



“FORGED IN FIRE” NARRATIVES OF TRAUMA IN PHD SUPERVISION PEDAGOGY

Abstract

This paper examines the role of the emotions and of the irrational in the production of the PhD thesis in the humanities and social sciences, and specifically, the phenomenon of trauma and distress. There is an apparent paradox in the current positioning of the PhD: on the one hand, there is a profound dissatisfaction with the experience of candidature reported by many students; on the other, an equally intense attachment, by students and academics alike, to the PhD thesis as the “original” and “significant” outcome of the period of that candidature. In informal discussion and, to some extent in the literature, the emotional dimensions of the intense engagement with the project of the doctoral thesis are acknowledged. In the latter in particular, however, the emotions, particularly emotional distress, are seen as “noise” in the system, which could be silenced through the development of new policies and practices for the institutional management of the PhD. This paper explores the possibility that, far from being “noise” in the system of pedagogic relations and practices, the emotional and irrational dimensions of the PhD experience are on the contrary both a necessary condition *and* an effect of the production of the subject of doctoral study — the licensed independent scholar. That is, the production of the putatively *rational, autonomous* subject of disciplinary knowledge is predicated upon both the production and the disavowal of the irrational.

I Introduction

Jane: That’s what I mean, we are *forged in fire*. It’s a very dysfunctional model for professional development which we seem to actually be able to critique in various ways but actually having all endured and it’s a kind of badge (comment by senior academic).

Over twenty-five years ago, Australian sociologist W J Bottomley noted a troubling discrepancy between what he termed “the formal view” of post-graduate training and “the ‘reality’ which comes to be constructed from the initiate’s own experience” (204). Drawing on Goffman (*The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, “The Underlife of a Public Institution”) for his exploration of his concerns regarding the PhD in the social sciences,

Bottomley explored the phenomenon of what he called "backstaging" in formal accounts. Aspects of the PhD which are "backstaged" include the effects of narrow specialisation, the cumbersome length of the thesis text and its fate to be exposed to just three (perhaps reluctant) readers, the problems of supervisor expertise and the high levels of emotional distress experienced during candidature by many students.

Bottomley's paper was published almost exactly at a mid-point between the awarding of the first PhD in Australia, in 1948, and the present. From the perspective of the present, many of his comments have a strikingly familiar ring, not only in terms of the substantive points of critique which he levelled at institutional structures and practices in Australian universities of his time, but in the more general point concerning the failure to attend to the informal "underlife" (Goffman, "The Underlife of a Public Institution") of the institution of doctoral training. Yet despite its currency and its contemporary resonance, attempts at intervention such as Bottomley's have not had an appreciable lasting effect, either in terms of significant debate concerning the nature and effects of doctoral thesis writing and PhD education generally, nor in terms of an engagement with the question of what is "written-out" of such texts as there are on the topic of the PhD in the humanities and social sciences. Notwithstanding significant institutional and disciplinary changes that have occurred within Australian universities in the intervening quarter of a century, the apparent paradox of the attachment to the PhD thesis as the outcome of a period of doctoral research training, and the accompanying dissatisfaction with the experience reported by many students, remains. It is this paradox that is signalled in the title of this paper and in the epigraph with which it begins.

This paper seeks to open out a discussion of one of the enduring aspects of the "underlife" of PhD educational experience, that of the role of the emotions in the production of the thesis, and specifically, the phenomena of trauma and distress. Bottomley noted that the writing of a doctoral dissertation is "a ritual which in many cases becomes psychologically painful and disproportionately demanding" (211). "Unless one is exceptionally fortunate," he goes on, "under current conditions gaining a doctorate entails the endurance of severe personal distress for a great many candidates and the output of successful PhDs is achieved at the expense of a high toll in purely human terms" (211). The title of this paper, and the segment of data with which it begins, seek to signal the significance of the emotional dimension of the experience of completing a PhD more generally and to raise questions concerning the role and the effects of the emotions in the production of the doctoral thesis and the graduated and certificated "doctor."

In the current climate of emphasis on rationalisation and reform for graduate training, in an era of efficiency and effectiveness and increasing policy intervention into the management and practices of higher education, such considerations are at risk of even further marginalisation. In recent years, a rapidly burgeoning literature on the PhD has principally

focused on organisational and administrative matters such as completion times, completion rates, costs and benefits (Holdaway, "Some prominent issues in the Postgraduate Education in Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom"), as well as on broad issues of "quality" (Zuber-Skerritt and Ryan; Cullen et al) of postgraduate education provision (Holdaway, "Current Issues in Graduate Education"; Powles). Research attention has focused on doctoral students principally in terms of their experiences of doctoral study and research, of supervision and of thesis production (eg Parry and Hayden; Salmon). More recently, in a climate of rapid expansion in doctoral provision, both in terms of the numbers of "new" universities and new disciplines offering doctoral programs and in sheer numbers of students, there has been a consequent proliferation of books for students (eg, Graves and Varma) and supervisors (eg, Delamont, Atkinson and Parry).

