work that gets put in but in just getting employment, I think that was a lot of luck. I mean some people would say 'right person for the right job' but I don't feel like at the start I was very well suited to it, but I was given a chance, so I guess that was luck.

Many of the FiF students we interviewed attributed their success to external factors rather than their own capacity, drive and abilities. The experience of actively engaging in tertiary education transformed their view of what is now possible, reshaping their understanding of self in the context of new opportunities. Some students were just beginning to anticipate how finishing university might open new horizons for them. Alison, for example, who previously thought she would live in her hometown forever, was now planning to live and work overseas: 'I just want to do so much more than I ever wanted to do'; and Travis and Todd spoke of their improved abilities to understand and converse with other people from a wide range of backgrounds, to articulate their opinions and no longer be afraid to challenge others ideas:

> That's generally one of the main things that I've gained out of university, to actually be able to view something, and go, 'yes something's not quite right here'. It's made me more vocal in my opinions because earlier in life I would express my opinion and someone would say something else, and then I would just shut up because I don't want to provoke a fight or anything like that. But now, if I can actually broaden someone else's horizon without treading on their own opinions, I do. (Travis)

Though Todd stated he had not changed his perspective of where he wanted to go, his relationships with colleagues strongly demonstrate how his transformed self was informing his social being. Todd had assumed the role of mentor to his casually employed work colleagues at the bakery and lamented that he had not had that sort of support when he started university:

> A lot of people at work are going through that stage now where they're going to the open days for uni and, I guess, when you work with them, you talk about it. I've also encouraged people to go to uni, and to stick with it, because people have wanted to drop out before … you say 'Well you're at the end of it, you've come this far, you might be better off doing it because you do feel immense satisfaction when it's finished.' I only give advice to those who want it (laughing). It is never uninvited. And I have, I don't know, this is a little bit weird, but I still feel like a bit of a mentor to some of them. Because, I sort of feel like I wish I had someone a little further on in their life, someone who had just a couple more years of experience, just that little bit of advice would have been good. So I sort of take on that role I feel [for work colleagues] and I love it, it's great and they appreciate it.

7.7 Transformation: Opening Horizons for Others

The effects of the FiF students on others' ambitions were equally reifying the students' transformed identities. A number of the students in the study spoke of how their experience of attending university had raised aspirations for others, demonstrating their role as pioneers and mentors and opening up new horizons. For example, participants who had children spoke of raising their aspirations to attend university. Marg's success at university inspired her own children, reinforcing a generational shift in what had previously not been considered for their 'sort of people':

Brendon's experience of going to university impacted on his younger siblings and extended family members, as did Alison's experience:

> My brother wants to get into human movement or PE [physical education] teaching or that kind of thing. I think he's just seeing that he can move out and learn so much. And it's the same with my partner; his younger sister is now kind of doing exactly what he's done.

Participating in university is a significant transformation not only for the individual student themselves but also their family networks, having a transformative ripple effect on siblings, children and extended family. This transformative experience extends beyond the walls of the university, impacting FiF students' future aspirations and their broader societal perspectives.

7.8 Conclusion

As we see from these students' stories, the formation of student identity is a multi-faceted process where individuals mediate a number of selves in order to succeed. It is also an iterative process whereby an individual reflexively responds to both extrinsic and intrinsic factors to shape and reshape their understanding of self in relation to their social circumstances (Chickering and Reisser 1993; Wenger 1998; Kaufman 2014; Turner and Tobbell 2018). At university, the student constructs the foundation for various areas of life, such as work, family, and other human relations, in addition to an academic identity and a professional identity related to the future transition to working life (Lairio et al. 2013).

As agents in their own identity formation, and in order to develop strong working relationships and practices, students develop an understanding of who they are as individuals in relation to their social environment (Daniels and Brooker 2014). As they navigate their way through their university degree, they deepen their understanding of who they are and how they can shape their own futures and those of others. As Brendon elaborates the benefits of participating in higher education are not limited merely to personal gains but have a ripple effect through broader social connections and aspirations for the future:

> Oh, it's definitely been better for me as a person, in just further developing the values I already had and just trying to further my social relationships too, I think has been good. So, it's benefited me with that. And I think too, having the degree, I hope would benefit others in my future work and life. That's how I hope my degree would benefit society as a whole, and the people around me too … I've got a big focus on the greater good. And I hope, I guess I hope, I can contribute to that? That's my lifetime goal. (Brendon)

From these FiF student experiences we can see that a university education has a far more wide-ranging impact than just developing skills, confidence and capabilities. As reflected in these stories there are multiple changes taking place: shifts in personal values and beliefs, the development of multifaceted identities and the transforming of aspirations and goals not only for those closest to the students but also of society, more broadly.

The research this book is based on (King et al. 2014) provides recommendations to universities. This book further develops that work and adds to the opportunity for institutions to draw upon these stories to gain insight into how we can make university processes more inclusive. How these FiF students transformed their sense of self within this new environment from initial dissonance and social incongruity to a 'tactical refinement' of their identity (Southgate et al. 2017, p. 255) that incorporates previous values and cultural identities with new aspirations and hopes for a more positive future, provides us with an in-depth understanding to the experience of diverse students. Using this knowledge to identify where supports can be added and processes refined will not only benefit FiF students, but all students, thus helping to redistribute the benefits of higher education more equitably across our society.

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