The focus on all counts is on "improvement" — of completion rates and times, of economic efficiency, of "quality" and of the experience of doing the PhD itself. In general, the current and recent literature on the PhD focuses in the main upon what Carolyn Baker ("Culture in Action") calls the "improvement imperative," arguably a dominant perspective in educational research and scholarship, where questions of educational policy and practice drive the formation of research problematics towards improvement "outcomes." In these accounts, emotional distress is seen in terms of what might be "wrong" with the institutional structures, policies and practices of the PhD. Trauma, abjection, isolation, loss are often read through an improvement discourse as "noise" in the system, noise which could, in principle, be silenced. What might be termed an "engineering" approach to policy development and concomitant professional development seeks to put in place improved structures and practices to minimise, if not entirely eliminate, negative emotional consequences connected with supervision, research and writing.

Preliminary outcomes of research on the history and the practices of the PhD in the humanities and social sciences in Australia¹ form the basis of the discussion in this paper. The research seeks to stand back from the "improvement" literature to examine the productivity of current practices of supervision and doctoral education more generally; that is, what is produced in terms of capacities and forms of subjectivity, as well as specific knowledges, of those who graduate with a PhD. In the context of this broader research agenda, our concern in this paper is to explore the possibility that questions of the emotions and the "irrational" dimensions of the PhD experience, far from being "noise" in the system of pedagogic relations and practices, are on the contrary both a necessary condition *and* an effect of the production of the subject of doctoral study — the licensed independent scholar. That is, the production of the putatively *rational; autonomous* subject of disciplinary knowledge is predicated upon both the production and the disavowal of the "irrational" and the emotions.

Further, as has been argued elsewhere, the self that is "becoming-

rational" in this process is problematic in gender terms, as this self has historically been produced and coded as masculine (Johnson, Lee and Green; Lloyd; Sofia). We want to ask questions concerning the necessary relationship between the structure of the PhD, in Australia and Britain, the styles of pedagogy which are projected by this structure and the gendered nature of the subject being produced through that process. Underlying our concern to investigate this relationship are a series of questions concerning the work of producing the "independent scholar" who is the successful subject of this conception of the PhD. At what price is the "rationality" assigned to the doctoral graduate bought? What is the other side of this rationality? To what extent is trauma an inevitable effect for many if not all PhD students?

One remarkable feature of the practice of this research into PhD supervision pedagogy is the effect upon those who respond to hearing of the project. At striking odds with the written literature come compulsive anecdotes of trauma and loss, of abuse and neglect, of plagiarism and of abandonment. There are important questions to ask of the persistence of such stories. What do they tell us of the state of play in this carefully protected preserve of the Academy? What functions do such stories perform within an institutional practice that is so intensely privatised and whose privacy and silence is so carefully guarded? What does it mean to name and investigate this "other" of the rational story of the production of the scholar?

What we suggest is that by attending to precisely what is "written-out" of most current accounts — the complexities of the psychodynamics of the pedagogical relationship and the production of a doctoral thesis — it may be possible to gain a more complex understanding of the production of specific kinds of capacities and subjectivities within the Academy and to understand better such things as why, despite widespread unease, indeed dissatisfaction, with the PhD experience, there persists in many quarters in the Academy an apparently intense and continuing attachment to existing structures and processes.

There is a small but important corpus of texts which have begun to open this terrain to theoretical scrutiny, drawing on psychoanalytic theory to examine aspects of the relationship between supervisor and student, of desire and the erotics of pedagogy, of oedipal narrative and of transference/counter-transference (eg Frow; Giblett; Gallop). This work is an important contribution to understanding supervisory relationships. What we are concerned to do here in supplementing this work is to offer an analysis which de-individualises the process to some extent, pointing to a different site for the production of emotionality and "irrationality" than purely the interpersonal one. We therefore seek to address, as well, the complex conceptual field within which doctoral supervisors and students are operating and negotiating positionalities, and the conflicts and difficulties that are produced particularly for women as they do so.

II Stories and Memories

In the remainder of this paper we draw on transcribed audiotaped data from a research workshop on doctoral supervision undertaken with a group of senior academics in an Arts Faculty in a large and well-established Australian university. Written accounts of supervising and being supervised were produced and discussed by these elite scholars who must collectively be deemed significant "successes" in the story album of Australian scholarship in the humanities and social sciences. Of the six participants, three were professors and three were senior lecturers with clear career prospects as internationally significant researchers. They came from Philosophy, English, Geography, Cultural Studies and Women's Studies. The research workshop sought to explore the importance and inter-relatedness of pedagogy and identity formation in the production of the PhD theses of these current senior supervisors. The focus was on the emotional dimensions of their experiences as PhD students and then as academics and supervisors. The aim was to explore the relationship between the experiences of these two institutional positionalities with a view to understanding the formative influences in the production of these academics as scholars and the subsequent ongoing tensions that are played out in their own supervisory practices and professional lives.

Informing the research in part was the methodological framework of the feminist collective empirical project known as "memory work" (Haug et. al., *Female Sexualisation*; Haug, *Beyond Female Masochism*; Schratz and Walker), though the actual techniques and activities of the workshop were not governed methodologically by the specific memory-work practices of Haug and her colleagues or of others who have subsequently sought to systematise this work (eg Crawford et al). Rather, techniques were drawn from a number of sources, including those of "memory writing" associated with the literacy pedagogy of James Moffett (*Active Voice*). A key theoretical assumption is that subjectively significant events (remembered and subsequently (re)constructed) play an important part in the construction of self and identity. Memory work investigation reveals how people construct their identities, change themselves, reinterpret themselves and see what benefits they derive from doing this. That is, through memory work, participants can explore how they "inscribe themselves into the existing structures" (Haug, *Beyond Female Masochism* 20).

For the participants of this workshop, significant events during their PhD candidature can be understood as critical moments of inscription into academic-disciplinary structures through "becoming" the graduated and certificated "doctor." Becoming an independent scholar necessarily involves psychodynamic mechanisms of identification and investment in the subject position of the scholar, a desire mobilised by the perceived rewards and benefits of its attainment. Inscription into that subject position demands submission to academic-disciplinary regimes and norms, a process of self-formation which produces identities and capacities specific to that regime.²

Also informing the research is a theoretical framework which derives from feminist and poststructural theorisations of the subject. Accordingly, in the context of this research, we suggest that as student-subjects are produced through complex relations of power-desire-knowledge, in which the supervisory relation is implicated, the process of attaining an academic-disciplinary identity/position is often characterised by trauma, contradiction and ambivalence. The identity produced is not achieved once and for all but is an unstable constellation of constitutive elements which are multiple and contradictory. These constitutive elements have to be rearticulated in every instance of the professional practice of academic work, including supervision; there is the constant risk of breakdown and also transformation (Butler). Further, the apparent stability, seamlessness and coherence of identity is achieved through psychodynamic processes of disavowal and forgetting of contradictions and tensions within the self.

In the case of "becoming" the independent, rational scholar, what is simultaneously produced and disavowed is the "irrational." Moreover, as feminist philosophers such as Lloyd (*The Man of Reason*) and Sofia (*Whose Second Self?*) have shown, notions of reason and autonomy, so central to the idea of the independent scholar who graduates with a PhD, are problematic in terms of gender. Underpinning the historical production of the scholar is the figure of the "Man of Reason," while the "other" of autonomous rationality — irrationality and "dependence" — are produced as "feminine." These implicit codings have effects for actual women and men as they attempt to negotiate attaining this subjectivity. As Lloyd notes, "there are not only practical reasons, but also conceptual ones, for the conflicts many women experience between Reason and femininity" (xix). Our point here is that the process of becoming an autonomous scholar and its subsequent institutional positioning and identity is particularly fraught and contradictory for women. According to Lloyd, "[w]omen cannot easily be accommodated into a cultural ideal which has defined itself in opposition to the feminine" (104).

Through participants writing and discussing stories of doing a PhD, we hoped that critical moments of "becoming" the scholar, attaining an academic-disciplinary identity, would emerge. However, these moments cannot be understood as unproblematically "true." A central understanding of memory work is that, in writing stories, "individuals twist and turn, reinterpret and falsify, repress and forget their experiences in pursuit of a construction of their personality to which the past has been subordinated" (Haug, *Beyond Female Masochism* 20). People construct the data of their lives so that they can live with them in relatively non-contradictory ways. Consequently, many of the stories of PhD candidature and supervision encountered, in this workshop and in the larger research project, began as what we have come to call "thin" stories; stories that give brief, unconflicted, unproblematic accounts of doing the PhD. Given the subsequent elaborations and problematisations of the written stories by their authors, we believe "thin" stories can often be suggestively read

in terms of the rationalisation and disavowal we have noted above.

"Thin" stories were in fact what the men in the workshop began with, in a manner that we have subsequently come to understand as quite classically gendered in PhD storytelling. For example, in his undergraduate years, Karl noticed "these people" — scholars — with whom he desired to identify, and whom he proceeded to emulate. This emulation led him to his pilgrimage to Oxford and to his "unproblematic" doctorate:

Karl: And then what I got was three years at Oxford where I was left alone to try and do it. Went to the library, read the stuff, wrote the stuff.

Similarly, for David:

David: I was exactly in that situation. I came from the East End of London, working class school all the way through, then went to University and got a PhD in a very similar way to Karl. My supervisor, I would give him material and he would say "yes, yes, yes, that's fine." I don't think I saw a word of comment. I wrote the thing in under three years, two and a half years.

Karl and David do in fact produce other kinds of stories, after writing and exploring written texts in discussion with others. For example, Karl, in telling of an incident in which his supervisor rejected a thesis proposal of his with the single word of "unpromising," concluded by naming "the scarring, the beating with words rather than sticks" that was his current recollection and re-experiencing of that event. David eventually recalled an event he had "forgotten" near the end of his candidature, when he became physically paralysed and confined to bed for two months, unable, literally, to write. David saw this as an "emblematic story" and spoke of using it in supervision with his students when they came to him saying "My thesis is in crisis, my whole life is in crisis," in order to open up discussion of the resolution of this crisis, which for him was the successful end of his illness and the production of the timely thesis, paradoxically "accelerated" by the crisis imposed by his paralysis. This later story certainly supplemented the "thin story" he began the workshop with. During the workshop, as well, Karl re-read his written texts and noted that he had been "overcompensating" in his initial writings for a variety of practices on the part of his supervisor that he began to reconstruct as "neglect" and "abuse."

Emotion, perhaps not surprisingly, was most readily articulated, at least in the early stages of the workshop, by the women. For example, one participant, Jane, writing in the third person, began a story as follows:

In one way she's reluctant to reveal this particular memory because it is quite pathetic. She really tried hard to come up with another memorable incident but this particular event just kept bobbing back up and she thought about it and as she thought about it some of the emotions it originally invoked also returned. In fact some of these emotions and if you like a sense of self have been recurrent features of her academic career ...

Jane wrote a story of her memory of neglect, rejection and isolation in the

first year of her candidature. It is a gendered story, marked by envy of the relationship a fellow male student has with the supervisor they share. She finished the story as follows, reverting to the first person at the end:

It is like the road to the PhD is strewn with suffering or something. She was very ashamed with herself at the time for allowing such a relatively small event to have such impact, but there you go, there's my story. I really didn't want to write that, I really tried to think of something else.

Indeed, Jane's first words two minutes into the workshop, after a brief orientation and briefing about the workshop's events, were an intensely emotional outburst. As part of the orientation phase of the workshop, two starting assumptions underpinning the research were presented for discussion. These were, first, that there was a significant relationship between an academic's experience of supervision in their own PhD candidature and their subsequent pedagogical practices and, second, that the PhD was, in ways to be explored, problematic. Karl, a professor, produced, as the first response, a mild demurral to the second assumption. The PhD was not "in itself" problematic, he said, while conceding that things might go wrong:

Karl: It felt to me as though you make the best judgment you can on someone, whether they have the potential and commitment, engagement to the discipline and then you give them a period of time, that's the main thing, where they've got very little else to do but work on it. And at the end they either succeed or they don't. Why is that problematic?

Here, Karl produces the PhD student as full-time, with no other responsibilities, a profile far from the actual situation of many, if not most, students. In immediate response, the following exclamation by Jane was an eruption of difference which was symptomatic of the events of the day:

Jane: My PhD was a trauma from beginning to end, I have to say! I disagree with that and what I mostly can encounter with my students is that it is a traumatic experience!

Later in the workshop, Jane commented that:

Its very weird, isn't it? That's like fifteen years ago or something and it's still like really there. I need post-trauma counselling now.

Much of what emerged in this workshop focused on painful memories. This is perhaps not surprising, given the explicit focus on the participants' emotions associated with their experience of doing their PhD and of supervising others. The stories produced are by no means the only ones these elite academics, or indeed other PhD graduates, could or might tell and they clearly represent an amplification of emotion, both in the memories themselves and in terms of the "here-and-now" effects of producing such memories. There are other stories, and this paper needs to be seen, not as a repudiation or denial of, but rather as a part of, a larger exploration of the kinds of stories that circulate around the doing of the PhD. We need also to write about desire and about pleasure which in some senses are equally "backstaged" in formal accounts of graduate

education. With some significant exceptions (eg, Patton; Gallop; McWilliam), the literature on graduate pedagogy and the PhD is as silent on the questions of desire and the pleasures of "becoming-other," in the Deleuzian sense of enhanced capacities and powers, as it is on trauma. Desire and trauma may be the necessary condition of each other and both are largely "written-out" of the (rationalist) formal accounts.

The complex relationships between the experiences being recalled and reconstructed in writing and talk, and the participants' understandings of how those experiences become transformed within their own contemporary practices as doctoral supervisors, form the substance of the remaining sections of this paper. To proceed, we track several themes and motifs that recurred in the discussions around the memory texts written during the workshop.

III Gender and Identity

In the workshop, participants began to name the dimensions of difference that were called into being through the discussion of the written texts. In particular, gender, together with a certain kind of class position, and what might be deemed a kind of "academic Britishness" or perhaps, more locally, a "sandstone subjectivity" emerge as the early visible markers of difference. The dream of "becoming an academic" is often couched in terms of images of buildings, holy spaces, bodies and certain modes of comportment (Riemer). As noted elsewhere, however, this is a gendered dream (Lloyd; Johnson, Lee and Green) and, through these images, the scholar has historically been produced as masculine.

More recently it might appear that, in the humanities at least, the major increase in the numbers of women undertaking candidature in the PhD, and the substantial critiques of phallogocentric knowledge systems and modes of scholarship that have become available through several decades of feminist work, should have effected some substantial shift in this situation. However, we suggest here that, as long as PhD training aspires to producing the autonomous, independent scholar, implicitly coded masculine, this will always remain problematic for women since there is so much at stake in accommodating to this ideal. Women have to "prove" the achievement of a scholarly subjectivity in ways not required of men. Further, they are required to disavow "femininity" in this process, to the extent that their gendered personhood is constructed in relation to terms that are the obverse of rationality and autonomy: terms such as dependence, interdependence, emotionality. Crucially, here, what has to be specifically disavowed and transcended in the process of becoming-rational is the female body (Gatens). Contradictions between femininity and the autonomous scholarly subject therefore remain a tension for many women, creating, through the process of PhD training, an ambivalent subjectivity which endures subsequently in their professional lives as

academics and supervisors.³

Such ambivalence is not notable in the stories told by the men in the workshop, at least in the first instance. The first step in becoming the autonomous scholar is identification with the scholarly figure. For Karl, this was unproblematic, a matter of imitation and emulation:

Karl: I could identify with them [the Oxford dons], they had quite a nice life. It was obvious they'd done a degree and were leading a life that I thought would suit me ... so I just imitated them.

For Karl, identification with the scholarly figure included smoking a pipe for a while, trying out the donnish practices of the English academic. Such practices are classically coded masculine, as Robyn noted wryly in her response to Karl ("you can't do that if you're a woman").

The four women, on the other hand, discussed problems of identification with the "image of the disciplinary figure," speaking, despite their seniority, of being "the interlopers, the imposters." Jane recalled a conversation a year earlier with Robyn as they were following two male academics who were wearing "tweed coats, leather elbow pads." These, the two women noted, were "real academics." There is a potent physicality about these images which mark the academic figure and his milieu.

The women's positioning in relation to these images appeared very significantly to mark the emotional space of their subjectivity subsequently as researchers. This is evidenced in Jane's memories, in regard to the emotions that for her were recurrent features of her academic career, as we noted in the previous section of this paper. For them, experiences of isolation, rejection and "hideous self-doubt" that "never goes away" (Robyn) were, while avowedly "irrational" as experiences at the time, as well as in their reconstruction in the workshop, intensely productive of their formation as scholars and their understandings of their practices of supervision. Simple emulation was never possible for the women, as they noted.

The women's ambivalence throughout their professional lives, in relation to both supervision and their professional roles more generally, emerged as key issues for them. They spoke of "good girlness" and "bad girlness" in relation to expressing confidence and assertiveness, where "good girls" were compliant and deferential. They spoke of their failure to properly nurture their students, and of problems and ambivalences around exercising authority, especially in relation to the "maternal," as a problematic alternative to the "paternal" figure of the ideal supervisor. These problems brought into sharp relief the tensions between the "maternal" function of support and nurture and the demands of producing the autonomous disciplinary scholar. The positions available for the women in relation to these problems were talked about in terms of "good mothers" and "bad mothers." One strikingly illustrative example in relation to this is the following:

Judith: What am I doing as an academic woman encouraging the woman to go home and have a baby instead of finishing her PhD? It's those sorts of anxieties that I was having; just exactly where am I positioned in this?

For Judith, her anxiety can be read in terms of her dilemmas as a department head and her conflicting investments and responsibilities to the institution and her care for the student. This is an instance of the practical conflict between the implicit legitimate body of the scholar and the marked reproductive body of the woman. The problematic positioning of Judith here, concerning her apparent collusion with the masculinist regime, is an anxiety often expressed by women.

IV Autonomy and its Other

The ordeal of candidature is a *mad* process in its assignment of a structural role to insecurity. It challenges the candidate's sense of worth, provoking a trauma of loss as one of its central knowledge-producing mechanisms, one which is often cruelly prolonged or repeated. (Frow, "Discipline and Discipleship" 318-319)

Peter: My experience of being supervised was one of being abandoned, so that although I showed my supervisor a final draft of my thesis I didn't have any sense that he'd read it in such a way that, well he didn't offer any comments on it. I wasn't even sure that he'd really read it. And in fact I'd had very little direct supervision. 'Cause I mean in my case when I did initiate contact I didn't get anything terribly useful out of it. The irony is that now I can look back and say, well, that was tremendously helpful and very important formative experience and if he had given me all this feedback and had all these conversations with me I would probably not know half as much.

So what I took from it was that I had to be a completely self directed learner. I had to work out what reasonable goals were, talking it through with various people, I had to work out a plan of my own of what I was going to do, I had to learn how to write, I had to learn how to do all sorts of research of methodologies and strategies and so on and I had to find a way of putting it together. And that was an unbelievably formative educational experience.

In the above account, Peter highlights the relationship between his experience of being abandoned by his supervisor and the development of his capacity for self direction and autonomy as a scholar. The relationship between abandonment and autonomy was a major theme in the workshop. Here we explore the participants' accounts of this relationship, in relation to the provocative comment by Frow, with which we began this section.

According to Frow, part of the process of embarking on the PhD is a "stepping-off" from the known, in some sense. To become the autonomous subject that is the successful graduate, a process must be under

gone which first requires a submission to the authority of a supervisor who in some manner disciplines the candidate into a mode of being in relation to scholarly work and the production of knowledge. Paradoxically, it is through this submission that the candidate learns the practices and capacities of self-regulation and independent judgement. This apparent paradox involves processes of separation from a previous self; in psychoanalytic terms, a "breaking-down" of the old self (Frow) and the development of a new self. Through the practices of candidature and supervision, the student must learn ultimately to overcome the dependence which is at first required of them and that they, in some sense "need."

The pedagogy which produces the autonomous subject is often fraught and unsatisfactory, and is often experienced in terms of neglect, abandonment and indifference on the part of the supervisee. These experiences are sometimes remembered long after the candidate has graduated and, if an academic, has themselves become a supervisor. There appears to be a trauma, for many, in relation to separation and the loss of an old self. This is particularly the case in terms of gender and of class identifications attendant upon the acquisition of a higher educational qualification. Yet, much is also "forgotten" of this loss in the process of attainment. Such are the investments in that subject position that the "public story" noted by Bottomley in the introduction to this paper must disavow or refuse the experience of trauma, abandonment and loss and deny their productivity in the formation of the autonomous self, in order to produce the effect of a rationality uncontaminated by emotion. Where emotion is acknowledged, it is individualised and pathologised as the other of rationality instead of its condition.⁴ The outcome is often, as in Peter's account above, an attachment to the position that being left to one's own devices is formative in terms of attaining the desirable subjectivity.

In the workshop discussions, the experience of abandonment by a supervisor was understood as one of the main mechanisms for the production of that autonomy. Indeed, while we would not claim empirically that abandonment trauma is a necessary feature for all students, it emerges as a strikingly consistent feature in our research generally. For example, Karl, initially a teller of a "thin" story of an unproblematic supervisory relationship, later reports his experience of supervision in terms of "benign neglect":

Karl: Nearing the end of my first year at Oxford I met with my supervisor (not for the first time) to present a proposed radical change of topic for my PhD thesis. During the first year I'd made no progress with the plan I had brought with me to Oxford. I had travelled through France and Spain then through Scandinavia and Russia but I had not written much. My wife was pregnant and had no source of income and no remaining savings. The pressure was on. I explained to my supervisor what my new research plan was. It was a good plan, interesting and manageable as the following years revealed. I did complete my thesis in well under three years and indeed the entire examination proce-

dures of oral and aural were completed several months before my three years' scholarship were up. The project was a good one and I knew it was. I explained it well. After the explanation my supervisor said "sounds unpromising" and was silent. I was not sure if I'd heard him correctly. Did he say "promising" or "unpromising"? I thought I had heard an "un" but it was so unexpected I doubted my ears. The episode occurred at my supervisor's home in the countryside near Oxford and there were three of us present. Me, my wife and my supervisor. My wife was shocked by the incident. At the time she leapt to my defence and my supervisor seemed to be a little taken aback and apologetic about having been so unencouraging. One thing which intrigues me about the episode is that I was not upset by it as much as I would have expected.

Later still, Karl remarks:

Karl: Gosh, that is ... overcompensating as I reread it. This one, surely, isn't benign neglect but a lot of what I experienced was neglect but with occasional saying you seem to be going all right and I hope you do well and sort of good wishes but no actual involvement. And I regard that as benign neglect. This episode actually is ... anyway. Paradoxically these episodes strengthened rather than weakened my commitment to the discipline.

This story is about a critical moment in "becoming" an independent scholar, with the presentation of a revised proposal and its refusal by his supervisor. Paradoxically, it is this refusal which produces the requirement of a greater commitment to producing himself as the writer of the successful thesis, independent of his supervisor. It is also a critical moment within the workshop, as the "thin," rational account shifts to a thicker and more reflexive story. Karl's self construction as scholar, as disciplinary figure, is attributed explicitly to the effects of "these episodes" of "neglect" or "abuse."

The issue of the achievement of autonomy concerns overcoming the dependent, student self. This was particularly an issue for the women, where overcoming dependency meant overcoming their own constructions of "good girl" femininity in the achievement of the subject position of the Man of Reason. These women acknowledged the disappointment and emotional trauma of supervisory abandonment more readily than the men. They similarly spoke much more overtly than did the men about lack of structures of institutional support. They were deeply ambivalent about the quality of autonomy itself and the pedagogical conditions of its production.

These two sections suggest an intimate connection between the production of autonomy, first, through identification with the (masculine-coded) disciplinary figure and second, through a pedagogy of abandonment and neglect, the subsequent trauma and its displacement into the attachment to the subject position produced. For the women in particular here, this displacement was not complete or unambiguous. The trace of

trauma remains in the ambivalence around their own supervision practices, manifesting as a paradox of attachment and dissatisfaction.

V "The Badge": the supervised supervise

This paradox of attachment and dissatisfaction is explored in this section in relation to the production of a series of quite striking images and metaphors by the workshop participants as they discussed the connections between their own experiences of having undergone supervision and themselves becoming supervisors. Through the laying out of some extended sections of transcript, a complicated picture of investment and ambivalence emerges.

The motif of the badge, or emblem, was one striking recurring theme in the discussions around the written texts. First produced by Jane in the epigraph which begins the paper, the badge was taken up at various moments as participants sought to make sense of experiences recalled and reconstructed in their texts. In most cases, what was being articulated was a complex set of issues of identification with the "suffering" explored in the previous section, a concern with the productivity of that suffering and the investments in having endured it. Robyn spoke in this regard of "an economy of suffering." The following exchange is worth quoting at length. Karl, initial producer of the "thin story" of his own candidature (*read the stuff, wrote the stuff*), reflects on the experience recorded above:

Karl: It's strange, isn't it. I just recently saw, I forget what it was called, on the Chinese Opera.⁵ A movie about people who went through the training in the old regime and they ... various kids were beaten to death, their friends died, the kind of suffering was absolutely appalling but once they got there and became opera stars they sort of in retrospect wouldn't have wished differently. In fact the people who teach that way were taught that way and it seems like we are now portraying the PhD as being a practice like the training for the Chinese opera or the training for ... probably you'll find a lot of disciplines ... it would be interesting to explore other select groups, the circus ... I wonder if someone to become a circus member gets abused and

...

Jane: well I mean there are ... the military models ... bizarre and barbaric initiations ...

Karl: And the more elite the group, like the Green Berets, the more barbaric is the ...

Jane: We're not actually talking about barbaric practices, we're just actually talking about languishing with neglect and if you've got the stuff, if you've got the mettle ...

Karl: See, this one was a little more than neglect. That one, given the situation I was in and he knew I was in, saying that sounds

unpromising and not offering anything else, just leaving it with me like that. ... I am now curious to think about other disciplines or professions or things like the circus or the Green Berets or all sorts of groups where they try and select the really elite group and you don't get the really best people by trying to bring out the best in everyone, you try and chase them away so the ones that remain are only the ones who are so gripped by the discipline that it doesn't matter what you do to them. The scarring, the beating with words rather than sticks ...

Jane: Or neglect.

Karl: Actually there was a metaphor you used. The road to the PhD is strewn with suffering. The only way to get there is to actually try and make it hard for the student.

Jane: It's a trauma model, really, isn't it. It's a trial by fire, so it's a bit like a military training academy.

As a way of dealing with her experience of trauma, Jane reported on developing a "stoic self reliance" which was a source of "perverse pride" for her. Further, at another point, there was a kind of "perverse" insistence on Barbara's part that PhD candidates must be "blooded," that is, must go through this traumatic process of production of autonomy. This insistence was not unproblematised by the workshop participants, however. For example, Barbara's attachment to the idea that supervisors needed to be able to understand the process in terms of its productivity is related to understanding what her students were going through. On the other hand, Barbara also recognised a contradictory and ambivalent mix of investment and refusal in her own position.

In relation to subsequent supervisory practices, Jane went on to say that, while she did not believe in the military training model of supervision, it was difficult for her to put that to the side and develop another model that would be less traumatic for the student. However, her ambivalence about the "improvement imperative," which impelled her to seek better ways of practising supervision with her students, is clearly demonstrated by her commitment to the traditional practice of her own formative experience:

Jane: As I am providing nurturing guidance to my students, some part of me is saying, but really, you've got to just do what David's student did and go away and just do it. It's your thesis, it's not mine.

The women in general tended to endeavour to make the PhD experience less traumatic and problematic for their students, despite their ambivalence. The men, on the other hand, tended to much more unproblematically and unreflexively reproduce their own supervision experiences. Karl, for example, reported operating according to a straightforward reproduction principle:

Karl: that very fact that the supervisor was distant and all that and left me alone was extremely formative in the way I treat students now. Just remembering that has a big influence on the way

I supervise so if a student doesn't want me to pester them I don't pester them because I really appreciated being left alone myself. And I know that other people don't supervise that way.

This principle could not be sustained by Karl in all of his supervision, however, as he subsequently discussed in his experience of supervising an overseas student whose first language was not English. For this student, it may not have been appropriate, desirable or possible to take up that position of independence.

These images of the extreme exercise of disciplinary power, and the analogies drawn with institutional practices of privation and violence, are striking reminders of the intensity of the experience of undergoing candidature in the PhD in the memories of these academics. It is important to note here, however, the relation of this intensity to the concomitant intensity of the desire to achieve the PhD and all it represented. The relations of power-desire-knowledge exposed in these images are complex and require careful examination. First, it is important to reflect on the productivity of the exercise of power more generally. Foucault's (*Discipline and Punish*) vivid account of the making of the soldier out of the peasant boy serves as a reminder that disciplinary power produces "subjected and practised bodies" whose capacities are both shaped and enhanced through disciplinary technologies such as those of candidature and supervision. Power does not merely repress or oppress; it produces. Second, in relation to desire, we draw on Patton's ("Deleuze and Desire") reworking of Deleuze: according to Patton, desire "produces intensities, and in doing so it multiplies the range and scale of a body's capacities to be affected. As such, it produces itself on an ever expanding scale, desire seeks its own enhancement" (10-11). The physical, emotional or intellectual capacities of the body are thus enhanced through these intensities. Desire, understood in terms of what Patton calls "becoming-other," is strikingly demonstrated in the images produced by these scholars reflecting on their experiences.

VI Conclusion

In this paper we have taken up Bottomley's challenge and foregrounded an aspect of doctoral training that has been previously "written out" of or "backstaged" in formal accounts; the emotional distress experienced by many PhD students during their candidature. In doing so, however, we have also focused on exploring other sites of emotionality in addition to those offered by traditional psychoanalytic approaches and their emphasis on the interpersonal relationship between supervisor and student. As well, drawing on feminist and poststructural theory, we have explored the conceptual contradictions and tensions produced within traditional formulations of doctoral training and, in particular, the assumed product of that training; the autonomous, independent scholar. This approach

not only opens up new sites of investigation of doctoral training but also shifts the genesis of much of the emotionality of the PhD experience away from purely interpersonal (the student-supervisor relationship) and institutional factors, the traditional targets of the "improvement imperative." One desirable effect of this shift of focus is to disrupt the tendency, evident in most literature on the topic, to read emotionality, trauma, breakdown of individuals and of the supervisory relationship as signs of personal pathology or failure on the part of either or both the supervisor and student. In de-personalising to some extent such outcomes of the PhD experience, part of the burden of responsibility is lifted from individual players. What is highlighted instead are the conflicts and difficulties produced for and between doctoral supervisors and students as they attempt to negotiate the complex and contradictory conceptual field they are operating within.

Central to our concerns is the figure of the "independent scholar": the rational, autonomous, implicitly male-gendered subject assumed in the traditional British/Australian model of doctoral training. The production of this subject through this form of doctoral training with its associated pedagogical practices of neglect and indifference is, according to the workshop participants' accounts, often traumatic for students of both sexes. The formal "rational" accounts characteristically disavow the "other" of doctoral training; the irrationality and emotionality that are both the necessary condition and effect of the production of the rational subject. As the conditional "other" of "rationality," "irrationality" and trauma can be suppressed but never entirely erased. Some of its traces can be found in the continuing anxieties attendant upon the professional lives of these workshop participants and in their deep, albeit avowedly problematic, investments in the kinds of doctoral training that they themselves had undergone.

For women, the contradictions and tensions inherent in the figure of the scholar are heightened. Attaining a state of "rationality" contradicts women's construction as the antithesis of the Man of Reason, for becoming-rational is also about becoming-male, in some sense. In the Enlightenment's conceptual scheme, women come to bear the signifiers of rationality's disavowed "others": irrationality, emotionality, dependence. As the workshop discussions revealed, women academics live out this contradictory gendered positioning in their professional lives, producing an additional burden of tensions and dilemmas to be negotiated.

There is also, of course, no doubt that "becoming-other" than what one was before, in this case increasing the self's capacities and powers through the process of doctoral training, has its moments of intense pleasure. As we noted, these pleasurable moments were not surfaced in the context of this workshop. Nor was there any detailed discussion of another potential source of tension and conflict we have identified, the "disciplinary" nature of doctoral training and the supervisory relationship. An exploration of these aspects of doctoral training will be the focus of future research.

An implication of the analytic approach we have taken is that, given the conditions of doctoral training we have outlined, negative emotional consequences cannot be simply understood as accidental "static" in an otherwise quiet and unproblematic pedagogical project (Lee and Green), a "noise" that could in principle be silenced by engineering solutions proposed in the "improvement" literature. This does not mean that such measures are not timely and necessary in an era of increased demands for efficiency and accountability, and where there is increased policy intervention in postgraduate training. Our own paradoxical positioning in this regard, as both critics of, and professionally invested in, doctoral programs, is clearly evident. But it seems to us that the "improvement imperative," by promoting better institutional supports and more efficient processes, not only implicitly contradicts the project of the traditional British/Australian PhD (in producing specific forms of subjectivity, capacities and knowledges), but it is also likely that the implementation of such measures might push the traditional PhD to breaking point, forcing an examination of its implicit assumptions and a rethinking of doctoral training.

The question then remains, given our analysis of the British/Australian humanities and social sciences PhD, would alternative forms of doctoral training such as professional doctorates or US-style PhD training (mooted and dismissed in Bottomley's time yet still proposed as a possible remedy for problems with the humanities and social sciences PhD in Australia) overcome the emotional distress of doctoral training? Is the project of all forms of doctoral training still that of producing the autonomous, rational, independent scholar? Is trauma an inevitable effect for many if not all PhD students even if they are not being trained in this way? If, as our approach suggests, doctoral training in any form is inevitably a "productive" exercise, what would different practices produce in terms of types of subjects and knowledges? And what would be the attendant traumas of that production? Additionally, if we assume that, according to Patton's account noted above, desire is always implicated in "becoming-other," the experience of "becoming-doctor" will always be fraught — both pleasurable and traumatic — more or less. The complex play of desire, trauma and irrationality in the production of the PhD graduate cannot therefore simply be overcome. Rather than attempting to "engineer" emotionality and irrationality out of the process, perhaps the challenge is to recognise and work with this dimension of the PhD experience.

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- 1 This larger project, titled "Rethinking Postgraduate Pedagogy: on the history and praxis of the PhD in Australia," being carried out by Alison Lee, Bill Green and Lesley Johnson, has been funded by the ARC for three years. The research being reported here is the outcome of an earlier small ARC grant.
- 2 It is of course important to recognise here that not all candidates aspire to

this subject position; not all are setting out to become academics. Indeed in the current climate of contraction in the higher education sector and the massive expansion in the numbers of doctoral candidates, such aspirations are less and less likely to be realised. The point we would make, however, is that current practices of supervision and doctoral education in the humanities and social sciences, at least, appear to operate on the assumption of the reproduction of the academic community.

- 3 By focusing on gender we do not mean to dismiss the importance of other dimensions of difference around which inequalities are organised in relation to the normatively white, heterosexual, European bourgeois man. In the literal setting of this workshop gender did emerge as the salient difference-dynamic.
- 4 A very suggestive line of questioning the gendered coding of the relationship between rationality and knowledge is indicated in the following story by Karl:

Karl: Just after I had been introduced to this I read reminiscences of [famous academic] and he needed self reliance to get through his sessions. He said "what should I work on" and the answer was "would you ask me who to marry"? "A good thesis topic like a good wife will give you many sleepless nights." That is rather sexist but on the other hand it was "keep away from me I'm not going to give you a topic, you find something that gives you passion so you can't sleep at night."

- 5 The movie in question was *Farewell my Concubine*.

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